

**The Ethics of the Novel in the Life of the Town:  
Provincial Communities in the Works of  
Fyodor Dostoevsky and George Eliot**



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## **Short Abstract**

This thesis analyses the function of the provincial town in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and George Eliot (1819-1880). It demonstrates that the small town, far from being a neutral backdrop to their narratives, functions as a sociological space in which to appropriate or challenge the discourses of modernity with which Dostoevsky and Eliot were explicitly preoccupied.

The first chapter examines how their provincial communities negotiate biblical narrative in a world in which, thanks to nineteenth-century attempts to historicise the Bible, an acceptance of the Bible's authoritative status is no longer a given. The instability of language itself is then interrogated in my second chapter, which shows that the transition from denotative, referential meaning to connotative, abstract forms causes ethical and narrative tension within the world of the novel, and which explores the aesthetics and ethics of gossip in the provincial town and novel. The third chapter details what becomes of the nineteenth-century discourse of heroism when characters seek to enact it in a provincial setting, showing that the environment of the provincial town proves hostile to heroic ambition, whilst the fourth argues that the provincial application of professional discourse (particularly that of medicine and the law) is critiqued and perfected by these authors.

Through the analysis of this discourse, it is shown that Eliot and Dostoevsky's treatment of provincialism is ambivalent. As urban intellectuals who did not consent to inhabit the provincial milieu they depict, they in many respects censure the world they describe. However, this censure is not absolute, and through their chosen setting, as well as their chosen genre of the novel, they provide ethical instruction for their readers, then and now. Ethics, for them, are best tested in community, and explored in narrative.

## Long Abstract

This thesis comprises a study of provincial communities in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky and George Eliot. It suggests that the provincial town, at once connected to and distant from the metropolis, functions as a laboratory for the playing-out of ethical questions whose importance and ramifications they had initially situated in the Russian capitals (Dostoevsky) and the English countryside (Eliot). Long regarded as pinnacle representatives of their respective traditions, Dostoevsky and Eliot turned to the genre of the novel to confront these questions, taking upon themselves the mantle of ethical instruction in landscapes of transition. This thesis examines how Dostoevsky and Eliot approach and utilise the changing discourse of modernity, showing how they exploit the provincial novel as a vehicle in which to confront or appropriate the fluid theological, linguistic, literary, and professional discourse of their time.

In the introduction, I situate Eliot and Dostoevsky in a wider tradition of novelists for whom the province functions as a sociological, rather than geographical, space. Rather than attempting to justify my comparison with recourse to (potentially jargonistic) explications of comparative literary theory, I demonstrate that, despite their different literary traditions, the pedigree of the provincial novel in both England and Russia provides a productive lens through which to view the works of both authors. Drawing on studies by Franco Moretti, Josephine McDonagh, Ian Duncan, Anne Lounsbury, Mikhail Epstein, and others, I posit that the conception of the province as a middle-ground between metropolis and countryside (or, conceptually, between what the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies famously called the *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*) continues to obtain in Dostoevsky and Eliot's work, whilst suggesting that the ethical value they ascribe to provincialism is not uniformly negative. I also argue that the unremarkable, quotidian nature of provincial life finds fitting linguistic expression in the vernacular of the novel.

Chapter 1, "Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Appropriation of Biblical Discourse in the Provincial Town", argues that Dostoevsky and Eliot were influenced by the Bible's historical, realistic, quotidian chronotope, as well as by the way Bible writers utilised narrative as a didactic tool. Scholars of biblical history in the nineteenth-century had shown that the theological message of the Bible could only be understood once readers had got to grips with the historical context in which it was conceived, written, and redacted. In the case of the New Testament, this context was, of course, itself provincial, with the incarnation of the Son of God occurring in the Judean backwater of the Roman Empire. For many nineteenth-century theologians, the universal significance of Jesus' teaching and works could be distilled only from a familiarity with the thoroughly earthly reality he inhabited. In arguing this, I view the Bible as a prototype of, or code for, the realist novel, which seeks to elucidate social, universal, or metaphysical truth through exemplary, but individualised, characters in a decidedly prosaic, even provincial, milieu. I then show how Dostoevsky and Eliot emplot biblical narratives in their own fiction, with a special emphasis on their rewritings of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, to explore the issue of moral distance and the limits of Christian charity. The provincial town, I argue, serves as a community in which the elasticity of sympathy can be both stretched and contracted, as the imperative to love one's neighbour is complicated by the presence not only of family members (as in a primal *Gemeinschaft*), but by strangers too.

Chapter 2, “The Talk of the Town: Language and its (Ab)uses in the Provinces”, turns to discourse—or language—itsself, and shows that the transition from discourse that is denotative and referential to that which is connotative and abstract impels plot in the provincial novel. I show that the ability to manipulate language, to avail oneself of its manifold and potential meanings, is a skill that tends to give characters the upper hand over those provincials who are unable to transcend the fixed relations of signs and their signifieds. The provincial town forces (or enables) characters of varying degrees of linguistic dexterity to come face to face, and the heteroglossia that such a collision engenders precipitates both tragedy and chaos. In addition, I discuss the function of analogy and gossip in the provincial town and provincial novel, arguing that Dostoevsky and Eliot treat sceptically any discourse that seeks to strait-jacket an autonomous individual by means of a script that has not been sanctioned by (in Dostoevsky’s case) the character themselves or (in Eliot’s) the narrator’s more nuanced evaluation of a character’s mind and behaviour. My readings here draw on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, as I attempt to apply his distrust of monologic authorship to gossiping communities. However, I also point to some of the ways in which Dostoevsky and Eliot attempt, in their own artistic practice, to redeem this much-maligned form of discourse.

Chapter 3, “The Heroic Surplus: Is Greatness Possible in the Chronotope of the Provincial Town”, asks how provincialism affects heroic aspiration. The models of heroism that Dostoevsky and Eliot inherited, I suggest, tended to extol larger-than-life figures who, through military exploits or adventures on the border of empire, inspired admiration or worship. Consonant with the realist novel’s rejection of both epic and Romantic heroes, Dostoevsky and Eliot depict a world of fragmentation, a world that can no longer accommodate heroic ambition. Their provincial settings comprise an arena in which greatness cannot be realised: the province is too far removed from the world-historical stage, it seems, too full of petty rivalries, to enable the hero to flourish. Whilst the thrust of most criticism on both writers is to recast this deficiency as a virtue (with the meanness of world-historical opportunity being amply assuaged by opportunities for small acts of prosaic, diffusive kindness), I argue that, on the contrary, both Dostoevsky and Eliot treat with regret the inability of their protagonists to realise their heroic aspirations. In so doing, I maintain that, far from throwing their lot in with the limitations of the novel as a genre (i.e. Lukács’s genre of splintered modernity), they maintain a desire to transcend the limits of the novel’s mundane presentness. By rescuing their characters from the provincial environments in which they have been unable to realise their heroic feats, and by destining them for future action elsewhere, the “here-now” chronotope of the provincial novel is rejected in favour of a “there-then” chronotope which, by definition, cannot be explicated in the form of the novel (and as such, their novels must end with the exile of their protagonists). Although I do not seek to overturn entirely readings of their novels that emphasise the importance of prosaic goodness, I do suggest that most critics overlook both writers’ deeply ambivalent approach to heroism, and that this ambivalence is foregrounded in provincial communities that seek, in contrast to the authors, to stifle heroism in its political, philanthropic, and religious guises.

Chapter 4, “The Professions in the Provinces: The Appropriation and Perfection of Medical and Legal Discourse in the Provincial Town”, argues that Dostoevsky and Eliot position themselves in opposition to the provincial practice of medicine and the law as they saw it. Both were extremely well-versed in developments in medicine and law across the continent, and they use their knowledge to expose the deficiencies of provincial practitioners who were for various reasons

unable to educate themselves similarly. This opposition, however, is not absolute, as both writers identify redeeming features of provincial professionalism—particularly its emphasis on interpersonal relationships—which, if they do not entirely excuse questionable professional practice, at least indicate ways in which professional discourse might be improved upon. It is not only within the communities of the novel that Eliot and Dostoevsky seek to dramatise the fluctuations of medical and legal discourse; in terms of their narrative composition, they also seek appropriate professional techniques—such as, in the medical sphere, that of vivisection, and, in the legal sphere, that of advocacy—to claim a place for the writer as a professional *extraordinaire*. The novelists' ability to manipulate medical and legal discourse is employed in the service of provincials who are decidedly without such ability; these metropolitan writers do not stand by and allow their characters to suffer under the weight of their provincial limitations.

In the conclusion, I briefly suggest some potential avenues for further research that might arise, more or less organically, from this thesis.

Both Dostoevsky and Eliot treat their settings (the provincial town) and medium (the novel) with some degree of ambivalence. Nevertheless, the fact that they elected for both suggests that an exploration of the ethical dilemmas of modernity is, if not impossible outside the confines of the provincial novel, at least given greater potency within them.

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## A Note on Transliteration, Quotation, and References

In this thesis, the names of all well-known Russian authors are spelled as they appear in Victor Terras's *Handbook of Russian Literature*.<sup>1</sup> For less well-known authors, contemporary critics, and the characters of Russian fiction, I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration, with the following modifications:

ё	yo
ь	omitted
ъ	omitted
ю	yu
я	ya
ый	y
ий	y
ой	oy
ей	ey
ай	ay
Пётр	Peter

In all bibliographic references, I use the Library of Congress system without exception. Thus, in my main body I have “Tatyana” or “Kovalevskaya” or “Tolstoy”, whereas in the references I have “Tat’iana” or “Kovalevskaia” or “Tolstoi”. If this risks inconsistency, it at least minimises the number of eyesores such as “Gogol’s” or “Gertsen”.

Quotations from the works of Dostoevsky or George Eliot are taken from the editions given in the bibliography. Their citation in the text is given in square brackets. In Dostoevsky’s case, the number in square brackets refers first to the volume, and then to the page, of the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* in which the quotation appears. In George Eliot’s case, the title of the book is abbreviated and followed by the page number from which the quotation is drawn. For example [12, 15] indicates the volume 12, page 15 of the *Pss*. A notation of [29.1, 15] indicates volume 29, part 1,

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<sup>1</sup> *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. by Victor Terras (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

page 15 of the *Pss*. [MF, 261] refers to page 261 of *The Mill on the Floss* in the edition listed in the bibliography.

References are given with full bibliographic information in their first citation within a chapter, and are afterwards abbreviated. Where the source is referenced in subsequent chapters, its full details are reproduced in the first instance.

## Introduction

Nikolai Gogol and Nathaniel Hawthorne knew nothing of each other. They were contemporaries, but they probably never heard each other's names, and they certainly never read each other's work; each thought very little, if at all, about cultural developments in the other's far-off empire. None of this is surprising, since in Gogol's and Hawthorne's life-times, the Russian and American literary establishments had little contact or knowledge of each other. What is very surprising are the similarities between these two writers, similarities so strong as to be almost uncanny, both in the ideas that preoccupied them and the trajectory of their careers. This study is focused on the significant and unexpected fact that at a particular historical moment, perhaps the two most important writers in two radically disparate societies—disparate in their political systems, class structures, economies, geographies, ideologies—shared so many preoccupations. These similarities must be explained not as a result of influence, but as the result of certain parallels in their historical situations.<sup>1</sup>

At the risk of conjuring an image that the reader will later have to repress, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and George Eliot (1819-1880) are not obvious bedfellows. That there exists no published monograph comparing the works of these two writers may be attributed to critics' inability to discover any ways in which the one might have influenced the other,<sup>2</sup> or to the fact that the affinities between them have been

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Lounsbury, *Thin Culture, High Art: Gogol, Hawthorne, and Authorship in Nineteenth-Century Russia and America* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> On Eliot's reception in Russia, see, for example, Ol'ga Demidova, 'Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot in Russian: A Bibliography (1849-1989)', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 29 (1996), 44-60; Boris M. Proskurin, 'The Reception of George Eliot in Russia: The Start that Determined the Paradigm', in *The Reception of George Eliot in Russia*, ed. by Elinor Schaffer and Catherine Brown (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 262-74; Julie Buckler, 'Victorian Literature and Russian Culture: Translation, Reception, Influence, Affinity', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 206-226. Dostoevsky's English reception is the subject of Lucia Aeillo's *After Reception Theory: Fedor Dostoevskii in Britain, 1869-1935* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013). To cut a long story short, it would have been impossible for Eliot to have read Dostoevsky in English since his work was not translated until after her death (although his name did appear in the English press as early as 1869). We have no evidence that Eliot had even heard of her

overshadowed by more ostentatious dissimilarities. Eliot's meliorism based on a belief system that might now be characterised as secular and humanistic; her deep respect for European civilization and the philosophies that gave it birth; her measured and benevolent narrative style that guides the reader through the prosaic world of sedate conflicts; her ability to psychologise the lives of her characters; her deep respect for Jewish culture: these aspects of her life and work seem to foreclose a sustained comparative study with her Russian contemporary, who impressed upon his readers the necessity of Christianity (at times prosaic, at times apocalyptic) as a means by which the world might be transformed; who railed against the soulless capitalism that had taken root in Europe in part because of philosophies he considered spurious; whose narrators spin their tales at a breakneck speed appropriate to the erratic twists of the plot they convey; who refuses to enter into the inner consciousness of his characters; who preached a vitriolic brand of anti-Semitism that remains a stain on his reputation.

By admitting the absence of any reciprocal influence, but by seeking to show that there are indeed affinities between the two writers, this thesis suggests that the lacuna of comparative scholarship on Eliot and Dostoevsky is indefensible—and, I hope, goes some way to redress the deficit. Clearly, the affinities between the two writers are also many: both were essayists and journalists who were subsequently celebrated for their contribution to the genre of the novel; both were, after a fashion, believers in the idea of the nation state; both were well read in European literature;

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Russian contemporary (although her personal acquaintance with Turgenev might allow for conjecture on this front). Eliot was translated into Russian, and her works were published and reviewed in several journals, including *The Contemporary*, *The Cause* and *Notes of the Fatherland*. Liza Knapp has argued that, due to Eliot's popularity in Russia, it is 'reasonable to presume that he [Dostoevsky] knew Eliot's work', and she posits a potential "borrowing" of an Eliot plot-line by Dostoevsky. See her 'Darwin's Plots, Malthus's Mighty Feast, Lamennais's Motherless Fledglings, and Dostoevsky's Lost Sheep', in *Dostoevsky beyond Dostoevsky: Science, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. by Svetlana Evdokimova and Vladimir Golstein (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2016), pp. 63-81. Here, p. 70. Nothing in this thesis rests on an ability to prove that the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* had read *Middlemarch*.

both were, in short, the subject of any number of claims that could be made about a host of nineteenth-century novelists. This thesis alights on what I hope to show are two especially productive and complementary affinities between the two writers: their novelistic representation of provincial communities as they confront the forces of modernity, and their use of the novel as a vehicle of ethical instruction. The representation of provincial community is not a random similarity that could be substituted to the same effect by any other. Rather, I argue that in their works the provincial town functions as an arena in which Eliot and Dostoevsky can bring into sharp relief a number of common concerns. In the absence of an intuitive belief in God that both writers felt keenly in the second half of the nineteenth century, Eliot and Dostoevsky took upon themselves the task of ethical instruction, teaching their readers how to navigate the changing waters of the modern world. The provincial town—often, although not always, catching up with developments in the capitals—foregrounds the struggle to accommodate modern ideas and discourses as they impinge upon the lives of various classes of society, and, through the representation of this struggle, Eliot and Dostoevsky are able to point to its potential resolutions.

### **Provincial Communities: Magnum in Parvo**

The writer of Eliot's obituary in *The Athenaeum* applauded the author's representation of provincial life:

Her father was a land surveyor, and she thus came into contact with all classes of provincial society, so that her pictures are far more complete than either Dickens's or Thackeray's accounts of London life. Both George Eliot and George Sand had learned that provincial life is more intense, if more monotonous and simple, than the busy life of towns. Amid the turmoil of cities, existence passes through a series of shallows,

as it were; whereas in the country the emotions are collected into one deep pool, which pours forth tumultuously if once disturbed.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with the obituary writer in his (or her) extolling of George Eliot at the expense of her male contemporaries, he or she has articulated the value that Eliot herself ascribed to provincial life. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator comments on the way in which the provincial town accommodates universal—‘complete’ as the obituary has it—experience: ‘The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented [...] in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths’ [*MF*, 273]. Eliot’s novels serve to ground the generalised ‘historical advance of mankind’ in a particular milieu—one that, far from being isolated from the life of the nation, crystallises national identity and international forces. As the novel’s narrator puts it, the ‘small pulse’ of the town of St Ogg’s is linked ‘with the beatings of the world’s mighty heart’ [*MM*, 272].

The claim Eliot makes—that the historical advance of mankind is best comprehended by examining the obscure hearths of the trading town of St Ogg’s—finds echo in Dostoevsky’s statements about provincialism. Rather than locating the essence of Russia in its capitals, Dostoevsky asks rhetorically whether the whole of Russia flowed *into* the capitals (‘не вся ли Россия [...] притекала и толпилась в Петербурге и Москве’), and held that their renewal depended on the ‘свежий приток новых сил из областей своих и окраин’. Those regions themselves experienced exactly the same challenges as those of Moscow and St Petersburg (‘задачи были совсем одни и те же’) [23, 6]. The spirit of the nation, for Dostoevsky, was at least as discernable in the provinces as in the city: ‘*езде по всей России в каждом месте была вся Россия*. О, мы понимаем, что каждый угол России может и должен иметь свои местные особенности и полное право их

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<sup>3</sup> [Anon.], ‘George Eliot’, *The Athenaeum*, 2775 (Jan 1, 1881), 20-21. Here, p. 20.

развивать; но таковы ли эти особенности, чтобы грозить духовным разьединением?’ [23, 7]. The question is rhetorical, but essentially answered in the negative, with Dostoevsky at once and contradictorily declaring Moscow to be the centre of Russia, before stating that he does not mean “Moscow” as a historical place, but as a metonym for Russia as a whole—a metonym that might just as easily be signified by the towns of Kazan or Astrakhan.<sup>4</sup> Thus for Dostoevsky, the national and universal significance of the Nechaev affair could best be explored in the nameless provincial town of *The Devils*, despite the fact that the historical event upon which the novel is based occurred in the ancient capital.

In recent years, literary critics have articulated the ways in which the provincial novel creates communities that function as microcosms of the nation. John Plotz, for example, has noted that while Victorian writers sought to emphasise the individual characters of the towns they depicted (*Middlemarch* is qualitatively different from *Brassing*, for example), this difference is ‘never presented as an impediment to the act of metonymy’ whereby the particular provincial setting can ‘[stand] in for English country living as a whole’.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, he writes that ‘at the heart of the provincial novel [...] lies not a triumph of the local over the cosmopolitan (Little-Englandism), but a fascinating version of *magnum in parvo*, whereby provincial life is desirable for its capacity to locate its inhabitants at once in a trivial (but chartable) Nowheresville and in a universal (but strangely ephemeral) everywhere’.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Josephine McDonagh comments that ‘the provincial novel

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<sup>4</sup> For a historical account of nineteenth-century debates around where Russia proper “ends”, see Leonid Gorizontov, ‘The “Great Circle” of Interior Russia: Representations of the Imperial Center in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, ed. by Jane Burbank et al (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 67-93.

<sup>5</sup> John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> John Plotz, ‘The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel’, *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (2011), 405-16. Here, p. 407.

[...] tends to view the province less as an outpost than as a miniaturized version of the nation'.<sup>7</sup>

The weight of national representation that the provincial novel is made to bear is, it is worth pointing out, by no means axiomatic of the genre of the novel as such. Indeed, earlier instantiations of the medium eschewed the generalising imperative that allows the communities of the provincial novel to stand for and create the nation state.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the 1850s, for example, another sub-genre of novel, namely the regional novel, was devoted to the representation of distinct local communities that were remarkable for the ways in which they resisted the centripetal pull of nation-building. The regional novel, much influenced by the historical topography of Walter Scott, tended to be set on the outskirts of the map of the British Isles, and paid considerable attention to the local colour, dialogue, folklore, traditions, and landscape of a particular region.<sup>9</sup> It is a novel of the border, of communities who take pride in their idiosyncratic identity, in their historical geography. None of this is true of the provincial novel. Instead of insisting on its difference from the nation at large, provincial life as depicted by Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and others 'assumes the burden of national representation' (to quote Ian Duncan),<sup>10</sup> and its coordinates are archetypal (some distance from London) rather than geographically measurable.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, whereas the geography of the regional novel is positive, the space of the provincial novel tends to be defined negatively: it is not the capital. It is not particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Josephine McDonagh, 'Place, Region, and Migration', in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel, 1820-1880*, ed. by John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 361-76. Here, p. 370.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson has argued that the novel functioned as a vehicle of nation-building. By creating imagined, but relatable, communities, the novel unites a vast and disparate population that is able to recognise the "reality" depicted as an embodiment of national identity. See his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), especially pp. 24-26.

<sup>9</sup> See McDonagh, 'Place, Region, and Migration', passim.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Duncan, 'The Provincial or Regional Novel', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 318-35. Here, p. 323.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 329.

important *where* Middlemarch or Treby Magna are; what matters is that they are located centrally, connected to, but at a distance from, the capital. The invented names that these provincial towns possess—Middlemarch, Cranford, Barchester—underscore the disavowal of historical geography.<sup>12</sup> Concerning this phenomenon, Franco Moretti’s distinction between mappable and diagrammable space is useful: ‘like the *provinciae* of antiquity, subject to Rome but denied full citizenship, the provinces are “negative” entities, defined by *what is not there*; which also explains [...] why one cannot map provincial novels—you cannot map what is not there’.<sup>13</sup> If not mappable, the provinces are, however, diagrammable, as they can be placed on abstract coordinates, somewhere between city and country.

Whether or not it is fair to adopt the terminology of the “regional novel” in terms of Russian literary history is not something that need concern us here. What is apparent in novels with a provincial setting, however, is that space is essentially unreal (that is, unmappable). It is impossible to locate on a map of Russia Gogol’s N. (*Dead Souls*), Goncharov’s Oblomovka (*Oblomov*), Dostoevsky’s Skotoprigonevsk (*The Brothers Karamazov*), Turgenev’s O. (*A Nest of Gentry*), or Saltykov-Shchedrin’s Glupov (*The History of a Town*).<sup>14</sup> This spatial unreality stands in contrast to the readily identifiable space of previous texts: Lermontov’s Caucasus or Gogol’s Ukraine are, essentially, mappable evocations of a vivid landscape that was experienced first-hand by the author. We always know where Pechorin is, which mountain pass he is traversing, which people group he encounters.

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<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>13</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Extensive research on this geographical unreality has been carried out by Anne Lounsbury over the course of several articles. These include: “‘No, this is not the provinces: Provincialism, Authenticity, and Russianness in Gogol’s Day’, *The Russian Review*, 64.2 (2005), 259-80; ‘Dostoevskii’s Geography: Centers, Peripheries, and Networks in *Demons*’, *Slavic Review*, 66.2 (2007), 211-29; ‘The World on the Back of a Fish: Mobility, Immobility, and Economics in *Oblomov*’, *The Russian Review*, 70.1 (2011), 43-64.

The symbolic significance of these places (Ukraine, the Caucasus) is, of course, very different, but it is worth emphasising that by the “provinces” we do not mean simply “that which was not the capital”. The Caucasus, for example, has an element of exoticism that would be utterly foreign to “provincial life”, a term with connotations of boredom, backwardness, and prosaic domesticity. Similarly, Siberia—another non-metropolitan but non-provincial space—is often presented as adventure space, as the destination of robbers, adventurers and exiles. Peter, as he expanded his empire across the Urals, did use the designation “Province” as an administrative term to describe Siberia, but this designation did not overlay a reality that could be called “provincial”.<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, when Goncharov was returning on land from his abortive round-the-world journey on the Frigate *Pallada*, he traversed the Siberian landmass, and found it quite without the sleepy lethargy that he had depicted in provincial *Oblomovka*. He writes of Yakutsk residents, for example, ‘что жизнь их не неподвижная, не сонная, что она нисколько не похожа на обыкновенную провинциальную жизнь; что в сумме здешней деятельности таится масса подвигов, о которых громко кричали и печатали бы в других местах.’<sup>16</sup>

In Russian literature the province is best conceived as a kind of conceptual middle-space between the exotic/adventure space of the Russian empire, and the urban space of the capitals.<sup>17</sup> As Lounsbury notes, ‘it began to serve less as a

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<sup>15</sup> On the symbolic significance of Siberia, see Emma Widdis, ‘Russia as Space’, in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 30-49, especially p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> I. A. Goncharov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 20 vols, II: *Fregat “Pallada”*, ed. by V. A. Tunimanov (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), pp. 685-86. My italics.

<sup>17</sup> On ways in which the word “provintsiia” ceased to function as an administrative unit and served to denote this conceptual space, see Evgeniia Kirichenko and Elena Shcheboleva, *Russkaia provintsiia* (Moscow: Nash dom, 1997), especially p. 46. The authors note that it was during the reign of Nicholas I that ‘возникло понятие провинции как антипода столицы’ (p. 49).

geographic designation than as a qualitative judgement'.<sup>18</sup> It is certainly not synonymous with "rural" space, since provincials have a level of consciousness that enables them to *know* that they are provincials, whereas rustics usually do not: the provinces in Russian literature tend to mimic the capital, following its fashions, its language, its aspirations, being characterised by inauthenticity and mimicry that is derived from a slavish attempt to follow urban models—something it would never occur to a rural peasant to do.<sup>19</sup> Thus Anne Lounsbery suggests that when writers use the words *provintsial'nyi* or *gubernskii* they are typically evoking small cities and towns,<sup>20</sup> arenas where consciousness, learning and knowledge of the world is advanced enough to be aware of their deficiencies in respect of the capitals. Provincialism in Russian literature functions as a sociological rather than geographical cypher, which, according to Mikhail Epstein lies somewhere between civilization and barbarism—the latter being the 'сила периферии, невозделанная природа', the former embodying the 'умелость, умеренность, изощрённость' of modernity. Of the provinces, he writes: 'крайности цивилизации и варварства слаживаются провинцией, преобразуются в нечто среднее, промежуточное, снимающее резкую разность потенциалов'.<sup>21</sup>

The negativity that attaches itself to the epithet "provincial" survives to this day, with the adjective connoting parochialism, backwardness, narrowness of vision, and a lack of culture.<sup>22</sup> 'Rude' and 'unpolished' were among the definitions of the word provided by Dr Johnson.<sup>23</sup> Whether the provincial prototypes of nineteenth-

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<sup>18</sup> Lounsbery, 'No, this is not the provinces!', p. 262.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Epstein, *Bog detalei: narodnaia dusha i chastnaia zhizn' v rossii na iskhode imperii* (N.p.: Izdanie R. Elinina, 1998), p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> On the different connotations of the words "provincial" and "regional", see Robin Gilmour, 'Regional and Provincial in Victorian Literature', in *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 50-61.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 2 (London: No publisher, 1786), p. 214.

century novelistic heroes recognised themselves in the urban condescension of the great lexicographer, or of subsequent writers such as Matthew Arnold (who berated English “provincialism” in the arts and sciences when compared to the European vanguard)<sup>24</sup> is open to question. Certainly, characters such as Mrs Cadwallader would recognise no deficiency in their provincialism, and the London-dwelling Eliot generally presents the provinces without the ironisation we find in Elizabeth Gaskell (‘Do you ever see cows dressed in grey flannel in London?’, ‘Do you make paper paths for every guest to walk upon in London?’),<sup>25</sup> or the pessimism of Flaubert.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, we might fairly suppose that the inferiority that Gogol presents as intrinsic to provincial life is without historical grounds, that not all Russian provincials prostrated themselves in self-abasement before the government inspectors of the country’s capital—as if only the capital could bestow meaning and significance on a provincial life.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, a recent study by Catherine Evtuhov seeks to revive the reputation of the Russian provinces as vibrant centres of culture and political initiative, full of local colour and exercising considerable de facto power in areas of agriculture, medical reform, local government, and the like.<sup>28</sup> Evtuhov demonstrates that Nizhnii Novgorod took pride in its positive identity and did not in any way feel inferior to the capitals. This unique identity is no doubt what Dostoevsky recognised when he commented (in the quotation already given) that each province has its ‘местные особенности’, despite the fact that in his fictional output no such historical

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<sup>24</sup> On Arnold’s view of provincialism, see Josephine McDonagh, ‘Rethinking Provincialism in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Fiction: *Our Village to Villette*’, *Victorian Studies*, 55.3 (2013), 399-424, especially p. 402.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, ed. by Elizabeth Porges Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, many small towns actively cultivated a reputation as a genteel escape from city life. See Peter Clark, ‘Small Towns, 1700-1840’, in *The Cambridge History of Urban Britain*, vol. 2, ed. by Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 733-73. See especially p. 752.

<sup>27</sup> See Lounsbery, “No, this is not the provinces”, p. 269

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

identity is elucidated: we know, of course, the town of *The Devils* was loosely based on Tver, and that Dostoevsky drew inspiration from Staraya Russa when creating Skotoprigonevsk, but it would make no difference if, instead of Tver, the author had taken elements of his topography from Vladimir, or Yaroslavl, or Orel. Similarly, we are aware that Middlemarch is a fictional representation of an industrial midlands town, but any associations we make with “real” Warwickshire country are imputed onto the text, either from a knowledge of the author’s biography, or a subconscious acquiescence to the agenda of literary tourist guides that have tried to locate real places in Eliot’s fiction.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the negative identity of the province for both Eliot and Dostoevsky does not always suggest a negative ethical evaluation of provincialism (as it did for Johnson and Arnold): rather, as I will show throughout this thesis, the provinces for these writers comprise deeply ambivalent moral universes, and at times it is not altogether clear whether either writer is quite able to take the side of the modern metropolis over against the provincial town.

### ***Gemeinschaft Meets Gesellschaft***

Both Eliot and Dostoevsky treat the provincial town as sociological *space* rather than a geographical *place*, and for that reason this thesis does not deal with descriptions of the historical reality of the provincial town in Russia or England.<sup>30</sup> Following

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<sup>29</sup> See Duncan, ‘The Provincial or Regional Novel’, p. 323. See also Josephine McDonagh, ‘Space, Mobility, and the Novel: “The Spirit of the Place is a Great Reality”’, in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 50-67, especially p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> For this, see Clark, ‘Small Towns’; and Stephen A. Royle, ‘The Development of Small Towns in Britain’ in *The Cambridge History of Urban Britain*, vol. 3, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 151-84. For the Russian context, see W. H. Parker, *An Historical Geography of Russia* (London: University of London Press, 1968); Judith Pallot and Denis

McDonagh, I suggest that for both writers place ‘is about communities and people, rather than about landscapes and environments’.<sup>31</sup> In the works of both writers, these communities do battle with, or seek to accommodate, the onset of modernity that was given concrete historical expression in the reforms of the 1820s and 30s in England (culminating in the Great Reform Act of 1832) and the Great Reforms of the 1860s in Russia. All the novels discussed in this thesis were set at a time of reform, when conceptual and administrative maps of England and Russia were being redrawn, as greater power was devolved to the provinces (including new industrial towns) through the creation of parliamentary seats, or through the creation of local government assemblies (*zemstva*). Though denied geographical specificity, the provincial milieux are decidedly historicised insofar as Eliot and Dostoevsky test the ways in which modern (often urban) developments can be absorbed by communities where a more traditional way of life continues, at least partially, to obtain. This collision of mentalities is pronounced in a variety of ways. For example, both Middlemarch and Skotoprigonevsk are home to medical men who feel threatened by the arrival of (what they perceive to be) new-fangled medical techniques and precocious practitioners from Paris, Edinburgh, and Moscow; land, traditionally bequeathed by virtue of heredity, is now the subject of legal disputes; the established church is, in Eliot’s world, increasingly usurped by dissent or agnosticism, while in Dostoevsky’s provinces the potential non-existence of God is proclaimed in the very institution where the representatives of Christianity find their most faithful expression. Their provincial communities are forced to wrestle with a changing world in which objects dissolve into abstract concepts, where the stocking gives way to the savings bank

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J. B. Shaw, *Landscape and Settlement in Romanov Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), especially chapter 10; and Kirichinko and Shebeleva, *Russkaia provintsia*, pp. 123-43.

<sup>31</sup> McDonagh, ‘Place, Region, and Migration’, p. 365.

[*MM*, 95],<sup>32</sup> and where the simplest tautologies ('water's water' [*MF*, 15]) can no longer be unquestioningly defended.

In his chapter on the provincial novel, Duncan argues that it is precisely the juxtaposition of traditional ways of life with the forces of urban modernisation that gives momentum to the text:

Historical change [...] is the condition through which the province or region becomes narratable, as an island, or reef, in a tide of wholesale economic and social transformation. A new, linear, open-ended impetus of historical time rushes against a traditional, closed, repetitive order, marked by the double chronology of everyday life and the seasons.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, it is the premise of this thesis that Dostoevsky and Eliot's towns and communities are imbued with an ambivalence that derives from their position *in between* the realms of what the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies called the *Gemeinschaft* ("primal community") and the *Gesellschaft* ("civil" or "modern society"). According to Tönnies, the *Gemeinschaft* is inhabited by individuals who are connected by organic, familial bonds, and organised around a shared set of values; these connections (*Verbindungen*) derive primarily from descent, and manifest themselves in shared language, customs, and beliefs. In modern society, human lives are still inextricably connected, but rather than being organic, these connections are mechanical, negotiated in the public sphere, and in the interests of commerce; here individual interest reigns supreme, as man is subordinate to function.<sup>34</sup> In the novels I consider in this thesis, the provinces are established as a space in which this clash of worldviews can take place: the traditional values of English country or Russian life (exemplified in such characters as Mrs Glegg in *The Mill on the Floss*, Sir James Chettam and Mrs Cadwallader in

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<sup>32</sup> An analysis of the transition from feudal to capitalist mentalities in Goncharov's *Oblomov* is provided by Lounsbury in her 'The World on the Back of a Fish'.

<sup>33</sup> Duncan, 'The Provincial or Regional Novel', p. 323-24.

<sup>34</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. by José Harris, trans. by José Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See especially, pp. 17-21.

*Middlemarch*, Sofia Matveevna in *The Devils*, Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*) are juxtaposed with the emergent values of the metropolis, as exemplified in mercantile characters (usually without organic connection to the land) such as Mr Wakem, Mr Bulstrode, Joshua Rigg, Harold Transome, Peter Verkhovensky, Smerdyakov, and others.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that Eliot and Dostoevsky establish a simple dichotomy between “good” rural values and “bad” urban ones. As intellectuals who never consented to live in the provinces, these writers had clearly made a personal investment in metropolitan culture. Both, to give just two examples, were extremely interested in modern medicine and both were themselves “mercantile” in their pursuit of literary success, riches, and celebrity. The point of the provincial town, it seems to me, is create a laboratory in which to explore how characters navigate the changes of the modern world—and through this exploration to offer ethical instruction to a readership in need of what one contemporary reader described as ‘second Bibles’ [*GEL*, 6, 340]—that is, moral teaching in an era where instinctive faith in an all-directing deity was on the decline.

## **Province and Novel**

For both writers, the quotidian setting of the provincial town, with its institutions of modernity (prisons, courts, breweries, factories, banks, hotels), provided the ideal arena in which to showcase the dilemmas of the nineteenth-century. In addition, the genre of the novel proved to be a necessary and appropriate medium through which to prosecute their ethical agenda. For literary theorists such as Lukács and Bakhtin, the novel was the quintessential genre of modernity. For the latter, it ‘reflects all the

tendencies of a new world still in the making':<sup>35</sup> it is born of this world and has complete affinity with it, parading its heteroglossia and delighting in the present moment. In this sense, it might be said that the term *provincial novel* is a particularly fitting collocation, a perfect fusion of space and form. Indeed, Epstein's description of the provinces could have been adapted almost word for word by Bakhtin in his analysis of the novel:

Итак, провинциальность - это способ устройства определенных структур, выносящих свой центр за собственные пределы. Этот центр находится неведомо где, за всякой видимой чертой - и в то же время где-то здесь, на земле, в той же самой субстанции, из которой образована структура. Если бы центр обретался в потусторонних мирах, в царстве чистого духа, это сразу бы лишило структуру провинциальности, потому что каждый ее элемент обрел бы возможность непосредственно, минуя все остальные, через собственную глубину сообщаться с Центром. *Особенность провинциальности определяется именно тем, что ее средоточие лежит в той же горизонтальной плоскости, что вся остальная среда, - в том же пространственно-временном, тягучем и вязком континууме.*<sup>36</sup>

Whereas genres such as the epic or lyric poem might be said to centre man on the "vertical" axis, foregrounding his challenge or subservience to Fate, Nature, God, or Love, the novel "earths" man in his horizontal experience, emphasising not the moment of epiphany but the temporal progression of his development through time. This point is further explored by McDonagh who comments that 'Eliot elides a way of life (tradition, rural, in which customs do not change over many generations) with a form of representation of that way of life (primarily, recounting the small details of everyday life in the context of a physical environment)'.<sup>37</sup> The provinces, for Eliot, are an area where the vernacular register of the novel can find its most fitting

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<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Epstein, *Bog detalei*, p. 24. My italics.

<sup>37</sup> McDonagh, 'Space, Mobility, and the Novel', p. 61.

embodiment, or, as McDonagh puts it, ‘the kinds of place described tend to determine the mode of representation’.<sup>38</sup>

This point does not map neatly onto Dostoevsky’s fiction, which very seldom describes physical environment as such. Nevertheless, his decision to abandon the alienating cityscape of St Petersburg and turn instead to the provincial environments of *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov* allowed him to develop his novelistic craft in such a way as to foreground man’s relation not only to himself, or to God, but to a concrete community. It is of course true that in these novels his characters maintain their own, inviolable voices as they come together to create the polyphony for which Dostoevsky is renowned. But whereas Bakhtin argued that social setting mattered very little to Dostoevsky,<sup>39</sup> I suggest that it is rather a necessary—or, at the very least, helpful—medium through which a polyphonic chorus can be achieved.<sup>40</sup>

## **Provincial Communities and the Discourse of Modernity**

In my analysis of the ways in which the provincial communities wrestle with the onset of modernity, I focus in this thesis on four discrete discourses that make ethical behaviour problematic.

The first of these discourses is the biblical. Chapter One, “Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Appropriation of Biblical Discourse in the Provincial Town”, argues that

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> See Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 262.

<sup>40</sup> This is by no means to suggest that Dostoevsky (or for that matter Eliot) represent all classes of society with uniform success. Only rarely, for example, does Dostoevsky represent the peasantry. As Raymond Williams pointed out some years ago, Eliot was likewise unable to represent the working class. Finding it ‘difficult to individuate working people’, Williams memorably writes that ‘George Eliot restores the real inhabitants of rural England to their places in what had been [in Jane Austen] a socially selective landscape, [but] she does not get much further than restoring them *as a landscape*’. See his *The Country and the City* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011). Here, p. 168 (Williams’s italics).

for Dostoevsky and Eliot the Bible does not function as (in Bakhtin's terminology) Holy Writ, that is, as an authoritative, eternal instruction manual for human behaviour. Rather, in their recasting of biblical narrative, especially the parables of Jesus, these writers draw on the quotidian, and time-bound aspects of biblical narrative—a narrative that, whilst articulating eternal truth, embodies that truth in a distinctly unglamorous present, in the intrigues of flawed individuals, in the contingent histories of realistic men and women in first-century Palestine. In this way, I view the Bible as a prototype of the provincial novel. Both Bible and novel seek to elucidate generalisable truth on the basis of specific, historical situations. In the case of the New Testament, that historical situation was decidedly provincial, and any understanding we have of the theology of (for example) the birth of Jesus must be predicated (as Historical Jesus scholars of the nineteenth century amply demonstrated)<sup>41</sup> on an understanding of the fact that both Bethlehem and Nazareth were provincial outposts of first-century Rome. When, in John 1.46, Nathaniel asks Philip whether anything good can come from Nazareth, he articulates an incredulity as to the possibility of divine activity emanating from an apparently inconsequential (and hostile) milieu. The New Testament, like the novel, reveals that such inconsequentiality is only apparent, insisting upon the centrality of an environment that might otherwise be dismissed as peripheral. In their novels, I suggest, Dostoevsky and Eliot undertake to imbue the provinces with national and universal significance, a significance which rests on the prosaic—or *poshlyi*—machinations of less than exemplary communities. Focusing primarily on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), this chapter argues that the provincial town, poised between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between the organic bonds of blood and the

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<sup>41</sup> An account of this scholarship has yet to supersede Albert Schweitzer's 1905 *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

synthetic bonds of commerce, serves as a sociological space in which the applicability of Jesus' ethical instruction can be interrogated in the modern world. To what extent, I ask, can the injunction to love one's neighbour be obeyed in communities where neighbours exhibit varying degrees of alterity: from family members, to friends, to outsiders, to enemies. Eliot and Dostoevsky emplot the parable in the nineteenth-century provincial town as a means of testing the elasticity of Jesus' command, of probing how far our communal obligations can be pushed. How tight, they seem to ask, are the organic bonds of community, and should they be extended to encompass characters who are not rooted in the native soil?

In my second chapter, "The Talk of the Town: Language and its (Ab)uses in the Provinces", I turn to discourse—or language—itsself and examine the ways in which the juxtaposition of referential, denotative meaning comes into conflict with metaphorical, connotative meaning in a provincial setting. Although I do not draw on the work of Saussure as such, his concept of the "sign" and the "signified" is essentially what is at stake here. I analyse the struggle of certain characters to understand or adapt to modern uses of language in which the surface meaning of the word has been divorced from its traditional referent, and argue that this struggle is intensified in the province, a space where abstract language is comprehensible to some (often those who have enjoyed an urban upbringing or education) but not to others. Given that language for Eliot and Dostoevsky is not "merely" a medium through which to convey ethical instruction, but rather a site of conflict and object of thematic interest *as such*, the modern use of language—which entails the breakdown of Mr Tulliver's apparent tautology of water being water—is not primarily an object of theoretical contemplation for Eliot and Dostoevsky, but rather a stimulus for the development of the plot. That words have consequences, is perhaps the most

irrefutable summary of Eliot and Dostoevsky's aesthetics and ethics. I then move on to examine how one particular mode of discourse—namely gossip—functions in provincial communities. My analysis of gossip draws heavily on Bakhtinian categories of monologism and polyphony, and I suggest that, despite the inherently communal (and thus potentially polyphonic) nature of gossip, Eliot and Dostoevsky are both wary of the dangers of a mode of discourse in which individual voices are subsumed into, or silenced by, a collective whole. Although both writers use gossip as a plot-compositional device (thus, to some extent, redeeming a discursive category usually derided), they treat with scepticism the attempts of communities to define other characters from the outside, to objectify and finalise them from without. Talking *about* people, rather than allowing them to reveal themselves through dialogue, is for both writers a sure path to epistemological uncertainty and ethical malevolence. Eliot does not go as far as Dostoevsky in making the polyphonic revelation of consciousness central to her narrative design, but *within* the worlds of her novels, she criticises characters who take upon themselves the task of her narrators: namely, the revelation of an Other's consciousness to which they cannot have access, the ascription of motive to an alterior, autonomous subject, the devaluation of complex human beings as mere signs for their neighbours' false suppositions.

In chapter 3, "The Heroic Surplus: Is Greatness Possible in the Chronotope of the Provincial Town?", I examine the ways in which Dostoevsky and Eliot refashion the discourse of heroism in the late nineteenth century. In the early part of that century, heroism tended to be exemplified in Great Men, who had, more often than not, earned their stripes on the battlefield. Heroism for the Romantics, if not always linked to tropes of military glory, tended to extol the idea of physical struggle or

adventure, often in far-off, extreme conditions—in the mountains, at sea, abroad. Eliot and Dostoevsky, I suggest, were interested in how heroic aspiration could be channelled into a provincial milieu—that is, in a domestic, peaceful, prosaic environment, at the centre of the nation rather than on its outskirts. The protagonists of their novels are, in a term I borrow from Gary Saul Morson, generic refugees,<sup>42</sup> insofar as they long to incarnate a mode of heroism (be it epic or hagiographic) whose expression the genre of the novel precludes. The quotidian provinces, described in vernacular prose, provide neither place nor medium for Dorothea Brooke and Alyosha Karamazov to realise their heroic visions, which they are forced to temper as the novels progress. However, I argue that whilst Eliot and Dostoevsky are decided propagators of what Wordsworth called ‘little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love’, of what Eliot christens ‘diffusive’ heroism, of what Dostoevsky refers to as the giving and receiving of onions, they nevertheless are unable to disavow the initial, grandiose visions of their protagonists. In other words, when, at the end of *Middlemarch*, Eliot’s narrator comments that ‘the growing good of the world is *partly* dependent on unhistoric acts’ [*MM*, 838; my emphasis], there is *another part* of human activity, a more conventionally heroic part, that does indeed shape historical destiny. In the provinces, this form of heroism is essentially unrealisable, and as such, in order to fulfil it, Eliot and Dostoevsky have to exile their characters to the metropolis, a more fitting stage for world-historical activity. Thus their characters, despite their emergent consciousness of the importance of small acts of kindness in their immediate environment, retain what I call a “heroic surplus” insofar as they never successfully abjure their heroic longings. I suggest that this

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<sup>42</sup> Gary Saul Morson, ‘Genre and Hero/*Fathers and Sons*: Inter-generic Dialogues, Generic Refugees, and the Hidden Prosaic’, *Stanford Slavonic Studies*, 4.1 (1991), 336-81.

ambivalence is essentially the authors' own, that neither Eliot nor Dostoevsky was content with a provincial existence that circumscribed (or stifled) heroic aspiration.

In my final chapter, “The Professions in the Provinces: The Appropriation and Perfection of Medical and Legal Discourse in the Provincial Town”, I look at the ways in which Eliot and Dostoevsky embed urban developments in medicine and the law in provincial communities. As metropolitan intellectuals of the 1860s and 70s, Eliot and Dostoevsky were armed with a degree of knowledge about the medical and legal professions that was unavailable to their characters. This chapter examines the ways in which Eliot and Dostoevsky use the latest scientific and legal concepts to structure their work. In so doing, they expose the poverty of a particular brand of professionalism which is, for them, behind the times. Whilst hospital medicine at the start of the nineteenth century acclaimed what Foucault called the “clinical gaze” (that is, the authoritative observation of the expert physician whose patients were a readily decipherable collection of symptoms), Dostoevsky and Eliot make use of the concepts of perception, imagination, and feeling—all of which were undergoing a revival as legitimate scientific categories under the auspices of scientific thinkers such as G. H. Lewes and John Tyndall. In my analysis, I suggest that Dostoevsky and Eliot destabilise the clinical gaze and that their refutation of epistemological certainty is made explicit through their presentation of provincial communities that resist the authoritative diagnoses of physicians. In this way, it can be said that Eliot and Dostoevsky make use of scientific advances in their fiction, even as they censure the *provincial application* of modern medical and legal developments, an application that (in Dostoevsky in particular) illegitimately politicises or makes tendentious professional knowledge. Nevertheless, they also seek to reinstate aspects of professionalism that are (they seem to suggest) more evident in the provinces than in

the city, particularly the belief that medical and legal subjects need to be understood not a collection of symptoms or as the sum of their crimes, but rather as integrated personalities.

In her analysis of Gogol and Hawthorne, Lounsbury examines the intersections of poetics and the publishing industry to demonstrate affinities between the two writers, how they both chased fame as artists living in countries where the circumstances for artistic production were apparently inauspicious. My thesis largely eschews questions of authorial biography and the ways in which Eliot and Dostoevsky attempted to make a name for themselves in their respective literary industries. Instead, I focus on how they engage with the particular thematic discourses I have outlined above. Nevertheless, like Lounsbury, I believe that it is entirely legitimate to bring together two pinnacle representatives of their respective canons, and that the comparison can contribute to knowledge on Dostoevsky and Eliot individually, as well as to the literary treatment of the provinces more generally. Whilst I have tried not to conflate the aesthetic principles and ethical visions of these two writers, I have examined four themes with which Eliot and Dostoevsky were explicitly preoccupied. The chapters that follow provide, I believe, a sufficient, by no means exhaustive, justification for the comparison of these authors. It will fall to the reader to decide whether the lacuna should have been left unfilled.

## A Note on the Corpus

Following Lounsbury's suggestion that provincialism typically denotes small cities or towns, and in accordance with the broader theoretical framework I have outlined in my Introduction, this thesis deals with a particular kind of provincial community as it is represented within the world of the novel, namely that of the small town. Thus whilst I do at times refer to other works by Dostoevsky and Eliot, my main analysis is focussed on five novels that deal specifically with small towns (rather than, say, villages or country estates): *The Mill on the Floss*, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. It would be fair to say that, of these texts, I devote most attention to *Middlemarch* and *The Brothers Karamazov* in the belief that it is in these two novels that Dostoevsky and Eliot make their most skilful, and most interesting, contributions to the provincial novel. Indeed, one might argue that, whatever afterlife the provincial novel attained in England or the Soviet Union, it would never return to the apex attained in these works.

# Chapter 1

## Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Appropriation of Biblical Discourse in the Provincial Town

In 1846, the English edition of David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* was published. Strauss's account of Jesus' life drew on a tradition of scholarship that sought to explain the origins of the Christian religion with reference to the historical circumstances of first-century Judea, and in particular with regard to the messianic expectations of the Palestinian Jewish community of the time.<sup>1</sup> In Jesus of Nazareth, according to Strauss, we do not encounter a historically verifiable individual, but a projection of a first-century Jewish worldview that sought to recast the life of a Galilean carpenter according to Old Testament prophecy. In order to elucidate this central thesis, Strauss was compelled to read the Bible as a historical document rather than as divinely-inspired revelation, and his almost scientific analysis of his sources ('Critically Examined') was carried out with a vigour that left his translator, the young Mary Ann Evans, 'Strauss-sick': according to Mrs Charles Bray, 'it made her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion, and only the sight of her Christ-image and picture made her endure it' [*GEL* 1, 206]. Bray's quotation is suggestive in at least two ways. Firstly, it implies that for the future George Eliot, Strauss's historiographical method, however enlightening in terms of historical study, did damage to the narrative sense—'the beautiful story'—of the Bible. Secondly that, whatever her misgivings about the existence of a personal deity, she was prepared to admit something of the sublime about the idea of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of this tradition, see Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

Some three years after the English publication of Strauss's *magnum opus*, the twenty-eight year old Fyodor Dostoevsky took a copy of the French translation of the same book from the library of Mikhail Petrashevsky. Whether Dostoevsky actually read the book is open to question,<sup>2</sup> but Strauss's ideas were certainly popular in 1840s Russia, and looking back from the 1870s, Dostoevsky recalls the reverence with which Strauss was spoken of at the time, counting him among those Belinsky and others considered to be 'европейские высшие учителя' [21, 132]. The irony of the epithet is subsequently elucidated by Dostoevsky, as he claims that these esteemed teachers, having rejected Christ, have lain the foundations of chaos and obscurity, resulting in a structure that 'рухнет под проклятиями человечества, прежде чем будет завершено' [21, 133].

For both Eliot and Dostoevsky, it seems as though Strauss's work on the historical Jesus, however well-intentioned, threatened their own understanding of the idea of Christ and Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this chapter will argue that their novels owe a debt to the historical Jesus school of which Strauss's book formed the apex. If historical Jesus scholars had shown that the theological significance of the New Testament could only be understood in light of a historical appreciation of Jesus' own provincial backwater, Eliot and Dostoevsky seek to recover the meaning of the Bible as it might be understood and applied in a contemporary, work-a-day, provincial context. I thus read the Bible as a 'metatype',<sup>4</sup> or 'code',<sup>5</sup> for their fiction: just as the

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<sup>2</sup> On Dostoevsky's (mis)rememberings of his philosophical and literary readings of the 1840s, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), ch. 14. For a more maximalist association of Strauss and Dostoevsky than I believe is warranted, see Karen Stepanian, "'Eto budet, no budet posle dostizheniia tseli...'" ("Zhizn' Iisusa" D. F. Shtrausa i E. Zh. Renana i roman F. M. Dostoevskogo "Idiot"), *Voprosy literatury*, 4 (2003), 140-58.

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I use "Jesus" or "Jesus of Nazareth" to denote a historical individual, whereas I treat "Christ" as a messianic (and therefore ultimately theological) title.

<sup>4</sup> The term is Stephen Prickett's in his *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). He describes 'metatype' as 'a kind of all-embracing literary form that was invoked to encompass and give meaning to all other books' (p. 1).

Bible writers employed a specific, historical, even realistic, chronotope to prosecute their ethical and theological agenda, so Eliot and Dostoevsky turn to the (apparently humdrum, or *poshlyi*) nineteenth-century province to explore themes they consider to have national or universal significance. Drawing on both historical and contemporary criticism of the New Testament (and particularly the genre of the parable), I argue that for both writers this exploration is best conducted through the narratives of the novel. Having established the primacy of narrative and its debt to biblical type, I then analyse the ways in which Eliot and Dostoevsky emplot a particular biblical narrative—namely, the Parable of the Good Samaritan—in provincial communities in order to provide ethical instruction on the theme of moral distance.

### **Eliot and Dostoevsky’s Engagement with Historical Jesus Scholarship**

The so-called Quest of the Historical Jesus was undertaken for the most part in Germany from the 1750s to the middle of the nineteenth century. The reasons for this are many, but the greater degree of *Lehrfreiheit*, along with the fact that the German higher critics were not necessarily salaried pastors, made that country a more amenable environment in which to challenge orthodoxies and treat the Bible with a critical spirit,<sup>6</sup> applying to it the techniques of historical and literary analysis. By employing these techniques, critics such as Strauss hoped to cut through centuries of

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<sup>5</sup> See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1982). An application of Frye’s theory—that the Bible functions as a model for subsequent literary production—to Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* is provided by Sarah Young in her chapter (as Sara Iang), ‘Bibleiskie arkhetypy v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo “Idiot”’, in *Evangel’skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov: Tsitata, reministsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, vol. 3 (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2001), pp. 382-90. Whereas Young examines the way the biblical tropes of creation, fall, and redemption are emplotted in the novel, my approach in the first section of this chapter is rather to examine the ways in which the Bible’s approach to historical reality (rather than theological motif) might function as a code for the novelists.

<sup>6</sup> On the hegemony of the German critics in the nineteenth century, see Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially ch. 1.

accreted interpretation that, they believed, would have been most alien to a Jewish rabbi of the first century.<sup>7</sup> Under Strauss and his precursors, the Bible was relieved of its supposedly innate sacralty and treated as a historical document that could shed light on the mythical-poetic mindset of first-century Christians—who, in Strauss’s estimation, inventively (although not necessarily deceitfully) ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth the characteristics of the messiah.

Running to three dense volumes, Strauss’s dialectical juggernaut remained underappreciated throughout the continent until the 1860s. In England, it fell, among others, to Eliot’s friend Benjamin Jowett to attempt to popularise his findings. In *Essays and Reviews* (1860), Jowett and his co-contributors denied all presuppositions about the inerrancy of scripture, and sought to analyse the Bible like any other book. In his contribution, entitled ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, Jowett conceives of the theologian’s task as to recover the plain meaning of Jesus’ words as their original audience might have understood them. Unimpressed with the creative allegorical interpretations scripture that had accrued throughout church history (during the course of which the text had been reduced to a ‘book of symbols’<sup>8</sup>), Jowett impressed upon his reader the need to abjure credal hermeneutics and to engage in philological research to uncover the meaning of the biblical text in the first century: Bible readers needed to understand what the word “faith” meant to Paul, not what it meant to Luther or Calvin. In a sense, Jowett’s work can be read as an instantiation of the Protestant doctrine of *ad fontes*, as he sought to liberate the Bible’s pages from the

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<sup>7</sup> A survey of theological trends in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was provided by Eliot’s friend Mark Pattison. See his ‘The Present State of Theology in Germany’, in *Essays*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889), pp. 210-62. For a treatment of the similarities between Pattison and Casaubon, see V. H. H. Green, *Oxford Common Room: A Study of Lincoln College and Mark Pattison* (London: Edward Arnold, 1957), ch. 9. Unlike Pattison, however, Casaubon could not speak German and therefore suffers from an inability to follow recent trends in German theology.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Jowett, ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, in *Essays and Reviews*, 12th edn (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869), pp. 399-527. Here, p. 447.

changing winds of doctrine and to guard against the hermeneutical sin of extracting from the pages of scripture only those propositions one had already determined to discover: ‘what men bring to the text,’ he writes, ‘they also find there’.<sup>9</sup>

Like Strauss, however, Jowett lacked concision and brio. Thus the former’s ideas had to wait until 1863, with the publication of Ernest Renan’s *Life of Jesus*, for their widespread popularisation. Admitting the influence of the German master on his own work, Renan viewed the gospels as products of a popular consciousness and (to quote Robert Priest) held that they ‘should be treated as contingent and contradictory historical source[s], rather than a divinely inspired and harmonious narrative’.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to Strauss and Jowett, Renan wrote with narrative flair and packed his work with rich and intimate descriptions of the Palestinian landscape (Renan had visited the Holy Land several times).<sup>11</sup> Somewhat sentimental, Renan’s *Life* presents a thoroughly earthly Jesus, a simple Galilean peasant enchanted with the beauty of nature who saw every Palestinian hillock as proof of God’s design.<sup>12</sup> Regrettably drawn into political debate and apocalyptic eschatology by his “cousin” John the Baptist, Renan’s Jesus is a tragic figure, compelled, like Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, to resort to miraculous signs as a way of ensuring, underhandedly, the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>10</sup> Robert D. Priest, *The Gospel According to Renan: Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> For a survey of literary production that responded to increased interest in the topography and culture of the Holy Land from the 1840s, see Jefferson J. A. Gatrall, ‘The Color of His Hair: Nineteenth-Century Literary Portraits of the Historical Jesus’, *Novel*, 42.1 (2009), 109-30. As his title suggests, Gatrall deals specifically with fictional depictions of the person of Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> On Renan, see Daniel L. Pals, *The Victorian “Lives” of Jesus* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1982), ch. 1. Pals’s study is particularly interesting in highlighting British responses to Renan, whose book brought discussion of the historical Jesus out of the common room and into public view (p. 48). He argues that Renan’s book set the standard for all subsequent *Lives* of Jesus (i.e. they had to be readable!), but that in Britain the historical method, now seen as indispensable, had to be made to serve orthodox theological conclusions.

allegiance of his followers. If for Strauss Jesus was a product of Jewish messianic expectation, then for Renan he was its victim.<sup>13</sup>

Eliot's view of Renan was mixed. In a letter of 1863, she writes in the space of a page that 'Renan is a favourite with me' and that his *Life* is a 'facile construction' [*GEL*, 1.4, 95]. Her knowledge of Renan's book (which she had not yet read) led her to opine:

It seems to me the soul of Christianity lies not at all in the facts of an individual life, but in the ideas of which that life was the meeting-point and the new starting-point. We can never have a satisfactory basis for the history of the man Jesus but that negation does not affect the Idea of Christ, either in its historical influence or its great symbolic meanings. Still, such books as Renan's have their value in helping the popular imagination to feel that the sacred past is of one woof with the human present, which ought to be sacred too. [*GEL*, 1.4, 95]

Although she expresses some scepticism as to Renan's historical method, Eliot admires the way in which the writer enables his readers to reimagine the Christian scriptures and to reappropriate them in the present day—a present that is, or should be, sacred. She went on to read the work, but it caused her to 'give up the high estimate I had formed of his mind' [*GEL*, 1.4, 123]: his skill was of that of an artist, not a serious thinker. True though that may be, her critique of Renan's work in the above quotation seems somewhat off the mark. Her use of 'still' establishes a contrast that is hers (not Renan's), since the 'Idea of Christ' was precisely that which Renan was trying to capture.<sup>14</sup> Although Renan was a lapsed Catholic, the sublime significance of Jesus of Nazareth was, for him, premised precisely upon an understanding of the historical context and topography of a far-flung province of the Roman empire. *The Life of Jesus* was not so much—or, rather, was not only—an

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Said famously charged Renan with creating rather than discovering Semitic traits, a creation that almost wholly reflected badly on Semitic communities. On Renan's anti-Semitism, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), e.g. pp. 139-40.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of Renan's twin preoccupations—that is, historical accuracy and spiritual inspiration—see T. R. Wright, 'The Letter and the Spirit: Deconstructing Renan's *Life of Jesus* and the Assumptions of Modernity', *Religion and Literature*, 26.2 (1994), 55-71.

attempt to ascertain the ‘facts of an individual life’ but to imagine that life, to enter into and recreate the psychology of Jesus—an enterprise for which the historical method was indispensable but not sufficient.<sup>15</sup>

Eliot’s view that the idea of Christ should be held supreme over ‘the history of the man Jesus’ aligns neatly with Dostoevsky’s own sentiment, expressed in his famous missive of 1854, that ‘если б кто мне доказал, что Христос вне истины, и действительно было бы, что истина вне Христа, то мне лучше хотелось бы оставаться со Христом, нежели с истиной’ [28.1, 176]. Indeed, Dostoevsky had remarkably little patience with attempts to contextualise the life of Jesus of Nazareth, fearing that such contextualisation would undermine the idea of a divine Christ to which he had always fervently clung.<sup>16</sup> In the 1873 Diary entry “Apropos of an Exhibition”, Dostoevsky reviewed Nikolai Ge’s painting *The Last Supper*. Following Strauss,<sup>17</sup> Ge had attempted to naturalise Jesus’ final meal, which under his brush becomes a dinner in modern-day Petersburg, with none other than Alexander Herzen featuring as the face of Jesus. Dostoevsky reacted negatively to what he perceived to be the decanonisation or domestication of the eternal Christ, who was now demoted to a nineteenth-century radical: ‘Где же тут восемнадцать веков христианства? Где идея, вдохновлявшая столько народов, столько умов и сердец? Где же мессия,

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<sup>15</sup> On the interplay of historical method and the imagination in Renan, see Priest, *The Gospel According to Renan*, pp. 73-76. Eliot and G. H. Lewes provide accounts of their meetings with Renan in [GEL 1.4, 334] and [GEL, 1.4, 328].

<sup>16</sup> Works that attempted to historicise sacred texts were not limited to biblical scholarship. For example, Klyuchevsky had attempted to apply the principles of source criticism to the ancient Russian *Lives of the Saints*, hoping—through a study of rhetorical-literary devices and factual-historical investigation—to shed light on the history of Russia through these documents. He was disappointed to discover, however, that his documents served little value as historical sources as such (the purpose of hagiography was rather to provide ‘практические уроки жизни’ and ‘нравственные парадигмы’). See his *Drevnerusskie zhitiia sviatykh kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Moscow: Izdanie K. Soldatenkova, 1871), *passim*. Here, p. 432. On Klyuchevsky, see Rosalind Y. McKenzie, ‘Secularizing Tendencies in Medieval Russian Hagiography of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, UCL SEESS, 1998), especially p. 14. See also Kåre Johan Mjør, *Reformulating Russia: The Cultural and Intellectual Historiography of First-Wave Émigre Writers* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), especially pp. 108-10.

<sup>17</sup> On Ge’s engagement with Strauss, see Inessa Medzhibovskaya, ‘On Moral Movement and Moral Vision: The Last Supper in Russian Debates’, *Comparative Literature*, 56.1 (2004), 23-53.

обетованный миру спаситель, - где же Христос...?'.<sup>18</sup> Whereas thinkers such as Jowett sought to cast off the accreted tradition of foregoing centuries, for Dostoevsky it was precisely this tradition that nineteenth-century higher criticism was in danger of eroding. Like Eliot, he evinces concern that naturalistic accounts of Jesus of Nazareth were threatening to usurp his own belief in the sublimity of the Son of God—a fear that had previously been given expression in the brutal realism of Holbein's *Christ in the Tomb* in *The Idiot*.

Dostoevsky's reaction to Renan was, like Eliot's, ambivalent.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, he believed that *The Life of Jesus* was filled with unbelief [21, 11], and was affronted by the Frenchman's denial of the sinlessness of Christ. On the other, he recognised that, even as an atheist, Renan still held Christ to be 'идеал красоты человеческой, тип недостижимый, которому нельзя уже более повториться даже и в будущем' [21, 11]. In addition, Dostoevsky would have appreciated certain aspects of Renan's polemic, especially his contention that the doctrines of religious observance detract from the vital ideas of Christianity.<sup>20</sup> As Malcolm Jones has shown, the concept of "minimal religion", that is 'a religion liberated from an elaborate interpretive tradition'<sup>21</sup> can aptly be said to encompass Dostoevsky's own approach to Christianity which was, at times, unOrthodox.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, Dostoevsky valued the 'восемнадцать веков христианства' to which he had fallen heir, but this

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<sup>18</sup> F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov, vol. 2, ed. by A. Dolinin (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> A fuller treatment of Dostoevsky's engagement with Renan—including and beyond *The Life of Jesus*—can be found in E. I. Kiiko, 'Dostoevskii i Renan', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. by G. M. Fridlender, vol. 4 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), pp. 106-122. See also the informative essay in [9, 394-404].

<sup>20</sup> Summarising Dostoevsky's attitude to *The Life of Jesus*, Kiiko writes: 'В отличие от «верующих» и «неверующих», отвергавших концепцию Ренана с противоположных позиций, Достоевский воспринял ее как некое диалектическое единство, как гимн нравственной красоте Христа, хотя и сочиненный атеистом' (Kiiko, 'Dostoevskii i Renan', p. 108). Dostoevsky, of course, tried to reflect much of this moral beauty in his own positively beautiful man, Prince Myshkin.

<sup>21</sup> Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> On Dostoevsky's divergence from Orthodoxy, see *ibid.*, especially chapter 1.

tradition should not strait-jacket religious experience, whose truest expression is not in creedal formulation but in spontaneous, active love.

For Renan, Eliot, and Dostoevsky, the “letter” of historical Jesus scholarship stood in a precarious relationship to the “spirit” of Christian teaching. Explicating the distinction between these two terms, Terence Wright states that: ‘the attempt to get back to an original stable and unchanging truth, to re-present it without difference, to convey its essential spirit without mediating material form, is doomed to failure’.<sup>23</sup> What I take Wright to mean here is that the spirit of Jesus’ teaching needed to be clothed in a particular form if it was to have any visceral appeal to nineteenth-century readers. For Renan, that form was a psychologised biography of Jesus of Nazareth (rather than, for example, a theological treatise as such).<sup>24</sup> I believe that Wright’s statement can be productively applied to Eliot and Dostoevsky too; that is, I contend that these writers also sought to convey their own understanding of the truths of Christianity, and that, in order to do so, they used the provincial novel as a mediating material form. It proved, I suggest, a vehicle that enabled them to reflect the Bible’s own emphasis on quotidian reality (whose prominence in the Bible the historical Jesus school had done so much to reassert) whilst also providing a *narrative* medium through which the spirit of the biblical text might be appropriated anew.

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<sup>23</sup> Wright, ‘The Letter and the Spirit’, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> In *The Gospel According to Renan*, Priest writes that Renan’s work comprised ‘union of biography and intellectual history’, in which the gospels were said to capture the spirit of Jesus’ teaching, even if they did not necessarily record his every word with historical accuracy (p. 74).

## A Realistic Chronotope as a Condition of Truth in Bible and Novel

Тут тайна,—что мимоидущий лик земной и вечная истина соприкоснулись тут вместе. Пред правдой земною совершается действие вечной правды. [14, 265]

In western biblical scholarship of the twentieth century, the central tenets of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Quest of the Historical Jesus have largely been taken for granted, even if the Quest undergoes continued revision.<sup>25</sup> The importance that scholars ascribe to the understanding of Jesus' socio-cultural milieu is, however, sometimes lost in literary appropriations of theological terminology. A case in point is the literary use scholars make of the genre of the "parable". Frequently, this genre is made to stand in direct opposition to "realism", as if a parable were merely an allegorical shell whose material contents could be disemboweled and leave the reader with much the same level of understanding. For example, treatments of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* describe the work as a parable that lacks the realism of earlier works such as *Anna Karenina*.<sup>26</sup> That Tolstoy in his post-conversion masterpiece dispenses with much of the colour, psychologisation and, indeed, realism of *Anna Karenina* is undeniable; but this does not make it a parable as such—at least not, I will show, in any biblical sense. Similarly, Robin Feuer Miller's treatment of the genre in relation to Dostoevsky's work sees the parable as a means of teaching doctrine without recourse to propositional statements, but she does not distinguish between those stories which have a realistic (if somewhat fanciful) content and those

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<sup>25</sup> With the publication of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 we are, by N. T. Wright's reckoning, on the "Third Quest" of the Historical Jesus. On the development of the "Quests" post-Schweitzer, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Russell, 'From Individual to Universal: Tolstoy's "Smert' Ivana Il'icha"', *The Modern Language Review*, 76.3 (1981), 629-42; and Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), ch. 7.

which are clearly mythical (such as the fable of Grushenka's onion).<sup>27</sup> I do not wish to say that the work of these critics is defective, since they are using the term "parable" in a conventional sense, that is, a narrative structure that illustrates a moral or sacred truth to which its content is only tangentially connected. However, a closer examination of how Jesus himself used the genre will enable us to see how Eliot and Dostoevsky produced narratives that were simultaneously grounded in realistic, contingent, human experience and able to signify eternal or universal truth. For them, as for Jesus, realistic experience was not an inconvenient obstacle around which human beings had to pass in order to attain sacred insight, but the very means by which that insight was to be attained.

The inherent realism of the parabolic genre has been posited by, among others, Charles Hedrick, who argues (somewhat *in extremis*) that parables have no hidden message, figurative or moral, that they contain no archetypal symbols or universal features, and no secondary layer of signification.<sup>28</sup> For instance, the parable of the workers in the vineyard, for Hedrick, is not a commentary on anything other than the economic systems of village life in first-century Palestine. According to Hedrick and others,<sup>29</sup> the synoptic Evangelists have glossed Jesus' stories (primarily secular in thrust) with an allegorical veneer that no Galilean peasant could have detected.<sup>30</sup> All Jesus' parables deal with situations accessible to the (largely illiterate) community in

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<sup>27</sup> See her 'Dostoevskii's Parables: Paradox and Plot', in *Cultural Discontinuity and Reconstruction: The Byzanto-Slav Heritage and the Creation of a Russian National Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jostein Børtnes and Ingunn Lunde (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1997), pp. 168-84.

<sup>28</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014). Levine is particularly scathing of Luke, who 'turns the parable into an allegory, and so platitude replaces provocation' (p. 16).

<sup>30</sup> It is equally doubtful that the Roman authorities would have been perturbed by a rabbi telling stories that were merely analogies for an extra-terrestrial reality. 'If Jesus was a teacher of heavenly truths dispensed through literary gems called parables,' writes William Herzog, 'it is difficult to understand how he could have been executed as a political subversive and crucified between two social bandits'. See William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), p. 9.

which he lived. The subject of his stories tends to be related to sowing and reaping, to weddings, to family relations, to shepherding, to economics. While many of these themes do have an Old Testament pedigree, it is difficult to imagine that Jesus' original audience would not have understood them in light of their own day-to-day experience. This is squarely the world that Epstein, as I charted in my Introduction, described as "horizontal", as it foregrounds man's experience with man in his temporal milieu before betokening any kind of vertical transcendence.

Whilst Hedrick is right to emphasise the realistic character of Jesus' work-a-day world, he does not, it seems to me, take sufficiently into account the fact that parables, by definition, cast two things aside each other (*para-bole*), and Dominic Crossan is (for once) not being controversial when he defines a parable as 'a very short *metaphorical* narrative'.<sup>31</sup> If allegorical readings of the parables went too far in church history, with the Good Samaritan becoming under Augustine a figure of Christ and the man on the road a representation of Adam, it does not follow that all figuration is inherently suspect. Hedrick rightly emphasises the need to enter the historical world of the parables (to know how much a drachma was worth, for example), but I am inclined to agree with Zimmermann that 'the parables of Jesus acquire their power from the transfer of *real experience and concrete, real-life contexts* to the *religious domain*'.<sup>32</sup> At any rate, my concern in this chapter is to evaluate the ways in which Eliot and Dostoevsky reinvented the *biblical* text, not the original tale as it might have been told by an elusive historical Jesus, and it is

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<sup>31</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), p. 2 (my italics). More detailed discussions of what constitutes a parable can be found in Ruben Zimmermann's *Puzzling the Parables: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), especially chs 1 and 6; *The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition: A Report of the Jesus Seminar*, ed. by Robert W. Funk et al (Sonoma, CA.: Polebridge Press, 1988), pp. 16-19; and Jeffrey T. Tucker, *Example Stories: Perspectives on Four Parables in the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 149ff. Defining a parable is a notoriously difficult undertaking, and scholars disagree as to how many Jesus told (the number ranges from about 46 to 52), and on the methods by which they should be classified (on which see Zimmermann, ch. 6).

<sup>32</sup> Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, p. 196; my italics.

universally attested that the Evangelists intend the stories of Jesus to be read as something more than stories of a man who had two sons, even if the sense of the parable is liable to misunderstanding without a knowledge of first-century filial relations.

The way in which parables combine individual and type, humdrum and sublime, might be seen as a model for Eliot and Dostoevsky's own fictional enterprise. In chapter 35 of *Middlemarch*, Eliot's narrator takes to task those critics who attempt to abstract quotidian reality to the level of allegorical veneer. Having just related the advent of the unimpressive Mr Rigg in Middlemarch, the narrator comments:

And here I am naturally led to reflect on the means of elevating a low subject. Historical parallels are remarkably efficient in this way. The chief objection to them is, that the diligent narrator may lack space, or (what is often the same thing) may not be able to think of them with any degree of peculiarity, though he may have a philosophical confidence that if known they would be illustrative. It seems an easier and shorter way to dignity, to observe that – since there never was a true story which could not be told in parables where you might put a monkey for a margrave, and *vice versa* – whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more than figuratively ungentle, and may feel himself virtually in company with persons of some style. Thus while I tell the truth about loobies [silly fellows], my reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded from an occupation with lords; and petty sums which any bankrupt of high standing would be sorry to retire upon, may be lifted to the level of high commercial transactions by the inexpensive addition of proportional ciphers.

As to any provincial history in which the agents are all of high moral rank, that must be of a date long posterior to the first Reform Bill [...] [*MM*, 341].

The narrative voice in this passage is overtly ironic: the propositions that a monkey might represent a margrave, or a loobie a lord, seem to violate the surface meaning of the text to such an extent that they might be considered faintly ridiculous. This irony helps to make explicit the rupture between apparent authorial intention (to tell 'the

truth about loobies’) and critical interpretation (‘an occupation with lords’). By reading in accordance with a hermeneutical system that the narrator deems parabolic (in the general sense of the word), the reader is absolved from the need to dwell on the quotidian realities that Eliot had made the bedrock of her realism in chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*. The problem of an allegorical reading is made still more explicit in that readers of the novel know that the machinations of mercantile Joshua Rigg, far from being ‘figuratively ungentle’, materially and negatively affect the development of the plot. Further resisting allegorical readings, the narrator informs us in the final line that in Middlemarch society of the early 1830s one would be hard pressed to find men and women whose daily behaviour could be ennobled; that is, it could not be considered a cipher for a reality beyond itself. Moreover, by calling the addition of proportional ciphers ‘inexpensive’, the narrator hints at the substandard quality of novels that rely on brazen allegory, as if they detract from moral seriousness that Eliot took it upon herself to invest in a genre once considered frivolous.<sup>33</sup> For Eliot, this seriousness is best realised not according to an allegorical superstructure, but by fidelity to what in *The Mill on the Floss* her narrator called ‘the most prosaic form of human life’ [*MF*, 272]—a form of life she believed was best exemplified in pre-reform provincial England.

There is no suggestion in Eliot’s fiction, however, that prosaic life cannot *also* be imbued with wider social significance. At one point in *Middlemarch*, for example, ‘the existence of low people’ is elevated by virtue of ‘lofty comparison’ [*MM*, 412], as the correspondence between Messrs Rigg and Bulstrode becomes symbolic of a

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<sup>33</sup> Barry Qualls has argued that Eliot was attempting in her novels to do two things: to provide entertainment, and, in lieu of a religion that no longer had unquestioned authority in the modern world, serious moral instruction. See his *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 12. On the attempts to rescue the novel from its reputation for frivolity, see Norman Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 27.

process by which world history is shaped by the interference of apparent non-entities. What is important here is that (in contrast to the lords and loobies) prosaic life is treated first of all on its own terms, and only subsequently in light of its signification, just as in the New Testament the theological signification of (for example) the cross can only be understood in light of the earthly maneuvers of Caiaphas, Pilate, and others that brought the flesh of a Nazarene carpenter to be nailed to a tree.

The unity of earthly reality and sublime truth is something that many of Dostoevsky's characters seek to deny. For Ivan, who has something of the deist about him,<sup>34</sup> God is an absentee landlord, who has abandoned the world to its own devices, just as Fyodor Pavlovich abandoned him. Ivan is often regarded as an atheist, but the appellation is misleading; he is happy enough to accept God (albeit as a hypothesis), but he cannot accept God's world: 'Я не бога не принимаю, пойми ты [Alyosha] это, я мира, им созданного, мира-то божьего не принимаю и не могу согласиться принять' [14, 214]. The reason for this non-acceptance, according to Ivan, is not due to any deficiency in the natural order (indeed, Ivan has moments of ecstatic communion with the buds of spring and such like), but because of the pollution brought by adults, who have eaten of the apple and brought suffering on innocent children. By contrast, Zosima, who is also well aware of human suffering, refuses to perform the separation of creator and creation that is necessary for Ivan's argument. Recalling the book of Job, Zosima admits that the suffering of God's servant is incomprehensible, but, even in the face of this suffering, Zosima's God

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<sup>34</sup> I use the term deist here to denote a general acceptance of some kind of creator whilst rejecting a personal deity involved in the day-to-day operations of the universe. However, it is likely that Dostoevsky thought more intelligently about the term. He reportedly called himself a "philosophical deist" (thus, as Stephen Cassedy notes, putting paid to the notion that he was an untroubled adherent of Russian Orthodoxy). See Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 64. In "A Few Words about George Sand", Dostoevsky identifies the French writer, whom he admired, as a deist ('Жорж Санд умерла деисткой'), claiming that her idealism sprang from a firm belief in God and immortal life, even if she could not articulate a theological conviction that human salvation was dependent upon the personal intercession of Jesus Christ—a view which, Dostoevsky claims, is the central tenet of Orthodoxy [23, 36-37].

looks upon his creation with pride ('вновь хвалится созданием своим' [14, 265]) and Job promises to 'служить не только ему [God], но послужить и всему созданию его' [14, 265]. Whereas Ivan looks upon the suffering caused by adults and withdraws from a world he refuses to understand, Zosima embraces the mystery of a God whose divine protection over his creation he refuses to deny even in the face of suffering. Like Job, he dedicates his life to the service of both creator and creation.

As for Eliot, Dostoevsky's interest in and respect for the phenomenal world does not preclude his plots or characters figuring as patterns for more general trends in Russian society. Although, as Bakhtin has shown, Dostoevsky masterfully endowed his characters with their own, individuated voice, these characters become in some way emblematic of the vice (or virtue) that Dostoevsky detects in his epoch. *The Devils*, for example, retells the story of Ivanov's murder at the hands of Nechaev in such a way as to explain how such a phenomenon could arise in Russian society [21, 125]. The figure (*litso*) of Dostoevsky's Nechaev—'конечно, не похоже на лицо настоящего Нечаева' [21, 125]—is treated as a social type whose individuality is generalised to explain the wider social phenomenon of 'Нечаевы' [21, 125]. Its generalisability is enhanced by the fact that it occurs in a Russian small town which, though quotidian, is unidentified: it is *somewhere* in provincial Russia, but could be anywhere.

Novelistic plots or characters that crystallise contemporary concerns are not, of course, the exclusive preserve of Eliot or Dostoevsky. In fact, as I discuss in chapter 3, it is a staple of realism that the protagonist should be in some way exemplary of wider social conditions or behaviour. Nevertheless, Eliot and Dostoevsky are more explicit in their borrowings from biblical texts than many of

their contemporaries.<sup>35</sup> As in biblical narratives, for example, both writers use specific events within their novels to reflect divine archetypes as well as to prefigure later events in their plot structures.<sup>36</sup> An occurrence of this paradigm can be seen in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Zosima is treated by a crowd in precisely the same way as Jesus was. As he approaches his death, Zosima tells those gathered in his cell about an incident that occurred with a mysterious visitor when he was a young man. The visitor, we are told, visited Zosima (Zinovy) regularly and, as a result of the visits, was led to confess to a murder of which he had not previously been suspected. Given his reputation as a respectable man of the town, however, no-one believed the confession and, after he had died, the townsfolk accused Zosima of filling his head with religious notions. The language with which Zosima recalls the scene is biblical: ‘Но весь город *восстал на меня*, когда похоронили его, и даже принимать меня перестали [...] ибо любит человек падение праведного и позор его’ [14, 283; my italics]. The incident is likely modeled on Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth (Luke 4.14-30), where Jesus’ preaching occasions the hostility of his countrymen: no prophet is accepted in his hometown. Like Jesus, Zosima is ultimately able to walk away from the crowd on this occasion, only to take to a more arduous path devotion in the future. Like the author of the Parable of the Tenants (which looks back to Israel’s less than exemplary treatment of its prophets, and looks forward to a continuation on the same

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<sup>35</sup> Throughout, this chapter assumes rather than proves these writers’ familiarity with the Bible. Any reader of the *George Eliot Letters* will find them saturated with biblical references and phraseology. The index of references to biblical texts runs to several pages. The same is true of the index to the *Dostoevsky Pss*. Given the wealth of criticism on Dostoevsky’s religious faith, some of which is referenced in this chapter, it seems somewhat gratuitous to recommend a single study. Nevertheless, Geir Kjetsaa’s *Dostoevsky and His New Testament* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1984) gives a good sense of Dostoevsky’s familiarity with particular New Testament texts.

<sup>36</sup> As Nina Perlina has shown, Dostoevsky’s depiction of family life tends to be more paradigmatic than that of other realist novelists. Perlina identifies several interesting parallels between Dostoevsky’s characters and their biblical models (e.g. Snegiryov as Job, Ivan as Cain). See her *Varieties of Poetic Utterance: Quotation in The Brothers Karamazov* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 72-73.

theme), Dostoevsky transforms a local story of a murder in a provincial backwater into a scene that can be traced back to a biblical prototype and itself becomes a prototype for other scenes in the novel. Indeed, much of Zosima's account of his youth prefigures other aspects of the plot: Markel, Zosima's brother dies of consumption at a young age, just as Ilyusha Snegiryov will; like Markel, Ilyusha will try to set his mother's soul at ease during his final agony; like Mitya, the mysterious visitor is heard threatening to carry out the murder in a tavern days before it takes place; and the final meeting between Zosima and the mysterious visitor contains several resonances that will recur during Ivan's final meeting with Smerdyakov—not least the latter's promise to make a confession. Evidently, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the typological seeds of Book 6 and the rest of the novel, but Dostoevsky seems to be suggesting that individual, autonomous stories told in both Bible and novel can serve as keys to interpret events that happen subsequent to them, either in the plot development of the novel, or in real life. If Dostoevsky's novel becomes a code through which we can interpret experience, this is a feature of his novelistic technique that has been acquired from the Bible itself.

This figuration is similarly evident in *Middlemarch*, where Mr Bulstrode copes with his unique, deserved, suffering at the hands of the provincial community by interpreting it in the light of a larger pattern of divine struggle that itself has a biblical pedigree. He identifies his opponents on the hospital board as belonging to an 'evil generation' (with echoes of Matt. 12.39) and resolves to continue his reforming projects 'in the face of persecution' [*MM*, 127]. And whilst Eliot clearly does not endorse Bulstrode's misplaced sense of martyrdom, she is not willing to deny entirely the link between the banker and his divine forebear. In chapter 71, he almost becomes a Christ figure, hauled before the latter-day Sanhedrin of the sanitation

committee (those concerned with purity in both Bible and novel frequently being the least perceptive of their own faults): ‘God had disowned him before men and left him unscreened to the triumphant scorn of those who were glad to have their hatred justified’ [MM, 726]. Admittedly, the quotation is not narratorial comment, but free indirect speech. But it is nevertheless shorn of all irony. Conjuring up the moment of Christ’s cry of dereliction (and possibly Acts 3:13-14), the narrator asks the reader both to interpret Bulstrode’s predicament in light of divine prototype (just as, for example, the two sons of Luke 15 evoke earlier biblical brothers such as Jacob and Esau)<sup>37</sup> and to internalise it as a model for our own experience: Bulstrode is no pantomime villain but someone whose experience, precisely because so individuated, can resonate with every reader whose desires have at times been stronger than their theoretic beliefs.

It is, of course, entirely to be expected that consummate artists such as Eliot and Dostoevsky would be able to use foreshadowing for artistic effect. My aim in the foregoing discussion, however, was to show how they make particular, earth-bound, novelistic situations function as paradigms for human experience, and that the ability to do so was, if not consciously based on a biblical model of narrative design, certainly in its debt.

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

## **Narrative as a Tool for Ethical Instruction in the Bible, Eliot, and Dostoevsky**

He was doctrinally convinced that there was a total absence of merit in himself; but that doctrinal conviction may be held without pain when the sense of demerit does not take a distinct shape in memory and revive the tingling shame or the pang of remorse [*MM*, 521]

Although historical Jesus scholarship in the nineteenth century succeeded in proving that theological insight was inextricably linked to an understanding of Jesus' socio-cultural milieu, critics such as Strauss, Jowett and (to a lesser extent) Renan largely failed to take account of the ways in which the narrative structure of much of the New Testament functioned as a mediating material form for the first Evangelists. They had thus done damage, Eliot thought, to the 'beautiful story' of the Bible. This failure to take narrative into account has been convincingly documented by Hans Frei, who posits that the theological, ethical, and universal message of the Bible can only be comprehended once the reader has engaged with the particular narrative mode of the biblical texts:

Style and account go together: for example, the parabolic mode of Jesus' teaching integrates ordinary themes with analogies drawn from workaday occurrences, and it does so in pithy, ordinary talk. Believable individuals and their credible destinies are rendered in ordinary language and through concatenations of everyday events which cumulatively constitute the serious, sublime, and even tragic impact of powerful historical forces. These forces in turn allow the ordinary, "random" life-like individual persons [...] to become recognizable realistic "types", without thereby inducing a loss of their distinctively contingent or random individuality.<sup>38</sup>

In response to Frei's identification of the failures of the historical Jesus school, modern critics such as Robert Alter have attempted to interrogate the significance of

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<sup>38</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 15. See also Anthony C. Yu, 'Recovering the Sense of the Story', *The Journal of Religion*, 58.2 (1978), 198-203.

*narrative* as a vehicle of sacred truth, arguing that God's divine plan is accomplished through the 'the disorderly character of actual historical events' for which prose is the most fitting medium.<sup>39</sup> In his analysis of Genesis, Alter shows that, in contrast to other creation myths (often recorded for posterity in the form of epic poetry), the prose narrative of the first book of the Bible creates a tapestry in which the moral choices of realistically contoured characters materially affect the stories of which they are part. These readings of the Bible tend to foreground 'an immediacy and freedom often denied to "sacred texts", weighed down as they often are by theological preconceptions or prejudice'.<sup>40</sup> For Alter and others,<sup>41</sup> the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel's history is contingent upon the day-to-day lives of protagonists whose actions and interiorities are less than exemplary.

Although narrative is clearly only one mode of biblical discourse, it was the one which seemed to hold the most appeal for Jesus, at least if the Synoptics are to be believed. After all, when confronted with hostile questions, he rarely replied with propositional truths, but with parables—which, I have shown, tended to be realistic in character. One effect of this pedagogical method was to ensure that not all his hearers could understand his message (Mark 4.12), and as such Jesus frequently found himself having to explain his parables to his disciples in private (Mark 3.4). Even those disciples on the "inside" often failed to understand the meaning of Jesus' teaching. This is not necessarily due to a deficiency on their part. Rather, as parable scholarship has demonstrated, the genre embodies within itself a potential both for

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p.37.

<sup>40</sup> David Jasper, 'Literary Readings of the Bible: Trends in Modern Criticism', in *The Bible as Literature: A Reader*, ed. by David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 44-64. Here, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> An excellent study of the way in which Eliot draws on the book of Ruth in *Silas Marner* to depict situations in which the prose world of the 'visible' and 'diurnal' sphere betokens higher reality is conducted by Harold Fisch in his *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1998), ch. 5.

misunderstanding and multiple interpretations.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, parable scholars agree that Jesus taught the same portable narrative on various different occasions, and that the meaning of the parable changed with each retelling and in each context. In short, as Richard Lischer has argued, parables are not limited to ‘one exclusive meaning, nor to a meaning that is unrelated to the milieu in which it has originated’, but rather they have to be interpreted anew by each audience across generations.<sup>43</sup>

The designedly polyvalent nature of parables is an important aspect to bear in mind when considering the use to which Eliot and Dostoevsky put the genre in their writings. After all, if the narratives of Jesus (unlike his commands) have no “definitive” meaning, is it possible to assess whether, in re-plotting these narratives, Eliot or Dostoevsky are recommending an ethic that is in concert with or in contradiction to Jesus’ own moral code?

In their inscriptions of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, Eliot and Dostoevsky bring out multiple resonances of the text, eschewing a single meaning. Eliot rescripts the parable several times throughout her fiction, each time to slightly different effect. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie’s trip to the gypsies, for example, seems to be a recasting of the narrative: off in a “far country”, Maggie dreams of living the life of a gypsy queen. But, forced to eat a gypsy diet that is quite unamenable to her more refined tastes (cf. Luke 15.16), Maggie longs to return home. As she returns, her father speeds towards her and welcomes her back with open arms, while her elder brother waits sulkily at home. The retelling of the parable in this instance (it will recur elsewhere in the novel, for example when Maggie flees to another “far country” with Stephen Guest) serves to underscore Maggie’s sense of alienation from a milieu that cannot accommodate her heroic ambition, whilst

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<sup>42</sup> For an overview of this scholarship, see Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, ch. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 2.

affirming the genuine, if often misguided, care her father has for her. In *Middlemarch*, the parable is retold to different effect, namely to highlight the ways in which Casaubon fails to act with the level of exuberance exemplified by Mr Tulliver or the Lukan father. After an argument, a penitent Dorothea begs Casaubon for forgiveness; ‘would not love’, the narrator interjects at this point, ‘see penitence afar off, and fall on its neck and kiss it?’ [*MM*, 210]. (Suffice it to say, the extent of Casaubon’s exuberance is a ‘strong statement’ and faint smile.) Eliot here has seemingly recast the parable in Feuerbachian terms, in particular by allowing ‘love’ to stand in for a personal father figure. And yet it does not seem to me that Eliot’s interpretation is in any way incompatible with the story Jesus told: it seems unlikely that Jesus’ *first* audience (before the crucifixion or birth of the church) would have rushed to understand the parable in divine or Christological terms, even though Luke insists on such an interpretation. Is it really illegitimate to read the story as a tale of human delight at reconciliation? The parable is reinterpreted again by Eliot in the story of prodigal Fred Vincy, who spends his father’s money on courting and other such pleasures, before being chastened by circumstance. But in this instance, she notably departs from the biblical text, by insisting that Fred *earn* his restoration within the community. He insists on paying Mr Garth to make amends for his transgressions [*MM*, 340], and Mary accepts him only after he has proven himself worthy [*MM*, 516]. Unlike the New Testament father—unlike the New Testament God—George Eliot does not offer pardon freely.

In her novels, Eliot exploits the unfinalisability of biblical narrative to teach her own brand of morality, which, to quote Norman Vance, enables her to ‘reimagine and reformulate rather than abandon essentially religious and biblical themes and

insights'.<sup>44</sup> Even where she insists, contrary to Luke 15, on the need to earn acceptance, she is in effect re-accenting rather than challenging Christian teaching. As Jowett had written at the start of 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', the New Testament at various points speaks about being justified by faith, *and* being justified by works (as Fred must justify himself).<sup>45</sup> 'Who,' Jowett asks in an uncharacteristic outburst of acerbic wit designed to call attention to a selective reading that bolsters a particular ecclesiastical tradition at the expense of the entire message of the Bible, 'that hears of the Sabbatharianism [...] of some protestant countries would imagine that the Author of our religion had cautioned his disciples, not against the violation of the Sabbath, but only against its formal and Pharisaical observance?'<sup>46</sup>

Dostoevsky also repurposes the parable of the Prodigal Son to bring out its various—and potential—resonances. Both *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov* begin with sons returning home from the far country of St Petersburg, in some cases (such as that of Mitya Karamazov) coming to their senses and prostrating themselves to ask for forgiveness, in others (such as that of Peter Verkhovensky) continuing in the provinces the sinful lifestyle they had practised in the city. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Petersburg functions as a cypher of a dissolute lifestyle. Zosima's widowed mother, for example, is advised by her friends to send her boy off to Petersburg, 'по примеру прочих' [14, 263], so that he might not be deprived of a distinguished future ('знатная участь'). The reference to the example of others is ominous in its echo of the syncretism condemned in passages such as Deuteronomy 6.14, Jeremiah 10.2, and elsewhere, and the threat of a distinguished future carries the caution of Colossians 3.2 as well as many a saint's life. In Dostoevsky's oeuvre the potential for the imperial city to rob provincials of their essentially Russian character

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<sup>44</sup> Vance, *Bible and Novel*, p. viii.

<sup>45</sup> Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', p. 399.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

is ever-present.

However, some critics overlook the polyvalence of the genre. For example, although Janet Tucker rightly argues that Raskolnikov's journey to St Petersburg is modeled on Luke 15 (St Petersburg functioning as a 'venue of abandonment', inimical to religious faith and characterised by 'rapacious capitalism'),<sup>47</sup> she underestimates the ways in which Dostoevsky destabilises the narrative. For her, the parable is purely allegorical (father = God, home = heaven) and can only be understood in abstract, allegorical terms (it becomes a lesson on the 'divine power of resurrection' and 'the miracle of life after death'). Although she pays some attention to the scholarly attempts to tease out the polyvalency of meaning in the parable genre (quoting Norman Perrin to the effect that 'meaning ha[s] to be found anew' in the Christian communities in which parables are preached), her own view is clearly that 'the purpose of a parable is to convey the Truth as the author of the tale [...] sees it',<sup>48</sup> a truth that is 'higher, constant, eternal'.<sup>49</sup> For Tucker it is a given that the prodigal is the centre of the story,<sup>50</sup> and his return home is seen by Dostoevsky as a prefiguration of Raskolnikov's return to his "home" of Siberia.<sup>51</sup> Arguing that the Gospels consider 'devotion to material goods' sinful (hardly an argument compatible with the Parable of the Lost Coin, where such devotion is commended), Tucker's Dostoevsky is almost gnostic in his disavowal of the material world, with the 'heavenly reward' of 'divine

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<sup>47</sup> Janet Tucker, *Profane Challenge and Orthodox Response in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 160.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 147.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>50</sup> This is open to debate and, whomever Jesus meant to be the centre of the story, it seems to me obvious that for Luke the older brother has greater significance: Luke frames the story with the approach of the grumbling Pharisees (Luke 15.1-2), and if Jesus is challenging anyone's behaviour, it is theirs. The older, not younger, brother is the intended mirror in this instance.

<sup>51</sup> Tucker explains the fact that Raskolnikov has never actually been there by arguing that 'God always denotes home... "home" is in the presence of God' (p. 157).

presence' being an adequate substitute for an earthly utopia.<sup>52</sup>

This reading of the parable and Dostoevsky's emplotment of it, has a number of flaws, the most severe of which is that it assumes that both the parable and Dostoevsky's oeuvre can be read monologically.<sup>53</sup> There is no trace of doubt in Tucker's Dostoevsky, no sense in which the meaning of the parable or Christian teaching in general might have sat uncomfortably with him. If we examine some of the other accents Dostoevsky gives to the parable we can see that such monologism is groundless. In his novels, to give one example of a contrary reading, Dostoevsky is interested in prodigal fathers as much as prodigal sons, as he probes ways in which failed or absent father figures can produce aimless or immoral offspring. In both *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is the fathers who squander their sons' inheritance. Stepan Trofimovich is particularly guilty in this respect, mismanaging his estate and leaving Peter Stepanovich without an inheritance to claim as his own. He also fails to educate both Peter Stepanovich (shipped off early to some aunts in the capital) and Nikolai Vsevelodovich, whom he indulges from a young age, in the manner of Pushkin's *Monsieur l'Abbé* in *Eugene Onegin*. For all his opposition to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 145. On Dostoevsky's belief in a this-worldly utopia see N. Efimova, 'Motiv bibleiskogo Iova v *Brat'iakh Karamazovykh*', in *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. by G. M. Fridlender, vol. 11 (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> Treatments of the Prodigal Son in Russian literature do tend towards monologism, although many are insightful. For example, in his analysis of the narrative in Soviet literature, A. Bocharov interprets it as a conservative narrative that propagates the value of tradition. See his 'Vremia vozvrashcheniia, bremia vozvrashcheniia', *Oktiabr*, 4 (1984), 186-92. Similarly V. I. Gabdullina sees the parable as evidence of Turgenev's latent religiosity in her 'Motiv bludnogo syna v romanakh I. S. Turgeneva', in *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literatury XVIII-XX vekov: Tsitata, reministsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, vol. 8 (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2001), pp. 135-49. On the other hand, A. V. Chernov examines the dual emplotment the narrative attained in the nineteenth century. Chernov argues that under Pushkin the parable has a moral meaning (something akin to the belief that everything one seeks in the far country is already to be found at home), whereas for Gogol, Belinsky, and their heirs the story is employed to stress the impossibility and undesirability of return, given that history is progressing in a straight line. See A. V. Chernov, 'Arkhetip "bludnogo syna" v russkoi literatury XIX veka', in *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literatury XVIII-XX vekov: Tsitata, reministsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, vol. 3 (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2001), pp. 151-58. For an analysis of the way in which the parable is employed by Pushkin, see J. Thomas Shaw, 'Puškin's "The Stationmaster" and the New Testament Parable', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 21.1 (1977), 3-19.

contemporary theories of the determining influence of “environment”, Dostoevsky makes it clear that the fathers of his novels are complicit in their sons’ prodigality, and this complicity can also be detected in the parable Jesus told: Jesus’ father provides the son with the means to realise his debauchery.<sup>54</sup>

My point here is not that Dostoevsky, had he been asked directly, would have articulated a reading of the parable that doesn’t see the father as a stand-in for a wise and benevolent deity; he clearly *did* believe this. Rather, the parable genre is fluid enough for the novelist to variously pick up on different resonances of the narrative, sometimes in contradiction to each other, and that such polyvalence is embedded within the parable genre itself. This reading better enables us to accommodate the disharmony of Dostoevsky’s religious belief. Indeed, a recent study by Susan McReynolds has sought to demonstrate that there were aspects of the Christian teaching that Dostoevsky found repugnant. In particular, he took offence at the very idea of crucifixion insofar as it premised the salvation of the world on the suffering of a single human being, offered up as a sacrifice by a supposedly loving father.<sup>55</sup> This is precisely the sort of exchange that forces Ivan Karamazov to hand back his entry ticket to paradise.

The prominence of narrative in the Bible prevents it being read (or at least exclusively read) as an authoritative manual of Christian ethics, and suggests that readers have to appropriate and interpret its narratives for themselves. A helpful distinction between these two kinds of readings has been provided by Bakhtin, who differentiates between the Bible as “Holy Writ” and the Bible as “inwardly persuasive discourse”.<sup>56</sup> By inwardly persuasive discourse, Bakhtin refers to those parts of the

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<sup>54</sup> An example of this kind of reading can be found in Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> See Susan McReynolds, *Redemption and the Merchant God: Dostoevsky’s Economy of Salvation and Antisemitism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> On this distinction, see Jones, *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience*, p. xi.

Bible that have moved or influenced individual believers and that take on a personal significance for the reader. Despite Bakhtin's claims about the authoritative status of the biblical word in Dostoevsky's poetics, Malcolm Jones rightly stresses the importance of inwardly persuasive discourse in Dostoevsky's works, where the Bible does not function as a static text, but is rather emphasised as a narrative that is indeterminate and that calls out for individual appropriation.

This view of the Bible is somewhat at odds with that provided by some of Dostoevsky's best interpreters, particularly those who emphasise the religious nature of Dostoevsky's thought. Diane Thompson (following Bakhtin) argues that 'the proclamatory word of the Bible may be veiled, mysterious, but it does not dissimulate, it does not say one thing, but give us to understand the contrary. It is a direct, fully convinced word, spoken without reservations, that urgently strives to transmit its message in as true a way as possible'.<sup>57</sup> Thompson analyses the way in which the biblical word "interacts" with the voices of others in Dostoevsky's novels, and insists upon the need for characters to internalise its message. But in her reading, the Bible's message is always clear and constant, never open to dialogue and never to be shaped by it: 'despite all the batterings of polemic, distortion, parody and irony, the Logos glimmers through in its inviolable holiness, intermittently penetrating the fraught medium of discordant voices like a shaft of light, illuminating from within'.<sup>58</sup>

It goes without saying that Dostoevsky revered the Bible to an almost hysterical degree. However, I do question whether the Logos in Dostoevsky's work is quite as inviolable as Thompson suggests.<sup>59</sup> To begin with, Dostoevsky is quite

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<sup>57</sup> Thompson, 'Problems of the Biblical Word in Dostoevsky's Poetics', in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 69-99. Here, pp. 69-70.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> A fascinating article by N. V. Balashov examines the different weight Dostoevsky gave to various translations of the Bible arguing (to risk a reductive summary of his research) that Dostoevsky has his

capable of taking biblical teaching and reinterpreting it in his own context. For example, in a conversation between Alyosha and Kolya, the former quotes Psalm 137, ‘if I forget thee, O Jerusalem’. Explaining this enigmatic line, Alyosha says: ‘то есть если забуду все, что есть самого у меня драгоценного, если променяю на что, то да поразит’ [14, 508]. This is more than an instance of appropriating the “sense” of a passage at the expense of its literal meaning; it imputes to Psalm 137 a meaning entirely of Alyosha’s own invention. It is highly doubtful, after all, that the exiled psalmist intended his lament to offer a tidbit of self-help, or a mini-homily on the virtues of holding on to what’s precious. Whether one regards this hermeneutical manoeuvre as legitimate or not, it does seem to illustrate that the message of the Bible is not entirely ‘inviolable’ and is subject to ‘distortion’ just as much as other people’s words.

More significantly, biblical texts in Dostoevsky’s works take on multiple meanings depending on the context in which they are employed, and it is precisely their *narrative* emplotment that conditions the meaning Dostoevsky wished them to bear. At first sight, it seems as if the biblical text has an autonomous authority outside the world of Dostoevsky’s narrative: both *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov* have stand-alone epigraphs taken from the Bible (respectively, the casting out of the swine, and the corn of wheat that dies to bring forth fruit). However, each of these epigraphs takes on a number of different meanings as the novels progress. The epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* (John 12.24) might refer (to mention the incidents where the epigraph is obviously alluded to or explicitly mentioned) to the death of Zosima’s brother, Markel, whose conversion was instrumental in Zosima’s

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least sympathetic characters speak in phrases inflected by the Slavonic translation, whereas his more positive characters, who have taken the message of the Bible to heart and are not manipulating it for their own ends, tend to quote in Russian. See his ‘Spor o russkoi biblii i Dostoevskii’, in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, vol. 13, ed. by G. M. Fridlender (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), pp. 3-15. This argument somewhat complicates the view that the Bible for Dostoevsky was a static, authoritative text.

own journey to faith; or to the mysterious visitor's own death to self (his confession) that will free him from the pain of guilt; or the way in which Zosima's death may enable others to reap a harvest of righteousness. Other meanings, less explicit, might be inferred too: isn't old Fyodor's death a seed that ultimately leads to Mitya's regeneration, for example?<sup>60</sup> In *The Devils*, the meaning of the epigraph becomes comprehensible only after the novel has been read, when it becomes clear that the demoniac is Russia herself, infected with the demons of revolutionary ideas and their progenitors. Similarly, the important quotation from Revelation 3—'I know thy works, thou art neither hot nor cold'—is explicable only once the reader has understood the existential despair that engulfs Stavrogin by the end of the novel, unable to commit either to Christian faith or nihilistic destruction. For Dostoevsky, then, the Bible does not have a single, authoritative meaning; rather, it acquires meaning through narrative emplotment. The novel is thereby coopted as a genre—i.e. as a 'mediating material form'—to make biblical truth more relevant to a contemporary society: it provides the necessary examples without which the messages and resonances of the Bible would be lost: 'что за слово Христово без примера?' asks Zosima, rhetorically [14, 267].

In recent years, critics have attempted to challenge Lukács's view that the novel is a genre of truthlessness. Ilya Klinger suggests that, far from being hostile to higher truth, novelists have always tried, through illustration and narrative, to represent divine truth. The difference between the novel and other genres is that the former encourages us to see truth differently, as immanent in a temporal shape rather than transcendent in a principle.<sup>61</sup> I would only add to this that the effect of this

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<sup>60</sup> On Dostoevsky's emplotment of the epigraph in the novel, see Robin Feuer Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), especially p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> See Ilya Klinger, *The Narrative Shape of Truth: Verediction in Modern European Literature* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), especially the Introduction.

narrative emplotment (in Dostoevsky's polyphonic universe, at any rate) can be to force the reader to interrogate as well as accept truth claims. For example, both Stepan Trofimovich and Zosima articulate "truth" about the necessity of truth telling (of not lying even to oneself). And yet this truth is accented differently depending upon the voice of the speaker: hearing such an injunction from the poseur Stepan Trofimovich does not have the same weight as hearing it from the Russian monk. Narrative in Dostoevsky serves to make divine truth more visceral, to contextualise it in the modern world, and to destabilise it, forcing the reader himself to make a decision as to whose truth claims are most valid.

For Eliot too, narrative was a means of avoiding the didacticism of moral maxims. In her letters, she had written of her desire not to 'lapse from the picture to the diagram' [*GEL*, 4, 300], and in *The Mill on the Floss*, her narrator states that:

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the man of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgement solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, impartially—without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimation of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human [*MF*, 498].

Suzy Anger provides an analysis of this passage that highlights the discrepancy between narrative's ability to engender growing insight and sympathy through vivid and intense descriptions and the impersonality of moral maxims: 'Eliot rejects rationalist, rule-based moral systems such as Kantian or Utilitarian ethics, arguing that moral behaviour should emerge not from the application of exceptionless moral principles but instead from attentive response to the complex particularities of a

situation (such as those which a novel can portray). Above all, moral judgements must be rooted in feeling'.<sup>62</sup> However, what Anger overlooks is that this deprecation of moral maxims is presented to the reader in the very form of a moral maxim, and, at any rate, Eliot is wont to provide such maxims at regular intervals throughout her fiction.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike Dostoevsky—at least, unlike Dostoevsky the novelist—Eliot seems at times uncomfortable with the polyvalence of narrative, biblical or novelistic, as her benevolent narrators step into the frame of the story to dictate its meaning. Thus it is not enough for her, for example, to illustrate, through narrative, the disconnect between Casaubon's illusions and the reality that shatters those illusions; the narrator has to append the maxim that 'we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them' [*MM*, 85]. In interruptions such as this, Eliot frequently assigns to her plots fixed, finalised meanings.<sup>64</sup> As Leah Price has shown, the material conditions of publication may have informed this didacticism. In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, she suggests that in Eliot's later works, the author wrote with the expectation of excerption in anthologies, and

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<sup>62</sup> Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 111.

<sup>63</sup> In this respect, Eliot can be compared to her Russian contemporary, Lev Tolstoy, who, in *What is Art?* provided a defence of art that rested on its ability to convey feeling without the necessity of explanation. Tolstoy was particularly enamoured of narratives such as the *Odyssey*, *Iliad*, biblical parables and stories such as those of Jacob, Isaac, and Joseph, for their ability to convey meaning to the masses, regardless of their education, social background, and the like. Tolstoy was a trenchant critic of art criticism precisely because, as he put it in *What is Art?* 'толковать произведения художника нельзя' (L. N. Tolstoi, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 20 vols (1960-1965), XVI (1964), p. 151). At the same time, however, the educator of Yasnaya Polyana peppered his works with didactic observations, as if his readers could not be trusted to grasp, on a visceral or instinctive level, the message of his art. As Edward Wasiolek puts it, 'Tolstoy demands more acuteness of understanding than acuteness of vision' (Edward Wasiolek, 'Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych" and Jamesian Fictional Imperatives', in *Tolstoy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Ralph E. Matlaw (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967), pp. 146-56. Here, p. 147.) Tolstoy's unwillingness to stand aside and let works of art interpret themselves is acutely demonstrated by Medzhibovskaya, 'On Moral Movement and Moral Vision'.

<sup>64</sup> D. A. Miller's *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) examines the tension in Eliot's work between a longing for narrative openness and a striving towards a final idea, suggesting that 'the dispersive and fragmentary logic of the narrative itself' functions in opposition to any attempt to close it down (p. x).

that it was therefore necessary for her discourse to have a moral message independent of plot.<sup>65</sup> Although Eliot expressed several reservations about anthologisation, precisely on the grounds that anthologies reduce the complexity of novelistic truth by wrenching language from its context, her publishing arrangements seem to betray an ambivalence about the conveyance of a final message. This tension is, of course, also present in the Bible itself—a book which no doubt has claim to be the most excerpted in history. Although critics such as Frei, Alter, Fisch, and Vance have rightly emphasised the importance of narrative structures in the Bible, narrative is only *one* mode of biblical discourse, and even Luke, probably the greatest New Testament storyteller, cannot allow his narratives to stand without authorial oversight. And perhaps he was right to assume that no-one would read Luke 8.5-8 (the parable of the sower) and come unaided to the conclusions of Luke 8.11-15 (the explanation that the seed is the word of God). Jesus, in the evangelists' representation, was both a great storyteller and a quintessential man of maxims.

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Ethics of Community Life**

In terms of realistic content and narrative method, the fiction of Dostoevsky and Eliot has a biblical pedigree. However, beyond its function as a metatype or code, the Bible also provides Eliot and Dostoevsky with specific narrative incidents which they rework in order to prosecute their own ethical agenda. Since their novels deal with provincial communities, it is not surprising that the question that most animates their ethical code is that of how to be a good neighbour—precisely the question put to

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<sup>65</sup> Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 10.

Jesus in Luke 10. In the novels, characters stand or fall by their ability to embrace their contingent and proximate context.

Christian ethics, various characters concede, are possible at a distance. In “Rebellion”, Ivan admits ‘я никогда не мог понять, как можно любить своих ближних. Именно ближних-то по-моему и невозможно любить, а разве лишь дальних’ [14, 215]. Ivan is compromised for much of the novel precisely because he loves at a distance. His supposed love for both children and humanity at large is exposed as a sham: there is no evidence that Ivan enjoys good relations with children (compare Kolya’s excellent relationship with his “squirts” and his healing influence on Ilyusha) or with humanity at large (compare the way in which Zosima knows and remembers each of his visitors by name, whereas Ivan only knows unnamed examples from newspaper articles). In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator highlights a similar kind of misanthropy when he states that ‘people who live at a distance are naturally much less faulty than those immediately under our own eyes’ [MF, 206]. In *Middlemarch*, Mr Brooke wants to contribute to the ‘improvement of the people’ [MM, 389], while entirely neglecting the specific families (Kit Downes, the Dagleys) in need of his assistance. One of the reasons why Brooke loses support among the electors of Middlemarch is his speech about the way in which Reform might affect ‘the Cape’, whereas voters such as Mr Mawmsey are more concerned about the effects it will have on ‘*my till and ledger*’ [MM, 500; my italics]. But however much Ivan and Brooke might want to love at a distance, their situation in the small town forces them (and the reader) to come face to face with a creation that is immanent, and it is in this immanence that the Christian vision can be interrogated. The provincial town, then, functions as a concrete space where characters must choose whether or not to obey the command of Luke 10.27: to love one’s neighbour as

oneself. As Gage McWeeny has argued, the social space of Eliot's communities is large enough to allow for asociality, but small enough to force characters to confront each other. Populated by 'innumerable strangers' who are 'curiously proximate' to each other, Eliot's towns have a gravitational orbit that forces characters to interact and affiliate, to socialise under conditions that are not entirely amenable to organic socialisation.<sup>66</sup> The question of how strangers become neighbours is precisely the one that Eliot (and Dostoevsky) are interested in: how far, they seem to ask, can our sympathies be extended? Are we only—or even—our brother's keeper, or can the commandment be extended to those related to us in space, but not by blood? And, if pushed too far, does the quality of that sympathy become diluted? Moreover, the provincial town tests the extent of the *reader's* sympathies. Given that the small town can accommodate multiple nexuses—different families, different plot lines, different physical spaces—can we as readers ensure the even spread of our sympathy, and is this desirable? Eliot makes such a question almost explicit in *Middlemarch*: 'In watching effects,' the narrator writes, 'if only of an electric battery, it is often necessary to change our place and examine a particular mixture or group at some distance from the point where the movement we are interested in was set up' [*MM*, 399]. The narrative then switches from the Brookes to the Garths. Does the reader's sympathy survive such a switch, or are the Garths too far removed from Eliot's urban readership to merit it? Is sympathy itself something to be merited—or a categorical imperative that applies to all, regardless of distance?

These questions were addressed by Dostoevsky in his reading of *Anna Karenina* in the *Writer's Diary*, where he takes Levin to task for failing to show sufficient sympathy to the suffering Slavs in the Russo-Turkish war. Levin's refusal

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<sup>66</sup> Gage McWeeny, 'The Sociology of the Novel: George Eliot's Strangers', *Novel*, 42.3 (2009), 538-45. Here, p. 539.

to say whether he would kill a Turkish soldier who was abusing a Russian child relies, Dostoevsky states, on an ethical system in which distance is allowed to diminish compassion:

Сам, дескать, не вижу—[Dostoevsky is here putting words into Levin’s mouth]—происходит далеко, ну вот ничего не чувствую [...] Э, дескать, в другом полушарии, не у нас [...] Если расстояние действительно так влияет на гуманность, то рождается сам собой новый вопрос: на каком расстоянии кончается человеколюбие? [25, 220].

In his study of *Anna Karenina*, Gary Saul Morson argues that distance does indeed matter for Tolstoy, and suggests that for him moral responsibility begins at home and radiates outwards, diluting in proportion to distance from the home: ‘For Tolstoy, morality may be described in terms of concentric circles. We owe our greatest responsibility to our family, then to our neighbors, relatives, or co-workers, then to people in our community, and, only several circles later, to people we have met on the other side of the world’.<sup>67</sup> At a distance, morality ‘never entirely evaporates [...] but it does diminish’.<sup>68</sup>

On this matter, Eliot seems to be at one with Tolstoy. In “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep”, Eliot writes: ‘I am not bound to feel for a Chinaman as I feel for my fellow-countryman [...] Affection, intelligence, duty, radiate from a centre, and nature has decided that for us English folk that centre can be neither China nor Peru’ [ITS, 173]. Quotations such as this challenge the view of Eliot as the archetypal cosmopolitan, committed to universal values at the expense of local or national character.<sup>69</sup> As critics such as Bruce Robbins<sup>70</sup> and Bernard Semmel<sup>71</sup> have shown,

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<sup>67</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *Anna Karenina in our Time: Seeing More Wisely* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The essay in question contains some highly offensive statements of nationalism, that could, in fact, rival any of Dostoevsky’s most vituperate (‘Let it be admitted that it is a calamity to the English [...] to undergo a premature fusion with immigrants of alien blood’ [ITS, 186]; ‘The marring of our speech [...] is a minor evil compared with what must follow from the predominance of wealth-acquiring

Eliot was relatively unsympathetic to the discourse of universalism, especially when it failed to account for the importance of local partiality or national tradition. This partiality must, according to Eliot, be fostered from infancy, and many of her characters' moral failings can be ascribed to the fact that they lack, like Gwendolen Harleth, the 'sweet habit of blood', a memory of the nightly heavens that belongs to 'one's own homestead' [DD, 16].<sup>72</sup>

A comparison between the ethical visions of Tolstoy and Eliot has recently been undertaken by Liza Knapp in her study of *Anna Karenina*.<sup>73</sup> For Knapp there is an important difference in the way each writer views the command to love one's neighbour, namely that for Tolstoy it can only be realised within the family, whereas in Eliot neighbourliness can extend beyond the realm of blood relations.<sup>74</sup> Knapp shows that the plot structures of both novels reflect the extent of the circles of sympathy that each author envisioned: whereas Tolstoy's plot-lines are linked by analogy only, Eliot embroils her characters in the same physical space, forcing them to meet and interact in a way that doesn't happen in *Anna Karenina*. Although Knapp

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immigrants, whose appreciation of our political and social life must often be as approximate or fatally erroneous as the delivery of our language' [ITS, 187]). Many critics take these to be statements of a cantankerous, aging Eliot's conservative nationalism. This view is challenged, however, by K. M. Newton, who argues that it is necessary to recognise the distance between Eliot and her narrator in the piece. See his 'George Eliot and Racism: How Should One Read "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!?"', *The Modern Language Review*, 103.3 (2008), 654-65.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce Robbins, 'The Cosmopolitan Eliot', in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (London: John Wiley, 2013), pp. 400-12.

<sup>71</sup> Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Semmel highlights Eliot's disagreement with nineteenth-century Comteans who held that society required a complete break from the obscurantism of the past in favour of the universal values of the Religion of Humanity. He argues that Eliot herself advocated nationalism without jingoism—a formulation, we might venture, that remains an ambition for many today. On the Leweses' relationship to Comte, see also T. R. Wright's fascinating and highly entertaining study, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>72</sup> On the importance of place in Eliot's fiction, see Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 255-63. For Shaw, Eliot's work 'betrays an intense uneasiness that we are approaching a point in history where one place is as good as another' (p. 261).

<sup>73</sup> Liza Knapp, *Anna Karenina and Others: Tolstoy's Labyrinth of Plots* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

doesn't focus on the provincial town as a social space as such, she does note that the chronotope of Tolstoy's novel tends to favour this exclusivity: meetings occur among social equals, on estates, in restaurants, at home.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, I suggest, it is remarkable in *Middlemarch* how frequently social boundaries are crossed (with doctors and the clergy in particular forming a bridge between different social classes), and how many meetings occur outside the home.<sup>76</sup>

According to this reading, Eliot occupies a middle-ground between a highly circumscribed Tolstoyan circle of sympathy and a highly diffuse Dostoevskian one, in which all are responsible for all. In an analysis of the scene in which Raskolnikov witnesses the beating of a nag in *Crime and Punishment*, Knapp writes that for Dostoevsky 'your neighbor is the body in pain on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho', i.e. any random stranger one happens to encounter.<sup>77</sup>

In his later novels, Dostoevsky's provincial communities continue this interrogation of neighbourliness as it is in them that sympathy *both* for one's family *and* for the random stranger can be tested. Dostoevsky uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan to conduct this test. In that parable, Jesus commends the compassion a Samaritan has for a wounded man on the road to Jericho, a compassion that is in stark contrast to the ultimate indifference the priest and Levite who walk on by. As Ruben

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>76</sup> The complex nature of social class in Eliot's fiction is examined by Avrom Fleishman in his *George Eliot's Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 103-7. D. A. Miller, in his *Narrative and its Discontents*, also draws attention to the class boundaries of *Middlemarch*, noting that the urban bourgeoisie can easily be distinguished from the country aristocracy. However, he qualifies this by adding that when reading the novel 'one inevitably thinks of a single *Middlemarch* community: the two social spheres are never shown to resist the general ideological coherence binding them' (p. 125). On the role of surprise meetings and meetings with members of different social classes, see also McWeeny, 'The Sociology of the Novel', p. 541.

<sup>77</sup> Liza Knapp, 'Teaching Raskolnikov's Dream: Regarding the Pain of Others in the Classroom', in *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), pp. 82-96. Here, p. 96. A different approach to the incident—one which sees Raskolnikov as motivated by a desire for justice rather than a sense of compassion—can be found in T. A. Kasatkina, 'Kategoriia prostranstva v vospriiatii lichnosti tragicheskoi miroorientatsii (Raskol'nikov)', in *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. by G. M. Fridlender, vol. 11 (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), pp. 81-88.

Zimmermann has noted, the visceral reaction of the Samaritan to suffering is highlighted by a fissure between narrated time and narrative time: since the priest and Levite are *walking*, they would have time to observe the scene and contemplate a response. As if to underscore the Samaritan's opposition to those who walk on by, Jesus employs a quick succession of verbs to describe the Samaritan's action: he sees, has compassion, approaches, binds, sets him on his beast, and takes him to an inn.<sup>78</sup> The most obvious example of an episode in which Dostoevsky replicates the sequence of the parable in the context of provincial community occurs in *The Brothers Karamazov* when Ivan is on the way to his third meeting with Smerdyakov. As he walks, Ivan passes a drunken peasant who falls to the ground, motionless and unconscious. Ivan abnegates any responsibility and walks on down the road: “”Замерзнет!” подумал Иван и зашагал опять к Смердякову’ [15, 57]. On his return, he stumbles against the same peasant, now covered in snow, and, like the Good Samaritan, takes him to a nearby institution to get the care he needs, offering, like his biblical prototype, to pay for any costs incurred. The passage, which frames the meeting with Smerdyakov, marks Ivan's maturation: initially indifferent to individual suffering, he later has compassion for the stranger on the road.

However, the passage also alerts us to Ivan's moral failure. Ivan's resolution to help the peasant comes directly after he has decided to help his brother, Mitya, at his forthcoming trial, where he intends to confess his involvement in Fyodor's murder. By not acting immediately on his new-found sense of moral responsibility (which had come just in time to save the peasant), Ivan's courtroom confession carries no weight, since it has already been nullified by Smerdyakov's suicide. Ironically, the institution where Ivan leaves the peasant is a police station, and Ivan

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<sup>78</sup> See Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, ch. 10.

spends a whole hour caring for his needs. During this time and at this place, his confession would have succeeded in affirming Mitya's innocence, but he decides to defer until the next day. As in Jesus' parable, procrastination here is a moral problem. The compassion we feel for, and debts we owe to, those in immanent need cannot be deferred: 'compassion,' Susan Sontag writes, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 'is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action or it withers'.<sup>79</sup> Ivan passes the test of the Good Samaritan in terms of his decision to care for a singular, unrelated individual, but his victory is not total as he fails to act with sufficient alacrity to save his brother. For him, the challenge of Genesis 4.9—to be his brother's keeper—is harder to master than that of Luke 10.<sup>80</sup>

The moral problem of procrastination is equally felt in Eliot's fiction. In *Adam Bede*, for example, Arthur Donnithorne's failure to confess to Mr Irwine his feelings for Hetty is missed by only a few seconds, and yet it has pitiless consequences, as the novel will go on to show: 'The opportunity was gone,' the narrator tells us, 'While Arthur was hesitating, the rope to which he might have clung had drifted away—he must now trust to his own swimming' [*AB*, 158]. Like Dostoevsky, she also criticises a society that puts abstractions such as the good of society above immanent human need. Of the ladies of St Ogg's the narrator writes:

They had their favourite abstraction, called Society, which served to make their consciences perfectly easy in doing what satisfied their own egoism—thinking and speaking the worst of Maggie Tulliver and turning their backs upon her. It was naturally disappointing to Dr Kenn, after two years of superfluous incense from his feminine parishioners, to find them suddenly maintaining their views in opposition to his; but then, they maintained them in opposition to a Higher Authority, which they had venerated longer. That Authority had furnished a very explicit answer to

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<sup>79</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 90.

<sup>80</sup> On the ways in which Ivan abnegates responsibility for his family by absconding to Chermashnya, see Susan Amert, 'The Reader's Responsibility in *The Brothers Karamazov*: Ophelia, Chermashnia, and the Palpable Obscure', in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, ed. by Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), pp. 105-18.

persons who might inquire where their social duties began, and might be inclined to take wide views as the starting point. The answer had not turned on the good of Society, but on “a certain man” who was found in trouble by the wayside [*MF*, 506].

For Eliot, society functions as a reification of one’s egoistic imperatives, and she extols the Christian teaching that displaces the self from the centre of one’s moral vision by insisting upon the need to foreground alterity in the form of a ‘certain man who was found in trouble by the wayside’ (albeit a foregrounding in the Comtean terminology of ‘social duty’). Eliot does little to make this switch of allegiance from self to other easy: Maggie’s behaviour is not (to the chagrin of many feminist critics) valorised in the novel, and she is certainly not the neighbour that the residents of St Ogg’s would wish for. In this sense, however, Eliot’s challenge is close to that of Jesus in the parable: as Jowett pointed out in his ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, it is necessary to read the parable not as an abstracted story about the kindness of strangers, but to remember the enmity that existed between Jews and Samaritans in first-century Palestine.<sup>81</sup> The Samaritans, after all, were not the neighbours that Jesus’ Jewish audience wished for.<sup>82</sup> According to this reading, Eliot is trying to correct a very different deficiency from the one Dostoevsky had identified in Ivan. Where Ivan succeeds in caring for the stranger, but fails to take care of his brother, Eliot condemns a society which only protects those whose alterity is not overly pronounced: however much the family unit matters to Eliot (and it does), it is not enough only to be one’s brother’s keeper. She censures the townsfolk of St Ogg’s—putting them at odds if not with a personal God, then with a Higher Authority—for failing to extend their circle of sympathy to the deviant members of that community.

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<sup>81</sup> See Jowett, ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, p. 442.

<sup>82</sup> The enmity between the two groups is a staple of the Old and New Testaments. It was in Samaria that Jacob’s daughter Dinah was raped in Genesis 34. Jesus makes trenchant criticisms of Samaritans in John 4.

And lest the reader rest in complacency, the parable also forces him to analyse the extent to which his own sympathy extends to those who are, in his eyes, deviant, foreign, or (still worse!) provincial: as Robbins writes, the reader has to make a choice, about whether or not one should be tolerant to those who ‘given a choice, would not themselves show tolerance’.<sup>83</sup> Does an urban readership’s repugnance at the philistinism of St Ogg’s society put that society outside the realm of our sympathy? Are we content to walk on by?

The way in which Jesus’ parable is employed by Dostoevsky and Eliot might be summarised like this: Dostoevsky uses the parable to demonstrate the necessity of contracting a large, abstract circle of sympathy, to gradually pare it down to individuals in immanent need; Eliot uses it to demonstrate the necessity of expanding a small, homogenous circle of sympathy, to include any individual in immanent need, however deviant they may be, within its orbit. For both writers the provincial community functions as a space in which characters, wherever they stand apropos of the circles of sympathy, can be challenged by the message of the parable as it pertains to their specific moral deficiencies. A homogenous *Gemeinschaft* or alienated *Gesellschaft* might be able to foreground the struggles of characters to come to terms either with the need to love blood relations or strangers, but the middle-ground of the provincial town allows these authors to stage the battle in both directions. A community of neighbours, the small town makes the term “sympathy” elastic, applicable to any individual in immanent need, related or not. Ivan has to learn that his brother, too, is his neighbour, just as the guardians of public opinion in St Ogg’s have to learn that Maggie is theirs.

As the frequently tragic events of the novels show, however, love for one’s

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<sup>83</sup> Robbins, ‘The Cosmopolitan Eliot’, p. 408.

neighbour is easier to theorise than to practice, and it is at any rate complicated by the fact that characters are never entirely able to determine the extent to which their neighbour can be known. The difficulties of epistemology for these writers present a barrier—not always insurmountable—to ethics.

A case in point is Shatov's declaration in *The Devils* that an ethic of love is unrealisable without a concrete knowledge of the Other: 'Нельзя любить то, чего не знаешь' [10, 33]. The context of this remark is a discussion with Stepan Trofimovich (a Westerniser) who claims to love the Russian people. Echoing a typical Slavophile reproach, Shatov claims that Westernist proclamations of love amount to very little when they are not grounded on intimate experiences with the reality of Russian life. Stepan Trofimovich's knowledge is very much of the cosmopolitan kind: 'под народом вы воображали себе один только французский народ, да и то одних парижан' [10, 34]. Indeed, very few characters in Dostoevsky's novel truly "know" the people they profess to love, a contradiction that Stepan Trofimovich makes explicit at the end of the novel when he admits to the gospel seller Sofya Matveevna: 'J'aime le peuple, c'est indispensable, mais il me semble que je ne l'avais vu de près' [10, 490].<sup>84</sup> The extent of his ignorance is revealed in his final journey, as he fails to communicate with Sofya, speaking in French and correcting the mistakes of the

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<sup>84</sup> Dostoevsky criticised representatives of both liberal and conservative stripes for their bookish or idealised view of the peasantry. In the April 1876 instalment of *A Writer's Diary*, for example, he took to task landowners who 'оказались не понимающими ни народа, ни жизни его, ни народных начал; [они] принимали русских мужиков за каких-то французских поселян или за пастушков с фарфоровых чашек [...] Надо полагать, что для постижения народных идеалов надо было ездить в Париж или, по крайней мере, в водевильчик в Михайловский театр' [22, 117]. Similarly, whilst sympathetic to the idealism and altruism that animated the Populist movement, Dostoevsky thought that the "Going to the People" movement failed sufficiently to account for the religious faith of the peasantry, and, as such, was certain to result in misunderstanding. On this movement, see Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. by Francis Haskell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), ch. 18. For a succinct chapter on Dostoevsky's approach to the Populists, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), ch. 47.

Gospel according to Renan's *Life of Jesus*.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Sofya Matveevna is unable to understand him: 'Да и не поняла я почти ничего-с', Sofya Matveevna announces when Varvara Petrovna eventually appears on the scene [10, 503]. In terms of the capacity of characters to love without understanding, Dostoevsky condemns the ignorance of the intelligentsia (exemplified in Stepan Trofimovich), whilst praising peasant ignorance of western culture. Sofya Matveevna is able to act ethically because of what she *doesn't know*, whereas Stepan Trofimovich's knowledge and ideology serve as a barrier to ethical activity.

Thus, whereas Sofya Matveevna is animated by visceral compassion, Stepan Trofimovich wants to die for an idea: 'он подымает "знамя великой идеи" и идет умереть за него на большой дороге' [10, 480]. Desiring to be humanity's saviour and never having renounced his dream of fame (or infamy), Stepan Trofimovich cannot humble himself to receive the ministrations of Sofya Matveevna, who becomes a Good Samaritan, taking pity on a stranger by the roadside and attempting to arrange for his medical care in a local inn: 'Трепеща и дрожа умолял он не звать никого, не предпринимать ничего' [10, 498]. By rejecting help, Stepan Trofimovich refuses to recognise Sofya Matveevna as a neighbour. Much modern criticism of the parable of the Good Samaritan locates the challenge of Jesus' words not in their injunction to help those in need (first-century Jews, including the lawyer who asks the question, knew those injunctions perfectly well), but in the suggestion that they should humble themselves to receive help from others. Indeed, the Jesus Seminar admit the genuineness of the parable only on these grounds: 'if the Parable of the Good Samaritan is an example story that illustrates what it is like to be a good

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<sup>85</sup> The genuineness of Stepan Trofimovich's conversion is contested. For two opposing views, see Stephen Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 45 (arguing that the conversion is not genuine); and Diane Oenning Thompson ('Problems of the Biblical Word'), who argues that Stepan Trofimovich has returned 'to the faith of his native land', (p. 81).

neighbour [as I have interpreted it thus far in this chapter], it is probably not a parable of Jesus. But if it is a metaphor that hints at what it is like to receive help from an alien, from an enemy, then it is metaphorical and may be a genuine parable'.<sup>86</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Dostoevsky would not have been receptive to this reading, and it is certainly true that throughout his whole oeuvre protagonists struggle far more to be the object of love than its subject.

In Eliot's fiction, the question of whether we can ever know another human being is essentially answered in the negative: 'how little we know what would make paradise for our neighbours! We judge from our own desires, and our neighbours are not always open enough even to throw out a hint of theirs' [*MM*, 520]. However, critics disagree as to the maximal potential of knowledge in her work. J. Hillis Miller identifies what he sees as a central paradox in her work: 'the ability to do good in George Eliot's novels always in one way or another depends on ignorance, while the novels themselves show over and over the terrible dangers of ignorance (for example, Dorothea's illusions about Casaubon in *Middlemarch*). The novels exhort the reader to clear-seeing knowledge and imperturbably provide him with the sort of knowledge which, if taken seriously, would thwart the doing good she praises in her characters'.<sup>87</sup> Against this deconstruction, however, critics such as Suzy Anger admit the difficulties that are present in coming to knowledge of another person (there is always a danger that we read our neighbours as signs of our own false suppositions), but insist that the quest for knowledge is always rewarded in Eliot's fiction. The difficulty of knowledge, for Anger, does not entail its disavowal.<sup>88</sup> Eliot, for Anger, enjoins her characters to work towards knowledge of others, and even when she

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<sup>86</sup> Funk et al, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> J. Hillis Miller et al, 'Middlemarch, Chapter 85: Three Commentaries', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35:3 (1980), 432-53. Here, 447.

<sup>88</sup> See Anger, *Victorian Interpretation*, ch. 3.

(Eliot) is aware that such knowledge will be imperfect it is ultimately the best basis for sympathy. I do not intend to solve this problem in Eliot's writing, but it does seem to me that by decamping to the small town Eliot asks of her characters whether the expanse of their sympathy can be extended to include those they do not know as much as those they do. In so doing, she does not diminish the importance of tight circles of sympathy revolving around the (known) family, but she does interrogate the elasticity of that sympathy. Can a character's sympathy envelop even those neighbours (the reader knows) they misunderstand? Dorothea's succeeds here, showing sympathy to the utterly alterior Rosamond. Lydgate initially fails to show kindness to Dorothea (regarding her as too simple), but later learns to expand his circle of understanding and love, ministering to her in the wake of Casaubon's illness and death.

When Jesus had wanted his listeners to consider whether their conception of neighbourliness could extend beyond the family of Israel, he chose the historically charged chronotope of the road: the road along which David had fled from Absalom, and along which Zedekiah had escaped his Chaldean pursuers.<sup>89</sup> That road then became an archetype, as the message of the story could be reinterpreted and appropriated by the Christian church throughout time. Eliot's ambition for the small town is not altogether dissimilar: at once a historical entity, filled with concrete, individuated characters, the dramas of *Middlemarch* or *St Ogg's* are intended to challenge the reader, urban or provincial, to ask whether they too can recognise that their neighbours have a 'centre of self' [*MM*, 211] equivalent to their own.

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<sup>89</sup> See Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, p. 88.

## Conclusion

The earliest Christians made no apology for the fact that their faith was based on a series of events that took place at a given time and in a given place. ‘When the fullness of time was come,’ reads Galatians 4.4-5, ‘God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons’. For St Paul, the truth of Christianity rested on the bedrock of the Son of God’s appearance in history (‘when the fullness of time was come’), on the incarnation of a historical individual (‘made of a woman’) among a particular people and historical tradition, namely the Jewish nation (‘made under the law’). The benefits that resulted, according to Paul, from the vicarious suffering of the crucified Jesus may have been more abstract or metaphorical (redemption, adoption), but there can be little doubt that for the Apostle these gifts could only be conferred on the basis of the real-life activity of a Galilean carpenter in first-century Palestine. It was the cultural context in which this activity was embedded that historical Jesus scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempted to recover. Although many of these scholars were not Christians in the conventional sense, their aim was to enable readers better to understand the theological implications or sublime ideas of the Bible through an understanding of its historical context. My contention in this chapter has been that, for Eliot and Dostoevsky, the realistic setting of the nineteenth-century province functions as an indispensable chronotope in which to emplot narratives that betoken universal significance. They use the novel as a mediating material form that challenges their readers to confront the ethical message of several biblical narratives in the modern world. In particular, the small town enabled them to explore the extent to which biblical ethics can survive in the intractable web of relations in Middlemarch, or the rivalries (petty and epic) of

Skotoprigonevsk. Although for both writers charity does (or should) begin at home, the small town comprises a chronotope of sufficient complexity to challenge characters and readers to ensure that it does not end there. This challenge, however, must be undertaken with a degree of caution, for neither must the centrifugal force of sympathy be allowed to break free of its centripetal moorings.

## Chapter 2

### The Talk of the Town: Language and its (Ab)uses in the Provinces

Geography may, if not exactly determine, at least encourage morphological change.

—Franco Moretti<sup>1</sup>

Located between the city and the countryside, provincial towns in the novels of Dostoevsky and Eliot constitute a sociological space in which the discourses of modernity impinge upon a more traditional way of life. This chapter examines the way in which both writers alight on language itself—language as both form and theme—to dramatise the collision of urban/modern and rural/traditional worldviews. As Moretti suggests, geographical setting *inflects* as well as *reflects* changes in language use, and my aim in the following analysis is to chart how provinciality acts upon language itself. The novels of Dostoevsky and Eliot host a wide range of characters who are variously able to manipulate the language of modernity, or else are fated to fall victim to it, as the certainties of denotative meaning gradually recede from view and as more complex, abstract or connotative systems of language come to the fore. After discussing Dostoevsky and Eliot's ambivalent approach to the language(s) of their provincial communities, I go on to examine how a particular mode of discourse (namely gossip) is presented in their novels, showing how the provinciality of its practitioners gives it a particular potency as a plot-compositional device.

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<sup>1</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 32.

In my previous chapter, I showed that D. F. Strauss formed the apex of a tradition of biblical scholarship that sought to locate Jesus of Nazareth within his historical context. His writing, however, goes beyond the strictly theological and provides a useful frame through which to view linguistic change more generally. For Strauss, it was axiomatic that as society developed it was increasingly able to abandon strict referential signification and to express more figurative, abstract concepts. The main argument of his *Life of Jesus*—that the Evangelists imputed to the historical Jesus a “mythical” personality that owed more to contemporary messianic expectations than the known facts about a historical individual—rests on the premise that the early Christians had, to quote Hans Frei, ‘not yet risen to the level of abstract conceptualization’,<sup>2</sup> and as such they were compelled to embody their ideas in the guise of a historical personality. Although Strauss sought to debunk literalist readings of the works and miracles of this historical personality, he did not, as such, charge the evangelists with deception; rather, he encouraged his readers to interpret the Bible as a ‘beautiful, sacred poem of the human race—a poem in which are embodied all the wants of our religious instinct’,<sup>3</sup> and he agreed with Origen that ‘spiritual truth often exists embodied in a corporeal falsehood’.<sup>4</sup> In other words, for Strauss the message or idea of Christianity could be transmitted without a reliance on a fixed correspondence between the biblical word and its referent, and if the meaning of the Christian scriptures was to be appropriated anew in the nineteenth century then its

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<sup>2</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. by George Eliot (New York: Cosimo, 2009), p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

propagators would need to employ a more nuanced linguistic apparatus than had been evident in the theological treatises that preceded Strauss's own.<sup>5</sup>

Evidently, Strauss's remarks on the nature of language change were informed by his study of first-century Palestine. A more general formulation of the way in which social space conditions language was attempted at the end of the nineteenth century by Ferdinand Tönnies, the main tenets of whose book *Community and Civil Society* I sketched briefly in the Introduction to this thesis. Although Tönnies's discussion of language as such is relatively brief, his conceptualisation of language in the *Gemeinschaft* and the *Gesellschaft* is instructive and can be utilised to shed light on the novels of Dostoevsky and Eliot. For Tönnies, language in the *Gemeinschaft* is the 'true organ of mutual understanding'; it is born out of intimate knowledge of other members of the clan and constitutes the 'involuntary outcome of deep feelings and prevailing thoughts'.<sup>6</sup> It is not artificial, and not designed to confuse; its surface-level symbols, its code, are fully intelligible to the initiated (and unintelligible to outsiders). It is purely referential and has yet to acquire the abstract quality that is characteristic of the move from a barter to a money economy.

By contrast, the language of the *Gesellschaft* is highly abstract and confuses the one-to-one correspondence between the word and its referent—a relationship that was previously the bedrock of community life. Nowhere is this process of abstract conceptualisation clearer than in the monetary sphere. As societies grew (in number and space), money was introduced and acquired a rate of exchange (a worth), despite its intrinsic worthlessness and metaphoricity. It is, in Tönnies's succinct phrase, 'the

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, biblical literalism did not hold sway for much of the history of the church. For some examples of non-literal readings throughout history, see Harold Fisch, *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1998) pp. 18-19; and Norman Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. by José Harris, trans. by José Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 33.

embodiment of abstract reason'.<sup>7</sup> The pathetic image of Silas Marner delighting over his hoard of coins, the '*immediate object[s]* of toil' [SM, 16; my italics] is testament to his desire to circumvent the abstract signification of paper and return to the concrete, tangible world of physical exchange. Jessie Givner has argued that rustic Caleb Garth cannot understand money precisely because he displays an 'inability to think figuratively'.<sup>8</sup> In *The Brothers Karamazov*, shrewd old Fyodor is well able to manipulate the world of commerce, but his attitude to money is quaintly naive: he cherishes it as a physical object, a pledge in place of Grushenka's allegiance. And of course, anyone reading the novel for a second time is struck by the cruel irony of the first page: at his death, it is discovered that the sponger had 'до ста тысяч рублей чистыми деньгами' [14, 7; my italics]:<sup>9</sup> in other words, more than enough to spare Dmitry a cool 3,000, and avert the conflict that dominates the plot from the first meeting in Zosima's cell. It is probably no coincidence that in Eliot and Dostoevsky dishonesty is often symptomatic of wealth (I have in mind characters such as Wakem, Jermyn, Bulstrode, Luzhin, Fyodor Pavlovich), since the ability to ensnare simple-hearted folk with abstractions in speech finds a natural complement in the ability to swindle them of the rightful object of their labour (which is now, paradoxically, embodied only abstractly in monetary form). As Spencer wrote in 1859, dishonesty is 'a general and permanent element of our mercantile system'.<sup>10</sup>

Tönnies's dichotomy between hermetically-sealed community and cosmopolitan civic society is no doubt too sharply contoured, and one might question

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Jessie Givner, 'Industrial History, Preindustrial Literature: George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', *ELH*, 69.1 (2002), 223-43. Here, p. 229.

<sup>9</sup> The Russian expression, *chistymi den'gami*, for which "in hard cash" or "in ready money" seem appropriate translations, literally means "in clean (or: pure) money"; one does not want to lay too fine a point on the semantics here, but the adjective emphasises not only the physicality of the cash, but also the fact that it is untouched, undefiled: it is an object of Fyodor's delight far superior to that of his firstborn.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Dermot Coleman, 'Being Good with Money: Economic Bearings in George Eliot's Ethical and Social Thought' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2001), pp. 51-52.

in particular his idealisation of the communal way of life. Nevertheless, his work provides us with convenient shorthands to conceptualise the way in which language is used and misused in the novels of Dostoevsky and Eliot. Their provincial towns have porous borders, with outsiders frequently challenging the traditions of the country with a language that is by no means comprehensible to all characters. Dostoevsky and Eliot dramatise the ways in which the abstractions of modern discourse can be navigated, a dramatisation that is conducted with both sympathy and censure. Ultimately, I believe, these authors want to chart a middle course between denotative and connotative meaning, between the language of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. As novelists whose craft relies on ability to use language on both an abstract and referential plane, they evince little nostalgia for the denotative simplicity of pre-literate *Gemeinschaft*, even as they at times seem to mourn its passing.

### **Eliot: Left Behind By Language**

In Eliot's writings, we meet provincial characters who manage the transition from the 'old stocking' to the 'savings-bank' [*MM*, 95], from a world in which words are inextricably bound to a corresponding physical referent to a world of metaphor and imagery, with varying levels of success. Eliot is sympathetic to characters like poor Tom Tulliver, and her narrator seems to take his side against the Greek tradition that finds its embodiment in Aristotle and his disciple Mr Stelling, lamenting that we can 'so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else' [*MF*, 140]. Tom's education in the Greek classics (an education that takes him away from the sensual world of his childhood and into the grammatical systems whose relevance to his immediate environment he is unable to perceive) mirrors society's movement

from the familiar *Gemeinschaft* to the more alien *Gesellschaft*, and the linguistic score that accompanies (or propels) this transition is clearly leaving people behind.<sup>11</sup>

Literalism is a feature of close-knit communities that are devoid of the more nuanced consciousness we associate with the modern life of the metropolis. The pastoral environment of *Adam Bede* had no shortage of people like Seth and Dinah who ‘believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions [...] having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures, which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators’ [*AB*, 35]. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the character whose outlook still belongs to this simple world, and most typifies its insistence upon direct referentiality, is Mrs Tulliver. In the novel’s second chapter, her husband criticises her for identifying a myriad of reasons why Tom should not be sent to school in another district. The following exchange ensues:

‘Well, well, we won’t send him out o’ reach o’ the carrier’s cart, if other things fit in,’ said Mr. Tulliver. ‘But you mustn’t put a spoke i’ the wheel about the washin’, if we can’t get a school near enough. That’s the fault I have to find wi’ you, Bessy; if you see a stick i’ the road, you’re allays thinkin’ you can’t step over it. You’d want me not to hire a good wagoner, ’cause he’d got a mole on his face.’

‘Dear heart!’ said Mrs. Tulliver, in mild surprise, ‘when did I iver make objections to a man because he’d got a mole on his face? I’m sure I’m rether fond o’ the moles; for my brother, as is dead an’ gone, had a mole on his brow. But I can’t remember your iver offering to hire a wagoner with a mole, Mr. Tulliver. There was John Gibbs hadn’t a mole on his face no more nor you have, an’ I was all for having you hire *him*; an’ so you did hire him, an’ if he hadn’t died o’ th’ inflammation, as we paid Dr. Turnbull for attending him, he’d very like ha’ been drivin’ the wagon now. He might have a mole somewhere out o’ sight, but how was I to know that, Mr. Tulliver?’

‘No, no, Bessy; I didn’t mean justly the mole; I meant it to stand for summat else; but niver mind—it’s puzzling work, talking is.’ [*MF*, 10]

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed examination of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in Eliot’s works can be found in Suzanne Graver’s book *George Eliot and Community: A Study of Social Theory and Fictional Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Whilst Graver’s concern is to categorise novels according to their *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft* setting, my chapter focuses on how the *traits* (specifically the linguistic traits) of Tönnies’s theorised communities express themselves in the characters of the novels.

This extract exemplifies the mismatch between Tulliver and his wife, as the former frequently speaks in ossified idioms that the latter cannot understand, with the three in this passage (the spoke in the wheel, the stick in the road, the wagoner) being only the first salvo in his verbal arsenal of fixed phrases.<sup>12</sup> Since Mrs Tulliver is only able to comprehend denotative language, she cannot understand the correspondence between her husband's idioms and the matter at hand. Perhaps wisely, Mr Tulliver gives up ('niver mind'), his attempt at verbal (Aristotelian?) play ('I meant it to stand for summat else') having been scuppered by an interlocutor who cannot understand figurative language, even of the most folksy kind. Whilst we might expect two members of the same family to communicate according to a common linguistic code (a common plane of heteroglossia, in Bakhtinian terminology), they fail to do so. The heteroglossia of the household is, in fact, destructive, since it takes place on different planes, and thus far from cementing their union, it alienates each from the other. Ultimately, they are unable to overcome their diverse social backgrounds (the superiority of the Dodson blood being something Mr Tulliver is never allowed to forget) and thus meaningful communication (dialogue, in the Bakhtinian sense) is unachievable.<sup>13</sup>

The failure of communication between Mr and Mrs Tulliver is, at its worst, tragi-comic. However, this kind of literalism can take a more thoroughly tragic turn in Eliot's fiction. This can be seen through her characters' frequent recourse to

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<sup>12</sup> Others include: 'if you drive your waggon in a hurry, you may light on an awkward corner' to warn against hasty decision making [MF, 15]; 'I'll never pull my coat off before I go to bed' to inform Mr Riley that he won't let the mill pass to Tom before his own death [MF, 16]; 'there's red wheat as well as white' to defend Maggie before her aunt Pullet who holds that dark skin is abnormal for a Dodson [MF, 62].

<sup>13</sup> On heteroglossia in Bakhtin, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 139-45. In *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), Franco Moretti argues that heteroglossia, *pace* Bakhtin, necessarily precludes dialogue, the two concepts being inversely proportionate: if people are speaking different languages, how can dialogue of any sort occur? It is only when characters begin to speak in a common language (at which point heteroglossia is eroded) that dialogue occurs (pp. 194-95).

*analogy*, and, more specifically, a tendency to interpret actions or personalities according to a prior schema that does little to account for the individual character of a person or event. Indeed, Eliot's fiction makes clear that whilst analogy has a creative potential, it can be destructive when prosecuted with literalist zeal. Before examining the specific features of analogy in Eliot's novelistic universe, I will outline some of its broader characteristics.

Analogy is a category used in all spheres of knowledge and research, as well as in everyday life. In the history of science, it has been a valuable tool to expand understanding of the universe, as scientists have postulated and tested laws about the interactions of different bodies based on relations already proven.<sup>14</sup> In the field of economics, Kurt Wicksell has defended the use of analogy as a conceptual tool, arguing that the speculation it relies on (A's potential similarity to B, as C is similar to D) is 'the only way of reaching that reality which cannot be reached by direct observation'.<sup>15</sup> Sociologists in particular, with their belief that the social world is open to examination in *just the same way* as the natural world, advocate the use of analogy when theorising. In addition to this justification, Durkheim argues that analogies are instructive in that 'the mind cannot create a new idea out of nothing [...] it can only be represented in terms of something else that the mind already knows'.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, both scientists and sociologists stress that the method must be treated with some circumspection. Thus Wicksell writes that all analogies must be treated according to their correspondence with the facts, since 'the difference between false analogy and true analogy cannot be seen *a priori*, only *a posteriori*, in

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<sup>14</sup> On this see, for example, Dedre Gentner, 'Are Scientific Analogies Metaphors?' in *Metaphor: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by David Miall (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 106-32.

<sup>15</sup> Kurt Wicksell, *Selected Papers on Economic Theory*, ed. by Erik Lindahl (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Emile Durkheim, *On Institutional Analysis*, ed. and trans. by Mark Traugott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 55-56.

accordance with the evidence of experience’,<sup>17</sup> whilst Durkheim cautions that we should not assume one analogy will be sufficient to ‘dissipate in an instant all the mysteries which still surround the origins of the nature of society’.<sup>18</sup> In order for analogies to expand knowledge, they must be both *creative* and *flexible*. In other words, they must suggest new correspondences, but not insist on these when empirical evidence has shown them to be faulty.

Dedre Gentner has defined analogy as a ‘non-literal similarity comparison’.<sup>19</sup> Implicit in this definition is the claim that analogies *suggest* rather than *fix* meaning: when we analogise, we do not say that “x is y”, only that x bears certain, perhaps incomplete, likeness to y. In *The Mill on the Floss*, this non-literal similarity is frequently eschewed by Mrs Tulliver in favour of a literal identity that enables her to interpret the complex world of human interaction with a certainty it cannot ultimately sustain. For example, when she first meets Mr Stelling she infers that he must have a housekeeper and that the housekeeper must be of a morally reprehensible character since her brother ‘had a housekeeper once, an’ she took half the feathers out o’ the best bed’ [MF, 22]. Similarly, she confidently predicts that Mr Wakem will not buy the mill since the purchase of land is not behaviour she has previously associated with lawyers (‘an’ I should think that ’ud be the way with you, sir’) [MF, 249]. For Mrs Tulliver, history constrains the present not as a causal force but as an analogical one, as she evokes past experiences in an attempt to predict future events.<sup>20</sup>

In evincing this propensity, she is not alone. Tom assumes that Philip Wakem will be an unamenable fellow since he had previously known another hunchback with

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<sup>17</sup> Wicksell, *Selected Papers*, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Durkheim, *On Institutional Analysis*, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Gentner, ‘Are Scientific Analogies Metaphors?’, p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Durkheim’s comment: ‘Evolution is not a monotonous repetition. Each realm of nature manifests some novelty which science must discover and reproduce, rather than erase.’ Durkheim, *On Institutional Analysis*, p. 55.

unsatisfactory moral qualities [MF, 161]; Aunt Pullet assumes that Mr Tulliver must have water on the brain during his illness, since an acquaintance of hers was once similarly diagnosed [MF, 208]; Aunt Glegg sees in the packman Bob Jakin a potential killer since ‘it isn’t many ’sizes ago since a packman murdered a young woman in a lone place’ [MF, 315]. Such is the prevalence of analogy in Maggie’s life that we might wonder whether her supposition that all astronomers hate women is quite a result of her difficulties with Latin grammar, or a socially-conditioned reflex that seeks to extrapolate the general from the particular [MF, 150].<sup>21</sup>

As it turns out, all these analogies are wrong: Mr Stelling does not have a housekeeper, Mr Wakem will buy the mill, Philip and Bob are both kind, and not all astronomers hate women. The challenge for the characters of *The Mill on the Floss* is, in light of this, to abandon or modify the analogy that has led to the erroneous conclusion—something that, in the worst cases, does not happen: Tom, for example, will never abandon his mistaken determination of Philip’s malevolence. The ‘evidence of experience’ (to use Wicksell’s phrase) is not enough to prevail upon his prefabricated view of Philip.

Perhaps the most damaging of all analogies in the novel occurs in the penultimate chapter, when rumours about the new vicar, Dr Kenn, and his relations with Maggie are at their height. Stephen Guest had already seen something apostolic in Kenn [MF, 379], but the comparison is not a favourable one among the denizens of St Ogg’s: ‘it was not safe to be too confident, even about the best of men: an apostle had fallen, and wept bitterly afterwards; and though Peter’s denial was not a close precedent, his repentance was likely to be’ [MF, 507]. St Ogg’s society, in spite of all evidence to the contrary (‘not a close precedent’), gropes after analogy (Dr Kenn =

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<sup>21</sup> The sentence in question is: *Astronomus exosus ad unam mulieres*.

Peter) to besmirch the name of one of the few residents who treats Maggie humanely. When past behaviour is analogised as a mimetic blueprint for future action, analogy becomes an instrument of bad faith that contrives to create finalised scripts of ethical activity and human personality. Such scripting is essentially the result of a failure of empathy, an inability to recognise that the dynamics of human experience are unrepeatable for each individual, who must confront their struggles *as an individual* with a unique matrix of concerns and motivations. In Eliot's poetics and ethics, analogy has to be predicated on an understanding of the *differences*, as well as the similarities, of each situation, and its practitioners must recognise that character does not neatly map onto caricature: there is no one-size-fits-all approach to individual subjectivity. The insistence on treating individuals according to a predetermined superstructure is one that is repeated throughout Eliot's fiction (Lydgate in particular falls victim to it),<sup>22</sup> and I will later go on to show how Dostoevsky censures a similar ethical failing, particularly in the speech of the prosecution lawyer in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

With her penchant for referential fixity, Mrs Tulliver would have survived well in a sheltered *Gemeinschaft*, had such a superlative community ever existed. However, St Ogg's and its environs present a challenge to her and her family because there are others who are able to manipulate language and take advantage of her literalism. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the character most able to disrupt the one-to-one correspondence of words and their referents is the lawyer, Mr Wakem. From Tulliver's perspective, the law is a complex code that complicates the simple linguistic correspondence of truisms such as 'water's water' [MF, 15] and his

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<sup>22</sup> In *Middlemarch*, the narrator appropriates the speech of the townsfolk when commenting on Lydgate's relationship with Bulstrode: 'the inferences were closely linked enough: the town knew of the loan, believed it to be a bribe, and believed that he took it as a bribe' [MM, 729]. Such a supposition damages Lydgate's reputation and career—and is, of course, entirely false.

sylllogism that, since millers need water, and he is a miller, he is owed ‘a legitimate share of water power’ [MF, 154]. John Kucich has illuminatingly ascribed Tulliver’s tautologies to a worldview in which all objects—including natural ones—are subjected to a single functionality; in other words, many of the characters in *The Mill on the Floss* (Maggie excepted) value the physical world only insofar as it aligns with a single delineated instrumentation.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Kucich is certainly right in arguing that Maggie rejects this reductive vision of the world, I suggest that the transcendence of literalism is exemplified just as well—albeit more negatively—in Mr Wakem. Of the lawyer we learn:

[he] knew quite well that the majority of substantial men [in St. Ogg’s] were perfectly contented with the fact that ‘Wakem was Wakem;’ that is to say, [he was] a man who always knew the stepping-stones that would carry him through the very muddy bits of practice [...] Wakem’s conscience was not uneasy because he had used a few tricks against the miller. [MF, 252-53]

Although Wakem is not the evil demon of Mr Tulliver’s imagination, he is nevertheless a trickster, and his trap is language itself. He recognises the simple linguistic correspondences upon which the society of St Ogg’s insists and is able to exploit the unsuspecting with legalese.<sup>24</sup> (There is an element of poetic justice when Tulliver finally brings Wakem down from the haughty heights of evasion to face his material whip on solid ground [MF, 356]).

Whilst Eliot to an extent censures Wakem’s use of legal verbosity as a tool to dispossess the miller, she is not nostalgic as to Tulliver’s way of life and linguistic crudities: she has a strong sense of the *inevitability* of progress and the necessity of

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<sup>23</sup> John Kucich, ‘George Eliot and Objects: Meaning as Matter in *The Mill on the Floss*’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 12 (1983), 319-40.

<sup>24</sup> As Sally Shuttleworth notes, there has been a change in the approach to language between *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. In the former, the correspondence between words and world was a given. In the latter, language is prized (by characters such as Wakem, at least) for its ‘lack of correspondence with the world’. See Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 55.

adapting to it. In his day, Tulliver could get by with an education that went not much beyond the alphabet, and, like his brother-in-law Mr Deane, he was able to make a living without linguistic flair (both he and his wife find writing difficult). Tulliver was, in fact, not wrong when he decided that Tom would require the skills of verbal manoeuvre if he was to survive in the world beyond the 1820s; he erred only in selecting Mr Stelling as a tutor up to the task of such formation. Stelling wrongly assumes that his own experience is sufficient to establish educational writ for another, and he is convinced of his duty to ‘teach the lad in the only right way—indeed, he knew no other’ [*MF*, 139]. Unfortunately, however, his generalisation of his own experience has failed to do what all correct generalisations must do, at least according to Eliot in her review of R. W. McKay’s *Progress of the Intellect*: ‘give significance to the smallest detail’ [*SCW*, 21]. Tom is thus suffocated by a blanket of educational practice that pays his individual needs no heed.<sup>25</sup>

Analogy for Eliot is deficient not when it suggests correspondences, but when it insists upon them, when, in J. Hillis Miller’s phrase, characters make the error of ‘taking a figurative similarity as an identity’.<sup>26</sup> The reason why Maggie finds the study of words exciting, whereas Tom finds it restrictive, can be attributed to the way they approach language. Maggie, who reads the dictionary in a house with a dearth of reading matter, is happy to embrace the multiplicity of meaning in her vocabulary (the Latin word “bonus” ‘may mean several things; almost every word does’ [*MF*, 145]), but she recognises that the synonym cannot wholly substitute for the original word: there is always a nuance of difference, a change of register, a morphologically irregularity involved in translation. Though she begins the novel by rigidly

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<sup>25</sup> As J. Hillis Miller puts it in his superb ‘Narrative and History’, *ELH*, 41.3 (1974), 455-73, ‘all generalizations are falsifications because they derive from the amalgamation of specific instances which are all different’ (p. 469).

<sup>26</sup> J. Hillis Miller, ‘Narrative and History’, p. 465-66.

translating words into actions (her aunts' hints about her hair are interpreted as orders to cut it), she nevertheless shows promise of transcending the limits of realism, fantasising about what she would do *if* a lion came running at Tom, *were* they in the lion countries, and using her 'hypothetic powers' to conjecture about Tom's reasons for wanting to endure the Gleggs (does he want to get his hands on the tipsy-cake? she wonders) [*MF*, 35, 45]. Tom unfailingly responds to her subjunctives in the indicative ('but the lion *isn't* coming' [*MF*, 35]), for his imagination is rooted only in observable reality and history, whence comes his enjoyment of Mr Poulter's stories of Wellington in preference to Philip's stories about Greek legend: they are 'removed from all suspicion of being mythical' [*MF*, 171]. Eliot, the novelist, has the last laugh, however, for Mr Poulter is a myth-maker *extraordinaire*, whose stories are invented or misremembered recollections of events in which he played no significant role. Like Strauss's Evangelists, there is no suggestion in the novel that Mr Poulter intends to deceive, and indeed his rehearsing of battle scenes in the privacy of the carriage-house suggests that he fully believes—and inhabits—the stories he tells. He thereby forces Tom, entirely without the latter's consent or knowledge, to abandon his referentiality and to surrender himself to stories, which, in spite of himself, he enjoys. The metaphor, poetry, and hypothetical nature of stories—of "narrative", to use their adult designation—combines with their *believable*, if far-fetched, mimesis to break the spell arid history without disintegrating into pure fancy. What Moretti says about metaphors holds: since they 'use a "familiar field of reference", they also *give form* to the unknown: they contain it, and keep it somehow under control'.<sup>27</sup> In other words, metaphors rely on mimesis (referentiality) to reveal something that lies beyond our hitherto-existing experience of reality. But whilst metaphor is held in check in Eliot's

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<sup>27</sup> Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 47

fiction, we shall see that it is given a much wider stage in Dostoevsky's work, and the consequences of its unfettered activity are far more serious than anything in Eliot's tightly controlled arenas of action. Instead of tragedy, chaos.

### **Verbal Manipulation in Dostoevsky**

Verbal tricksters of a hue far more sinister than that of Mr Wakem abound in Dostoevsky's fiction. The most demonic is Peter Stepanovich in *The Devils*, and his skill is to take advantage of the literalism of the denizens of Dostoevsky's town in order to bring about social disintegration. Peter is able to expand his influence in the town by means of an idiolect that now insists on literal referentiality, now on poetic metaphor. His verbal antics enmesh all sectors of society—students, officials, intellectuals, landowners, peasants—all of whom lose out in his games of verbal play.

In the chapter “Peter Stepanovich Gets Down to Work”, the idol of the town's radical movement, Nikolai Stavrogin, suggests a means by which Verkhovensky might solidify relations with his group. Stavrogin says:

Все это чиновничество и сентиментальность — все это клейстер хороший, но есть одна штука еще лучше: подговорите четырех членов кружка укокошить пятого, под видом того, что тот донесет, и тотчас же вы их всех пролитою кровью, как одним узлом, свяжете. Рабами вашими станут, не посмеют бунтовать и отчетов спрашивать. Ха, ха, ха! [10, 299]

In a reply that will become prophetic, Peter says: ‘ты мне эти слова должен выкупить’ [10, 299]. Stavrogin's statement and Peter's response reveal that they are operating on different linguistic planes. Stavrogin, after all, is not offering a blueprint for action, but making a joke, as signalled by the final three monosyllables of the extract quoted. Peter, however, makes a conscious decision to take Stavrogin's words literally, a decision underpinned by his knowledge that a literal reading of Stavrogin's

utterance will allow him to present Shatov's murder as a directive from on high, not a product of his own malevolence. Later in the novel, he admits that he understood that Stavrogin was speaking in jest ('Хотите всю правду: видите, у меня действительно мелькала мысль, — сами же вы ее мне подсказали, не серьезно, а дразня меня (потому что не стали же бы вы серьезно подсказывать)' [10, 403]), but for the purposes of his own propaganda it is necessary to cast Stavrogin as a giver of instructions that can be applied unthinkingly to the immediate situation. By recasting Stavrogin's utterance as a command, Verkhovensky demonstrates his linguistic prowess; far from being Stavrogin's puppet, he is his puppeteer, able to use his words to serve his own ends. Peter is always one step ahead of his idol: 'мне только приснилось, а уж он и сон отгадал', Stavrogin says [10, 214].<sup>28</sup> Unlike Maggie Tulliver, who neither understands nor is understood by the townspeople of St Ogg's, Verkhovensky knows his audience only too well, and his recourse to literalism proves an effective way to manipulate the townsfolk who have consistently underestimated him.

In his extra-literary writing, Dostoevsky attacked what he perceived as a Russian propensity to accept wholesale and without reflexion complex ideas from the West. In the *Diary of a Writer*, he dubbed this extreme application of the ideas of European philosophy the 'русская сторона их учений' [21, 132], and in *The Brothers Karamazov* Ivan bemoans that 'там [в Европе] гипотеза, то у русского мальчика тотчас же аксиома' [14, 214].<sup>29</sup> The originators of European ideas,

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<sup>28</sup> My reading of Verkhovensky here draws on Gary Saul Morson's view of Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Morson believes that commentators have underestimated Smerdyakov's skills at verbal trickery, and that he is the most intelligent character of the novel. See Gary Saul Morson, 'Verbal Pollution in *The Brothers Karamazov*', *PTL*, 3 (1978), 223-33.

<sup>29</sup> It helped Dostoevsky's polemic to make this charge against the Socialists. However, it was one to which Slavophiles, reactionaries and, indeed, Dostoevsky himself were also prone. After all, the German Romantics might have stressed the importance of the unique role of national identity in the "symphony of nations", but as this idea migrated eastwards, it soon gave rise to theories not of the *contribution* of Russia to this symphony, but to its *superiority* over it. On the various strands and

Dostoevsky claimed, would be surprised at the ways in which their nuance or complexity had been abandoned in Russia in favour of a literal application. This tendency, however, is not the exclusive preserve of the Westernisers. In *The Devils*, Shatov, the defender of Orthodox brotherhood, fails to appreciate the complex nature of Stavrogin's utterances about God and makes them serve his own ideological agenda. For example, Shatov attributes to Stavrogin the view that there has never been a nation without a religion, and that the strength of a nation is directly proportionate to its conception of a deity. These ideas, he claims, have come entirely from Stavrogin: 'я не изменил ничего, ни единого слова' [10, 199]. Stavrogin disputes such a claim:

Не думаю, чтобы не изменили [...] вы пламенно приняли и пламенно переиначили, не замечая того. Уж одно то, что вы бога низводите до простого атрибута народности. [10, 199]

In and of himself, Stavrogin is a character of great complexity, but his followers reflect only one side of him (with the Shatov-Kirillov pair embodying this bifurcation most obviously).

Unlike Verkhovensky, however, Shatov is not, as such, attempting to manipulate Stavrogin's language, since he lacks Verkhovensky's skills at verbal manipulation. Verkhovensky is able to take advantage of this inability in order to throw Shatov into confusion. At one point, he confronts Shatov about some pamphlets the latter had been asked to print with a secret press. Shatov had previously sent a letter simply stating, in reply to the group's request, that '[стихи]

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mutations of conservative thought in Russia in the nineteenth century, see William Leatherbarrow, 'Conservatism in the Age of Nicholas I and Alexander I', in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. by William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 95-115; on the correspondence between Romantic and Slavophile thought, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1952), especially chapter 5; on Dostoevsky's chauvinistic Messianism see James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), especially chapter 6.

отпечатать здесь не могу, да и ничего не могу; печатайте за границей' [10, 275].

Recalling the incident, Shatov explains to Verkhovensky, 'я прямо отказался печатать'. Verkhovensky is (or pretends to be) unconvinced:

Да, но не прямо. Вы написали: "не могу", но не объяснили по какой причине. "Не могу" не значит "не хочу". Можно было подумать, что вы просто от материальных причин не можете. [...] Но и сам должен был сознаться, перечитав теперь, что эти две строчки неясны и вводят в обман. [10, 294]

Verkhovensky complicates the simplest of utterances in order to force Shatov's statement to signify a myriad of possible meanings, however implausible. Verkhovensky strives to make language anarchic, to enable words to stand for a referent that constantly shifts. His frequent repetition of the slogan 'общее дело' [e.g. 10, 315] is a prominent example of this and signals a retreat into abstraction (what *is* the common cause?) in order to secure the allegiance of his followers. The slogan is ultimately nothing more than a metaphor for his own desire to transform society according to his own dictates, and he profits from the townsfolk's inability to acknowledge a truth articulated by the narrator of *Middlemarch*: 'we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them' [*ММ*, 85]. In Verkhovensky's case, the adverb *fatally* seems especially apposite.

In addition to imputing new meanings to existing words, Verkhovensky at times simply injects words that have not previously been spoken. Such happens in the discussion of Shatov's assassination:

— Я против; я всеми силами души моей протестую против такого кровавого решения! — встал с места Виргинский.  
— Но? — спросил Петр Степанович.  
— Что *но*?  
— Вы сказали *но*... и я жду.  
— Я, кажется, не сказал *но*... Я только хотел сказать, что если решаются, то...  
— То?

Виргинский замолчал. [10, 421]

Like Wakem in *The Mill on the Floss*, Verkhovensky knows that his verbal arsenal is unmatched by that of his audience, who have no choice but to fall silent. Words for Peter Stepanovich are not a means of instigating dialogue but of closing it down.

Although few, if any, characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* exhibit Peter Stepanovich's cruel cunning, in the novel Dostoevsky continues to dramatise the collision of characters who are able to deal with abstract/metaphorical language and those who are not. For example, Kolya Krasotkin at one point tells Alyosha of an occasion in which he persuaded a peasant that it would be a good idea to run over a goose's neck with a cart of oats. The deed done, Kolya protests to the judge that 'я отнюдь не учил [i.e. he didn't teach the peasant what to do], что я только выразил основную мысль и говорил лишь *в проекте*' [14, 496; my emphasis]. The judge comments that more time spent at his schoolbooks would cure him of such hypothetical scheming. In Kolya's interaction with peasant society, Dostoevsky reveals, on a level far more understated than that of Peter Verkhovensky's antics, how the close proximity of characters with different degrees of verbal proficiency can challenge the fabric of Russian society. In his work, the provincial town setting creates such proximity, and accelerates its consequences. Kolya himself attributes the significance imputed to the incident to the fact that the residents of Skotoprigonevsk naturally tend to exaggerate events of the smallest proportions: 'самая безмозглая шутка, самая ничтожная, из которой целого слона, *по обыкновению у нас*, сочинили' [14, 495; my emphasis].

It is in Book Twelve, however, that the juxtaposition of referential and poetic language is most clearly enacted. Upon the small town of the Karamazovs descend two erudite lawyers from the capital. Ippolit Kirillovich is tasked with proving

Mitya's guilt, whilst Fetyukovich provides his defence. Kate Holland provides a persuasive account of the dichotomy between the arguments of defence and prosecution. Briefly summarised, Holland's argument is this: Ippolit Kirillovich's speech is structured around the principle of linearity, or *priamolineinost'*, which attributes to each of Mitya's action a single, determinate meaning. Every action of Mitya's, according to this schema, is performed as written in a script, thus denying him any kind of moral agency. The prosecutor slips effortlessly from probability to certainty, such that his amulet, in which he stores Katya Ivanovna's money, cannot be explained otherwise than by an appeal to Mitya's overactive imagination ('это такое противоречие с действительностью, какого более и представить нельзя' [15, 131]). Mitya is just not the kind of person whose honour would succeed in restraining his own voluptuousness for the sake of moral scruple. Fetyukovich, on the other hand, rejects this *priamolineinost'*, and rewrites reality to allow for a literally endless number of readings. Why, there might not have been a robbery, or murder, at all. Since no fact can stand up to scrutiny when examined in isolation, any attempt to construct a narrative of events that implicates Mitya must be rejected from the outset. Holland concludes that Mitya's own testimony falls between these two extremes: he does act unpredictably (e.g. by stealing the pestle without reason), thus nullifying the prosecutor's contention that everything happens for a preordained reason; but he also acts according to a fixed code of honour that renders him a scoundrel, but not a thief (e.g. by saving the 1,500 roubles), thus disproving the defence attorney's claim that he resists all moral codes and systems.<sup>30</sup>

I find Holland's analysis utterly convincing, and only intend to emphasise slightly more than she does how Mitya's fate is sealed by the dubious eloquence of

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<sup>30</sup> Kate Holland, 'The Legend of the *Ladonka* and the Trial of the Novel', in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004), pp. 192-99.

the lawyers, whose linguistic acrobatics intentionally mislead (in the prosecutor's case) the peasant jury, or pass entirely over their heads (in the case of the defence attorney's). In this respect, Ippolit Kirillovich turns out, surprisingly, to be the sharper of the two, despite his less illustrious career to date. His key weapon in portraying the *priamolineinost'* of Mitya's actions is *analogy*, as he tries to convince the jury that the murder was accomplished as written. Like Eliot's analogists, he uses analogy as a finalising tool that seeks to compress the dynamic unpredictability of individual life into the mould of syllogism.<sup>31</sup> He conceives of a general category of criminal who "would have" acted in a particular way, and measures the actions surrounding the murder against this criteria: 'соскочил он именно для того, чтоб убедиться: жив или убит единственный свидетель его злодеяния [...] так как не мог соскочить в сад по какому-нибудь другому поводу, влечению или чувству' [15, 154-55; my emphasis]. It is highly doubtful that Ippolit Kirillovich actually believes his own rhetoric here, for he has previously identified Mitya's broad nature as containing within it the vying impulses of the beauty of the Madonna and the beauty of Sodom. But Ippolit Kirillovich knows his audience well: the jury itself is made up of peasants and petty-merchants most of whom had never read a single book [15, 93]. By creating analogies which directly correlate Mitya's actions with those of a "typical criminal", Ippolit Kirillovich exploits the simplicity of the jury: had they read books, they might be better placed to discern the multiple meanings of words, just as bookworm Maggie Tulliver can. As it is, the prosecutor knows that spurious logical analogies and syllogism are better suited to his aims: *murderers*

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<sup>31</sup> On syllogism as a development from analogy, see Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. by Ephraim Bischoff et al, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 407.

*behave this way, Mitya behaved this way, therefore Mitya must be a murderer.*<sup>32</sup> Such logic leads to false conclusions, just as, in *Middlemarch*, Mrs Dollop's did: *Lydgate is a doctor, doctors cut everybody up, therefore Lydgate cuts everybody up* [MM, 723]. Fetyukovich fails in spite of his superior eloquence because he has misjudged his audience, because the peasant and petty-bourgeois jurors are not ready to embrace a belief system in which the correspondence between words and their referents is complicated to such a degree that even the most customary definitions are rendered meaningless: 'в настоящем же деле отец, покойный Федор Павлович Карамазов, нисколько не подходил под то понятие об отце, которое сейчас сказалось нашему сердцу' [15, 168]. If it seems at any point as though things are going Fetyukovich's way, this is because his speech is primarily for the benefit of an audience he wants to dazzle, rather than for a jury he wants to convince. He plays to the gallery (an appropriate metaphor in this most theatrical of trials), which is made up of journalists, merchants and middle-class women, and readers who are more likely to be swayed by abstract rhetoric. For the jury, however, the meaning of "father" is not negotiable, and they prove unable to understand Fetyukovich's claim that the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich cannot be called parricide [15, 172]. For Fetyukovich is perfectly happy to admit that Mitya may have struck the fatal blow, but he errs in basing Mitya's defence on semantics: does such an act constitute the murder of one's father, since Fyodor Pavlovich reneged on his fatherly duties? The formulation 'убил, но не виновен' [15, 177] might make for effective oratory, but it

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<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin was particularly incensed by such pigeon-holing of Mitya's personality, arguing that the court lawyers were playing at second-hand psychology. For Bakhtin, it was not right to call Dostoevsky a psychologist at all, the discipline for him being cognate with the reduction of a person's consciousness to a play of unconscious, biological, or chemical forces beyond his control. This formulation belongs to Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 266.

does not win over the jurors, for whom such a complication is too complex.<sup>33</sup> However, just as Eliot did not evince nostalgia for the simple linguistic correspondences of Mr Tulliver, neither does Dostoevsky applaud this provincial simplicity: clearly, the jury got it wrong. But so did Fetyukovich, for the obverse turns out to be true: *Mitya is guilty, but he did not kill him.*

## **The Uses and Abuses of Gossip in Province and Novel**

My discussion so far has dealt with language as a product of individual consciences, as I have examined the ways in which individuals exploit their linguistic felicity to manipulate those provincials whose verbal apparatus is more staunchly referential. But as well as effecting consequences in the social sphere, language also *emanates from* the social sphere. As Bakhtin argued, language is not only the object of linguistics and semiotics, but of *metalinguistics*, by which he meant it to be understood that an utterance can only be comprehended as the product of a given set of social circumstances and a given matrix of human interactions. Language, according to Bakhtin, is intrinsically dialogic, born of and directed to community.<sup>34</sup> Given Bakhtin's insight into the dialogical nature of Dostoevsky's work and his analysis of the role played by other people's words [*chuzhie slova*] in the world of the novel, it is surprising that he devotes so little attention to gossip as a discrete mode of discourse, since this form of communication is born, by necessity, of community and consists, by definition, of other people's words. Before testing whether some of

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<sup>33</sup> One suspects Fetyukovich might have had more luck in the city. In the *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky takes urban juries to task for acquitting criminals who are clearly guilty on the basis of spurious conjectures. See, for example, Gary Saul Morson, 'Introductory Study', in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 1, trans. by Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), pp. 1-117. Here, pp. 40-47.

<sup>34</sup> On this, see Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, esp. ch. 4.

Bakhtin's theories about language more generally can illuminate the function of gossip in the provincial novels of Dostoevsky and Eliot, I provide a brief survey of some of the critical work that has been devoted to this mode of discourse in recent years.

Despite religious injunctions against gossip (e.g. I Timothy 5.13 where gossips are equated with idlers and busybodies), there is no shortage of scholars who seek to redeem this form of discourse. First among its recent defenders was Priscilla Meyer Spacks, who argued that gossip offers many positive benefits to those who indulge in it: it is pleasurable, creates a sense of solidarity and identity within social groups, empowers those (usually women) who participate in it and thereby challenge the official narratives of public life (usually scripted by men), and opens up worlds of possibility to otherwise disenfranchised speakers, allowing them to speculate about a wider world to which they have no direct access.<sup>35</sup> Since Spacks, scholars from across the academic disciplines have joined in the defence. A volume edited by the psychologist Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *Good Gossip*, was published in 1994;<sup>36</sup> the anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar suggests that gossip is the goal of human evolution;<sup>37</sup> and Kirsten A. Pond has recently published a penetrating article arguing that gossip succeeds as a mode of epistemology when more rational, systematic, and empirical modes fail.<sup>38</sup> Critics such as Spacks do not insist, of course, that gossip is a uniformly beneficent mode of discourse. "Bad" gossip (that is, gossip intended to harm or malign) does exist. But since her aim is to

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<sup>35</sup> See Priscilla Meyer Spacks, 'In Praise of Gossip', *The Hudson Review*, 34 (1982), 19-38; and *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), especially pp. 3-23.

<sup>36</sup> *Good Gossip*, ed. by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Robin Dunbar, *Gossip, Grooming and the Evolution of Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Kirsten A. Pond, 'Harriet Martineau's Epistemology of Gossip', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 69.2 (2014), 175-207.

rehabilitate gossip, she is careful to note that bad gossip is ‘infrequently evident in our living rooms’.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst gossip in the novels of Eliot and Dostoevsky is often utilised to positive effect by narrators and characters, its more malign aspects are nevertheless ever-present. Using Bakhtin’s categories of monologism and polyphony, we can begin to construct a taxonomy of gossip within the novels, and to explore in more detail exactly what constitutes “good” and “bad” gossip for these writers.

The central paradox of gossip for Eliot and Dostoevsky can be stated like this: gossip, in theory, should be a *polyphonic* mode of speech. If individuals, each with their own consciousnesses, come together to engage in conversation, then the result should be a dialogue in which no one belief system is *a priori* preferenced to another. Through this coming-together in dialogue, truth can be constructed.<sup>40</sup> After all, as Bakhtin had argued, polyphony arises out of a ‘plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses’.<sup>41</sup> However, the polyphonic potential of gossip in the novels is frequently arrested because the voices that produce gossip are precisely *merged* and *derivative* (rather than *unmerged* and *independent*). Individuals in Eliot and Dostoevsky’s fiction frequently do not come together to engage in meaningful dialogue. Rather than responding to the utterances of others (and thereby sharpening their own understanding), characters conspire to produce single, finalised narratives that promote closure. Thus, Morson and Emerson’s comment on Bakhtin’s concept

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<sup>39</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> As Morson and Emerson note, the polyphonic novel is not a relativist novel in which “anything goes” in the moral sphere. Were there no truth to be found, dialogue would not be necessary, since each character would be left to his own, unchallenged worldview. Only because there is a shared faith in a truth-building enterprise is dialogue necessary. See Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, pp. 234-37.

<sup>41</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 6.

of monologism, whilst not addressing gossip as a phenomenon, can be appropriated to cover this mode of discourse:

[In the monologic novel] a system can be comprehended and fully contained by a *single* consciousness—in principle, by any consciousness with sufficient intellectual power. Even if a thought has been produced collectively [as in gossip—PC], it is imagined as spoken by a single abstract entity: science, history, or the spirit and age of a people. Individuals can either accept or reject the truth, but as individuals, they do not participate in its content.<sup>42</sup>

Instead of polyphony, gossip has the potential to produce monologism. In particular, it does so when individual consciousnesses surrender themselves to, or merge with, the collective, divesting themselves of the right and responsibility to exercise independent judgement. Consequently, I think that Tatyana Pirusskaya (in the first article-length comparative study of Dostoevsky and Eliot of which I am aware) overstates her case when she argues for the inherently polyphonic nature of gossip.

She writes:

Сплетня обеспечивает возможность общения, то есть содержит в себе установку на контакт и сотворчество; сплетня неизбежно субъективна, поэтому даже в простейшем случае ставит слушателя (и читателя) перед проблемой выбора: доверяю я этой истории или нет?<sup>43</sup>

Such a statement would hold only if the characters who gossiped were bestowed with (or attained) a subjectivity or consciousness that was able to sustain an independent point of view. Many of the characters in Eliot's novels in particular, however, are denied such a consciousness; rather they function as what William Deresiewicz calls a 'unitary collective consciousness'.<sup>44</sup> The patrons of Mrs Dollop's can hardly be said to suffer from an existential burden of decision-making: 'sane people,' we are told of

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<sup>42</sup> Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 236.

<sup>43</sup> Tat'iana Pirusskaia, 'Spletnia kak mekhanizm: avtorefleksii v romanakh Dostoevskogo "Besy" i Dzhordzh Eliot "Midlmarch"', *Voprosy literatury*, 2 (2015), 193-216. Here, p. 199.

<sup>44</sup> William Deresiewicz, 'Heroism and Organicism in the Case of Lydgate', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 38.4 (1998), 723-40. Here, pp. 732.

Middlemarch society in general, ‘did what their neighbours did’ [MM, 9].<sup>45</sup> And whilst the unreliability of gossip may force the *reader* to question the accuracy of the tale told, this kind of reflective activity seems to be decidedly lacking among the gossips themselves. As a result, the multiple voices that participate in the dissemination of gossip converge to produce a narrative that determines (rather than questions) the reputation and motivations of other characters—that seeks, in Bakhtin’s terminology, to finalise them from without, quite apart from what they choose to reveal about themselves or from any factual evidence that might belie such conclusions.<sup>46</sup> We might therefore say that gossip becomes problematic when it is *talk*, rather than *talkers*, that secures control of the narrative, when the bearers of a message become complicit in their demotion to instruments of storytelling.

The triumph of message over bearer is emphasised by the narrator of *Middlemarch*, in reference to the Bulstrode affair:

Even the more definite scandal concerning Bulstrode’s earlier life was, for some minds, melted into the mass of mystery, as so much lively metal to be *poured out into dialogue*, and to take such fantastic shapes as heaven pleased. [MM, 720; my italics]

The dialogue mentioned here cannot be understood in the Bakhtinian sense of negotiated meaning, but is rather the final product of community chatter, for which individuals serve as unconscious mouthpieces. Eliot’s gossips speak in one voice, with a merged consciousness. Evidently, this approach to language is entirely at odds with Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony, since the polyphonic novel is one in which all ideas are uttered by distinct ideological bearers, such that words from one character

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<sup>45</sup> D. A. Miller, in a superlative study, divides the different perspectives on events in *Middlemarch* into three: (1) that of the community as a general body; (2) the protagonists; (3) the narrative voice. Pirusskaia’s comment could only be said to pertain to the “protagonists” (what I have called those characters with tragic potential) and not to the “community” of the novel. See D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 107-52.

<sup>46</sup> Pirusskaya comments that ‘[Верховенский] стремится создать и определенные образы других (Ставрогина, Юлии Михайловы) и сделать их убедительными для окружающих’ (‘Spletnia kak mekhanizm’, p. 209).

take on a different meaning when spoken by another: ‘Dostoevsky cannot and does not separate the thought from the person, from a living mouth’.<sup>47</sup> The gossiped words of Middlemarch, however, exist independently of any individual bearer; they belong to no-one in particular and serve to reduce individual subjectivity to a statement of fact. It is this systematic reduction of the human personality (in this case Bulstrode’s), which claims that the human subject can be understood wholly and at a glance, which gossip, at its worst, creates.

A further example of this tendency can be seen in *The Mill on the Floss*, where society chooses to interpret Maggie’s affair with Stephen Guest in such a way as to paint Maggie as the villain and Stephen as the victim:

Could anything be more detestable? A girl so much indebted to her friends [...] to lay the design of winning a young man’s affections away from her cousin, who had behaved like a sister to her! [...] There was always something quite questionable about her. [...] To the world’s wife there had always been something in Miss Tulliver’s very physique that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic harm. As for poor Mr Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise: a young man of five-and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases—he is really very much at the mercy of a designing bold girl. [*MF*, 491]

In the extract, it is clear that society—the world’s wife—has convened to impute onto Maggie a fixed assessment of her character, subjecting all her actions, and even her physique, to a finalised script or pattern.<sup>48</sup> She has become, to borrow from Middlemarch idiom, a mere ‘cluster of signs for her neighbours’ presuppositions’ [*MM*, 142]. By falsely ascribing motive to Maggie, the world’s wife comes to a conclusion that is quite at odds with the facts of the case (that it is Stephen who has acted contemptuously), and evidently owes nothing to Maggie’s own, torn assessment of her situation. Moreover, the matrons of St Oggs refuse to acknowledge that

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<sup>47</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Gary Saul Morson uses the term “semiotic totalitarianism” to describe the process by which all signs are taken as proof of a preexisting, overarching theory. See his *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 84.

Maggie acted morally in returning to the familial nest. In assigning to Maggie a finalised reputation, the townsfolk of St Ogg's perform the same task as a monologic author. By this I mean that they allow themselves a greater liberty than that to which they can legitimately lay claim: they assume an ability to read and reveal the inner life of an Other.<sup>49</sup> But unlike the author George Eliot, the residents of St Ogg's are unable to perform this task: whereas Eliot really can, god-like, divulge the thoughts and motivations of her characters, the townsfolk of *The Mill on the Floss* have no such divine insight, and as such they read Maggie wrongly.

In Dostoevsky's novels, gossip is similarly imbued with the damaging potential to determine reputations from without, and it frequently functions according to the principle of linearity [*priamolineinost'*] that Ippolit Kirillovich exhibits at the trial. As Carol Apollonio has argued, for example, Svidrigailov's reputation in *Crime and Punishment* is determined not on the basis of his self-revelation or authorial insight, but according to gossip and rumours that seek to malign his character—a character that his actual behaviour in the text seems not to warrant.<sup>50</sup> In *The Brothers Karamazov*, gossip creates such identities and reputations from birth, as it is rumour that establishes Fyodor Pavlovich's paternity of Smerdyakov (and cements him as the bastard of the Karamazov clan). In the chapter that deals with Smerdyakov's nativity, we learn that Fyodor Pavlovich 'клятвенно уверял, что тогда и он вместе со всеми ушел' [14, 91], i.e. that, after a night of carousing, he had not separated from his

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<sup>49</sup> In *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 4-6, Dorrit Cohn argues that this is the privilege of the fictional narrator, since in real life we cannot, of course, see into other people's minds. I return to Cohn's work in chapter 4.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets: Reading against the Grain* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), chapter 4.

Although he does not focus on rumour as a discrete category of discourse, William Leatherbarrow has shown how Myshkin's identity in *The Idiot* is determined by the interpretations others impute to him rather than by any more reliable disclosures made by the narrator, or, indeed, by the Prince himself (who, Leatherbarrow demonstrates, is enigmatically silent for much of the novel). See his article 'Misreading Myshkin and Stavrogin: the Presentation of the Hero in *Idiot* and *Besy*', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 78.1 (2000), 1-19.

drinking circle to rape Stinking Lizaveta. As readers, we do not know whether or not Fyodor's oath is true, and since he is a practised liar we are not particularly inclined to trust him. But the objective truth of the matter is, in fact, a secondary issue, as the rumour of his involvement with Lizaveta takes on a life of its own. Indeed, the uncertainty of his paternity is explicitly stated by the narrator:

никто этого не знает наверно и никогда не знал, но месяцев через пять или шесть все в городе заговорили с искренним и чрезвычайным негодованием о том, что Лизавета ходит беременная, спрашивали и доискивались: чей грех, кто обидчик? Вот тут-то вдруг и *разнеслась по всему городу странная молва*, что обидчик есть самый этот Федор Павлович. *Откуда взялась эта молва?* Из той ватаги гулявших господ как раз оставался к тому времени в городе лишь один участник, да и то пожилой и почтенный статский советник, обладавший семейством и взрослыми дочерьми и который уж отнюдь ничего бы не стал распространять, если бы даже что и было; прочие же участники, человек пять, на ту пору разъехались. Но *молва прямешенько указывала на Федора Павловича* и продолжала указывать. Конечно, тот не очень-то даже и претендовал на это: каким-нибудь купчишкам или мешанам он и отвечать не стал бы [14, 92; my emphasis].

The lack of material evidence does not arrest the spread of rumour. Moreover, on the basis of the textual evidence, it seems more likely that the convict Karp fathered Smerdyakov: the narrator himself believes that such a surmise is plausible [*pravopodobnyi*] and there is circumstantial evidence that, at the time of Smerdyakov's conception, was seen loitering around the town [14, 92]. Fyodor Pavlovich's silence on the matter could be construed either as tacit admission, but it could just as easily be interpreted as his pathological desire to own shameful epithets he knows to be untrue. At any rate, rumour here has taken on an independent existence, quite apart from its initial bearer. In the passage above it is almost personified, first dispersing itself around the town, and then pointing the finger of

accusation at Fyodor Pavlovich. In other words, an autonomous *molva*<sup>51</sup> utterly determines Smerdyakov's status as a lackey throughout the novel—a status that no other character will ever question.<sup>52</sup> Like Eliot, Dostoevsky warns of the dangers that accrue when rumours begin the spread of their own, autonomous accord, divorced from their original bearer.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, Madame Khokhlakova both believes and spreads rumours that are not undergirded by evidence. Upon hearing of Mitya's arrest, she exclaims:

Представьте, я все это предчувствовала! Я одарена этим свойством, все, что я себе ни представлю, то и случится. И сколько, сколько раз я смотрела на этого ужасного человека и всегда думала: вот человек, который кончит тем, что убьет меня. И вот так и случилось... То-есть, если он убил теперь не меня, а только отца своего, то, наверное, потому, что тут видимый перст божий, меня охранявший [14, 404].

Rumours allow her to conjecture an image of Mitya that cannot be sustained, either by his own self-revelation or by her own logic (she has not, after all, been killed). She later conjectures, on the basis of accounts she's been reading in a newspaper conspicuously entitled *Слухи*, that Mitya's murderous activity was occasioned by a fit of passion [15, 18]. The stories that circulate about the oldest Karamazov brother are morally questionable not because they conjecture Mitya's guilt (he *is*, in Zosima's sense, guilty) but because that conjecture is presented as fact, accepted without

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<sup>51</sup> *Molva* in Russian can mean both "rumour" and "talk". The word *spletnia* means gossip, but when countable in the plural—*spletni*— it can mean "rumours". "Rumour" can also be translated by "slukh". *Molva* derives from the root "mol", meaning "say" or "speak"; *slukh* is cognate with "slushat'", meaning "to listen" (cf. "slyshat'", "to hear"). "Spletnia" ultimately comes from "plesti", "to weave", i.e. to weave a story. The overlap here should warn us against too fine an distillation, but in the present extract, Dostoevsky is no doubt emphasising the autonomy of gossip: rumour itself is doing the talking, its human agents being absent. As Pirusskaia notes, *molva* implies a disembodied autonomy: 'у "молвы" [...] источника словно бы нет, она всеобща' ('Spletnia kak mekhanizm', p. 197).

<sup>52</sup> Even Alyosha fails to treat Smerdyakov as a brother. On this, see Anna Berman, 'Siblings in *The Brothers Karamazov*', *The Russian Review*, 68.2 (2009), 263-82, especially p. 278.

<sup>53</sup> This concern is also articulated in Dostoevsky's novella *Uncle's Dream*, where the old Prince's true character is established before he has chance to reveal it himself: 'по городу распространились странные слухи. Где начались они—неизвестно [...] Слух разрастался и укоренялся с необыкновенным упорством. Всего удивительнее, что он начал распространяться именно в то самое время, когда Марья Александровна приступила к своему давешнему разговору с Зиной об этом же самом предмете' [2, 336]. In the quotation, the reflexive verbs emphasise rumour's autonomy.

moderation, and leading to the erroneous conclusion that Mitya killed his father.

The willingness of the residents of Skotoprigonevsk to believe in the rumour of Fyodor's paternity does seem inexplicable given the evidence against it, although socio-historical studies have shown that rumour in pre-industrial Russia did tend to establish itself with alarming alacrity. In his chapter on peasant society in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, Franco Venturi has shown that rumour contributed to the Bezdna revolt, during which Anton Petrov circulated stories about decrees from the tsar guaranteeing serfs ownership of their land and assuring them that they would be immune from punishment if they made attempts to secure that land. Since these rumours mapped perfectly onto the peasantry's existing perceptions (that the tsar had been betrayed in his Emancipation programme by corrupt officials), the peasantry had little cause (or incentive) to disbelieve Petrov.<sup>54</sup> In other words, rumours take root when they align most closely with an environment of suspicion that already exists.<sup>55</sup> Such a view might also explain the enduring success of the myth that Boris Godunov was responsible for the murder of Prince Dmitry. In her work on this legend, Caryl Emerson notes that Karamzin had initially viewed Boris Godunov charitably in a text of 1802. But, for good or ill, Boris was a usurper and with the ascension of a more contemporary usurper in the Tuileries, it became expedient for Karamzin and his readers to let the initial rumours of Boris's malevolent complicity

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<sup>54</sup> Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, trans. by Francis Haskell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), especially chapter 7, "The Peasant Movement". On the myths that the peasantry held about the tsar (whom they usually held to be a benevolent father, not authoritarian despot), see Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), especially chapter 1.

However, we must also note that the presence of merchants, shopkeepers, monks, and the petty-bourgeoisie in Skotoprigonevsk prevents us from calling it a "peasant" community. The majority of its residents would likely be literate and thus be not wholly reliant on oral tales (rumour) for their news. On literacy rates in nineteenth century Russia, see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learnt to Read: Literacy and Popular Culture, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> On this, see also Pond, 'Harriet Martineau's Epistemology of Gossip', p. 193.

hold sway.<sup>56</sup> It was these rumours, rather than Karamzin's earlier, more dispassionate historical account, that Pushkin allowed to propel his own version of the legend. Thus the residents of Skotoprigonevsk echo a general tendency to accord significant weight to rumour—a tendency that might (perhaps) be diminished in a more liberal society with a free(r) press. At any rate, it is this unchallenged rumour in *The Brothers Karamazov* that determines Smerdyakov's own perception of his nativity (which he himself does not seem to doubt) and, if it does not directly cause his act of parricide, it at least contributes to it.

### Gossip, Plot, and Narrative Design

Твой Турнир напоминает Турниры W. Scotta. Брось этих немцев и обратись к нам православным; да полно тебе писать *быстрые* повести с романическими переходами—это хорошо для поэмы байронической. Роман требует *болтовни*.<sup>57</sup>

—Pushkin (in a letter to A. A. Bestuzhev)

Gossip in the novels of Eliot and Dostoevsky does not merely function as commentary on a character's personality, reputation, or motivation. Rather, it is a discourse utilised by the novelists themselves to (in Spacks's words) 'impel plot'.<sup>58</sup> Even where the plots it generates are destructive, it is nevertheless sanctioned as an artistic device that gives momentum to the narrative itself—and, as Pushkin suggests, a momentum that operates on a decidedly vernacular plane, one ideally suited to quotidian world of the unRomantic, unpoetic nineteenth-century province.

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<sup>56</sup> See Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 59 (and chapter 2 more generally).

<sup>57</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 16 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii SSSR, 1937-1949), XIII (1937), p. 180.

<sup>58</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p. 7.

The events of the provincial town, be they personal tragedies or social calamities, are largely influenced by gossip. ‘Far from simply narrating events,’ D. A. Miller argues in relation to the rumour that brings Rosamond and Lydgate together, ‘gossip substantially shapes them’.<sup>59</sup> Gillian Beer has compared gossip to another circulatory mechanism, the heart, which pumps blood around the body: gossip, like the heart, gives *Middlemarch* a ‘strikingly synchronic and forward-moving quality’.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, in the work of both authors, the narrative is stewarded by gossips. In *The Mill on the Floss*, for example, news of Maggie’s fatal trip to Mudgate is not broken by Maggie herself, but by Bob Jakin who saw Maggie alight from her vessel; by the time Maggie arrives home, Tom has already had chance to prime his ‘unbending, unmodifiable’ response to his sister’s transgression [*MF*, 483]. In *Middlemarch*, news of Casaubon’s codicil is circulated by Dorothea’s maid, Tantripp, who disperses the tidings as bees do pollen [*MM*, 599]. In *The Devils*, news of Stepan Trofimovich’s engagement to Dasha Shatova is public before the official announcement [e.g. 10, 90]. And in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is the insufferable gossips Rakitin and Madame Khokhlakova who delight in spreading news of Zosima’s death [14, 318; 14, 347].

Dostoevsky and Eliot use a series of metaphors to describe how news is disseminated so quickly through the medium of gossip, which is variously compared to a fire, a bad smell, an infection, and a disease. Gossip in *Middlemarch* spreads ‘like the smell of fire’ [*MM*, 718], and the rumours of Stavrogin’s identity as Ivan the Tsarevich in *The Devils* are not coincidentally accompanied by arson [10, 325]. The exposure of Bulstrode takes place during a meeting about the town’s preparedness to

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<sup>59</sup> D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents*, p. 124.

<sup>60</sup> Gillian Beer, ‘Circulatory Systems: Money and Gossip in *Middlemarch*’, *Cahiers Victoriens & Edouardiens*, 26 (1987), 47-62. Here, p. 51.

deal with a cholera epidemic, and the committee members do not want Bulstrode to infect them with his moral weaknesses; however, Lydgate is more acute when he identifies gossip itself as a dangerous miasma: ‘there’s something poisonous in the air of public rooms,’ he tells Mrs Bulstrode [MM, 746].<sup>61</sup> In *The Devils*, the Shpigulin factory is described as a ‘рассадник болезни’ (the disease in question being cholera) [10, 270], with the susceptibility of the Shpigulin men to disease finding its complement in their susceptibility to rumour [10, 270]. Meanwhile, news of the stench from Zosima’s corpse spreads as quickly as the stench itself; like an epidemic, it does not discriminate between the righteous and the unrighteous, as the news ‘облетело весь скит и всех богомольцев – посетителей скита [...] а наконец, чрез самый малый срок, достигло и города и взволновало в нем всех, и верующих и неверующих’ [14, 298].

Gossip, then, is employed as part of narrative design to accelerate the plot, as well as to hold audience attention. The provincial town, with its proximate residents, is a particularly amenable environment for gossip, since it is able to infiltrate all classes with alacrity, whilst also affording some measure of distance to allow characters the opportunity to engage in clandestine conversations.<sup>62</sup> Here again it is necessary to emphasise the provincial town’s “in-between” status, that is, a social space in between the city and the country. A depersonalised city is less likely to provide the kind of personal investment in a narrative that is necessary for gossip to flourish: we do not gossip about people we do not know, and the city is full of

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<sup>61</sup> The image of a poisonous atmosphere is repeated in *Daniel Deronda*, when Rev. Gascoigne likens gossip to ‘a sort of smoke that comes from the dirty tobacco pipes of those who diffuse it’ [DD, 118]. In Gascoigne’s case, however those rumours would have been better heeded.

<sup>62</sup> For Pirusskaia, it is the location of the provincial town away from the central spaces of the capital that allows gossip to flourish: the small town is characterised by a ‘теснота коммуникательного пространства’ which ‘ограничивает возможности связи с внешним миром, но делает тем более интенсивными внутренние “каналы сообщения”, по которым непрерывно передаются слухи’ (‘Spletnia kak mekhanizm’, 196, 194).

strangers; moreover, the commercial and functional character of the city leaves its residents with insufficient time to gossip. Likewise, gossip is less likely to gain traction in the primal *Gemeinschaft*, since private life did not exist in an environment where life was lived in such close quarters, and gossip is only possible where there is the semblance of a private life to be divulged. The small town enables gossip to flourish, and without it we would have to wait for events to proceed “on foot”, whereas the airborne (or waterborne) method of dissemination is much more effective. The narrator of *Devils* is well aware of the need to strategise in this way, since, even for the ablest storytellers, ‘нельзя занимать собою публику более двадцати минут безнаказанно’ [10, 365].<sup>63</sup> Aware of the limitations of a purely factual account, the chronicler of the novel’s opening ‘становится романистом внутри романа,’ writes Pirusskaia.<sup>64</sup> Or, as Kariakin describes the evolution of the text, G—v begins, like Dostoevsky, as a collector of snippets of information disparate sources, but he soon gives them artistic (novelistic) expression:

Хроникер оказался сильным художественным противовесом известной предвзятой тенденциозности Достоевского. В немалой степени именно благодаря Хроникеру роман, первоначально задуманный как “памфлет”, превратился в “поэму”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John Plotz, in ‘The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel’ *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (2011), 405-16, argues that Eliot does not intend to engross her readers in a text so that they might forget about the real world outside the pages of the novel. Rather, her fiction is *semi-detached* since her reader ‘is imagined as getting lost in a book, but remaining simultaneously aware of the real world’ (pp. 405-6). This aesthetic experience is compared to the reading of *Crime and Punishment*, which R. L. Stevenson considered to be a book that simply could not be put down. However, the serial publication of Dostoevsky’s works—enjoyed by his original readers, but not those who, like Stevenson, read the novel in a complete volume—suggests that the author was aware that his readers would experience a rupture similar to that Plotz regards as intrinsic to Eliot’s novelistic project. Regardless, my point about gossip here is that it is an *entertaining* narrative strategy which, if it does not compel readers to lose all sense of the outside world, at least provides an incentive to return to the text and get lost in it—if only for a time.

<sup>64</sup> Pirusskaia, ‘Spletnia kak mekhanizm’, 212.

<sup>65</sup> Iu. F. Kariakin, ‘Zachem Khroniker v “Besakh”?’ in *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. by G. M. Fridlender, vol. 5 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1983), pp. 113–31. Here, p. 125. On the artistic devices used by G—v, see Vladimir E. Alexandrov, ‘The Narrator as Author in Dostoevskij’s *Besy*’, *Russian Literature*, 15 (1984), 243–54.

For him, gossip is an artistic device that ensures (insofar as any device can) that the reader keeps reading. Spacks has this to say about Marlow, the narrator of Joseph Conrad's *Chance*; it can be quoted almost verbatim to describe the narrative strategy of *Devils* (and, indeed, Dostoevsky's own practice of collating newspaper scraps on his Dresden sojourn):

he builds his narrative, piece by piece, from scraps he sees and hears, and generates a novel, not just an interrupted oral tale... Yet the reader's fascination approximates that of hearing an extended and absorbing piece of gossip.<sup>66</sup>

Evidently, the use of gossip, whilst giving the advantages of speed and entertainment, compromises the narrator's objectivity, as the chronicler is woefully unable to provide the stamp of omniscient authority. In arguing this, I am somewhat in disagreement with Carol Apollonio in her fascinating study of the unreliability of language in Dostoevsky's works. Regarding *The Devils*, Apollonio maintains that we should distrust the words of characters such as Stavrogin, since words in Dostoevsky are always less reliable than silence. Rather than relying on Stavrogin's deceptive self-revelation (Apollonio goes as far as to argue that he did not commit the defilement of the young girl), we should rely only on what we "see" in the novel, that is, what the narrator tells us. Apollonio writes: 'the narrator's simple, direct indicative allows for no doubt: Peter Verkhovensky masterminds the violent crime in the part [...] He is guilty. In the case of Stavrogin, by contrast, guilt is hidden in layers of [his own] narration'.<sup>67</sup> However, this argument does not take into account, it seems to me, that the narrator of *The Devils* never provides 'simple, direct indicative', and that he himself relies heavily on gossip to tell his tale. As a character in the tale, as well as the author of it, G—v is no more reliable than Stavrogin. Even at the height of

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<sup>66</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets*, p. 129.

omniscience he attains in the latter parts of the novel, he relies heavily on conjecture, on what “must” or “might” have been said, and he admits his own unreliability quite explicitly: ‘я сам не видел ничего, но зато все уверяли, что видели, хотя все-то уж никак не могли этого увидеть за суматохой, а разве иные’ [10, 261].<sup>68</sup> Indeed, one might argue that G—v’s novel consists in the very accretions of narrative that Apollonio suggests Dostoevsky disdains: if we must distrust every event that the reader does not personally “witness”, we could trust nothing at all. In G—v’s retrospective narrative *everything* is unwitnessed: it is all brought to us in retrospect, and all mediated through the voice of the gossip *extraordinaire*. Whilst Apollonio rightly cautions us against taking language at face value, language remains the preferred medium of the author of the text and the author in the text. For Dostoevsky and G—v, the objectivity that is lost through the reliance on gossip is compensated for by the aesthetic and structural pleasure it provides.

The idea that gossip may serve this positive purpose is not, of course, unique to Dostoevsky. However, his aesthetic redemption of the discourse is thrown into revealing relief when compared to the presentation of gossip in society novels. In her work on Turgenev, Jane Costlow has shown that for Turgenev gossip is always an inauthentic discourse that the author must expose and correct. In Turgenev’s world, it bespeaks pretence and malice, paying lip-service to morality while delighting in scandal. In a statement that could not hold for Dostoevsky’s (or Eliot’s) novelistic universe, Costlow argues that for many of Turgenev’s characters ‘lying and gossip are [...] inseparable’.<sup>69</sup> Gossip *per se* in Eliot and Dostoevsky is rather *amoral*: it may be authentic or inauthentic. There are characters who are compromised by gossip, but

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<sup>68</sup> An overview of the various positions taken apropos of the shifting narrative focus of *Devils* can be found in David Stromberg’s article, ‘The Enigmatic G—v: A Defence of the Narrator-Chronicler in Dostoevsky’s *Demons*’, *The Russian Review*, 71.3 (2012), 460-81.

<sup>69</sup> Jane Costlow, *Worlds within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 37.

there are many others who find it socially or aesthetically useful. This ambivalence is summarised well by Pirusskaya:

Сплетня [...] может выглядеть и как небылица, и как вполне здоровое суждение [...] Догадки, высказываемые сплетниками, нередко изображены как явный гротеск, фантазии, происходящие из ограниченности, однако двойная ирония заключается в том, что они могут оказываться неожиданно меткими и пронизательными.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, Eliot's note of ethical caution against a variation of gossip that seeks to finalise the individual from without, is countered by another, more exemplary mode of gossip. In *Middlemarch*, Mrs Cadwallader, the 'diplomatist of Tipton and Freshitt' [*MM*, 61], utilises the discourse to positive effect. Keenly alive to the contoured landscape of provincial life, Mrs Cadwallader is a shrewd observer of social relationships and is a gifted matchmaker, and she uses her skills as a gossip to weave the most successful marriage of the novel: that between Celia and Sir James. She uses gossip as a means of expanding Celia's vision for herself, encouraging her to explore the possibility of a match with the amiable baronet in the wake of Dorothea's rejection of him (exploration, according to Spacks, being 'gossip's mode').<sup>71</sup> She also uses gossip to protect Dorothea from the rumours circulating about Rosamond and Ladislaw, and Sir James asks her to inform Dorothea of the rumours lest she hear them from a less benevolent source: 'Mrs Cadwallader, who already knew the gossip, would think it no compromise of herself to repeat it as often as required' [*MM*, 628]. Needless to say, she agrees to his request. Thus, gossip for Mrs Cadwallader is a means of creating alliances and protecting the vulnerable, as she tells stories for the good of the community. (We might contrast her behaviour with fictional characters such as Betsy Tverskaya in *Anna Karenina*, who also likes to spread rumours of illicit affairs—but who does so without the benevolence of Eliot's matriarch.)

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<sup>70</sup> Pirusskaia, 'Spletnia kak mekhanizm', p. 203.

<sup>71</sup> Spacks, 'In Praise of Gossip', p. 34.

## The Role of Minor Characters in the Spread of Gossip

As Spacks has shown, gossip functions as a tool of the disenfranchised to wrest power from the official keepers of discourse. For Spacks, it is women in particular who are attracted by gossip's liberating potential: women, forbidden entry to the structures of power ('rarely on stage, always whispering in the wings'<sup>72</sup>), use their status as outsiders to observe and comment on the world from which they have been jettisoned. Spacks's contention that gossip is a mode of discourse favoured by the disenfranchised can be extended, on a literary plane, to a consideration of minor characters of both genders, and it is my contention that these figures, whispering in the wings, use gossip as a means of wresting power over the narrative from its main protagonists. One might be forgiven, after all, for reading *Middlemarch* and forgetting the role played by Mrs Abel or Mr Hawley's clerk. But it is from the housekeeper of Stone Court that news of Raffles's illness emerges, and it is from Fletcher, the clerk, that this news is shared among the men of the Green Dragon and Mrs Dollop's.

In *Devils* Liputin, a relatively minor character, seems to be the most significant gossip, and he himself is spied on by his maid Aglaya [10, 418]. Aware that servants spread gossip, Varvarya Petrovna orders the door closed when discussing Stepan Trofimovich's engagement to Dasha to prevent Nastasya from listening in [10, 60]. Her tactic doesn't work, since Nastasya, we learn, runs over to Liza's nanny, Alyona Frolovna, to tell her the news [10, 90]. The narrator himself is certain that servants are the first port of call when assessing the origin of any story.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 20. A contrary position is taken by Nicholas Emler, who argues that men are just as prone to gossip as women. See his 'Gossip, Reputation, and Social Adaptation', in *Good Gossip*, pp. 117-38, especially p. 120.

About the supposed slap on the face he asks:

Удивительно нам было то: через кого это все могло так скоро и точно выйти наружу? Ни одно из присутствовавших тогда лиц не имело бы, кажется, ни нужды, ни выгоды нарушить секрет происшедшего. *Прислуги тогда не было* [10, 167; my italics].<sup>73</sup>

The implication is clear: *had* servants been present, it would be only natural to suspect them of dissemination. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Smerdyakov, Fyodor's lackey, betrays the secret signals to Mitya. Rakitin, the monastery stooge, knew 'удивительно много [...] у всех-то он был, все-то видел, со всеми-то говорил, подробнейшим образом знал биографию Федора Павловича и всех Карамазовых'; he collects the rumours from Skotoprigonevsk and writes them up for the national press [15, 99]. In *Middlemarch*, gossip seems to circumvent the upper echelons of society altogether: 'When *Tantripp* [the Brooke sisters' help] was brushing my hair the other day,' Celia recalls, 'she said that *Sir James's man* knew from *Mrs Cadwallader's maid* that Sir James was to marry the eldest Miss Brooke' [MM, 36; my italics]. (Celia's use of the third person to refer to the sister she is directly addressing alerts us to the fact that she enjoys gossip herself: even when face to face with Dorothea she is happier spinning a tale *about* her rather than communicating *to* her.)<sup>74</sup>

Minor characters, especially those who are in positions of economic dependence, are important for the spread of gossip because they can go everywhere unseen, the narrator being unobliged to account for their every move.<sup>75</sup> Writing of

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<sup>73</sup> The role of servants in the spread of small-town gossip is not unique to these writers. In provincial Yonville, Monsieur Léon's nighttime parley with Emma Bovary circulates because 'Madame Tuvache, the Mayor's wife, *declared in her servant's hearing*, that *Madame Bovary was compromising herself*' (Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. by Mark Overstall, ed. by Terence Cave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.81). The first set of italics are mine, the second Flaubert's.

<sup>74</sup> These examples are only a small number of those that could be marshaled to illustrate the prominence of minor characters in the spread of gossip. As one of the characters in *Scenes of Clerical Life* comments, 'there's no holding servants' tongues' [SCL, 251].

<sup>75</sup> As Jan B. Gordon notes, Mrs Cadwallader, though by no means a servant, is similarly well positioned due to her status as the rector's wife; that is, she is part of the "establishment" of

Smerdyakov, Morson comments that he occupies a liminal, threshold position in the novel, allowing him to go in and out without being seen; meanwhile, his twin positions as cook and gatekeeper allow him to control what goes into the house, and what goes into the soup. The plot, Morson argues, ‘turns on Smerdyakov’s abuse of his role as a guard’.<sup>76</sup> Morson’s comment is helpful since minor characters—the Mrs Abels, the Nastasyas, the nannies and clerks—are close enough to the action to overhear conversations, and able to choose which of those conversations they wish to disseminate. Without them, we would be left with a novel of Dorotheas and Alyoshas, protagonists who never gossip.

Minor characters turn to gossip as a way of asserting their significance in a social or narrative superstructure that attempts to deny them that significance. G—v is a classic example of this. Despite his literary pretensions, he is not invited to speak on stage at the fete and is instead asked to act as a doorkeeper, keeping the riff-raff at bay. His own narrative, *The Devils*, sees him transform this apparently menial task into one of great significance as he stewards his narrative, deciding whom to include and when to include them. The tendency of Dostoevsky’s minor characters to brood over their status as shunned individuals before reclaiming their power is charted by Greta Matzner-Gore, who argues that it is ‘precisely their status as outsiders that gives them strength’: hidden from view, they will eventually break forth with powerful narratives of their own.<sup>77</sup> As Matzner-Gore argues elsewhere, the designation of a character as “minor” has ethical dimensions for Dostoevsky too, since the question

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Middlemarch, but separable from it when she needs to be; she has a trusted, but not overly authoritarian, position in society. See Jan B. Gordon, *Gossip and Subversion in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction: Echo’s Economies* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 263. (Regrettably, insights such as this are rare in Gordon’s deeply puzzling work.)

<sup>76</sup> Morson, ‘Verbal Pollution’, p. 225.

<sup>77</sup> See Greta Matzner-Gore, ‘From the Corners of the Russian Novel: Minor Characters in Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky’, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2014), p. 147.

arises as to whom we can consider “minor” (a particularly pertinent question for a writer so concerned with universal brotherhood): Smerdyakov, it turns out, is ostracised in the world of the novel and yet he is someone to whom we should be paying attention.<sup>78</sup>

Whilst minor characters are instrumental in spreading gossip and accelerating plot, there is a limit to the influence they can wield. After all, the structural integrity of the novel would break down entirely if they were allowed free rein over the spread of news. The value of gossip—a highly marketable commodity, according to Mr Bambridge [*MM*, 717]—will decrease if its suppliers are innumerable.<sup>79</sup> As Matzner-Gore puts it, polyphony cannot disintegrate into cacophony.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the autonomous nature of gossip and rumour, once ignited, cannot remain unchecked by narrators who see it as their duty to retard its spread. Moreover, the texts’ integrity would be compromised as gossip is frequently unreliable. Writing on gossip, Heidegger argues that its unreliability—a virtue of its second-hand nature—gives the listener only superficial understanding, since he has reneged on the task of ‘genuinely understanding’ and has not had to get to grips with the primary material, not had to ‘make the thing [his] own’.<sup>81</sup> Heidegger’s concerns certainly seem justified in *The Brothers Karamazov*, for characters imbibe messages without ever challenging themselves to investigate the premises on which they are built.<sup>82</sup> Ivan’s article in

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<sup>78</sup> Greta Matzner-Gore, ‘Kicking Maximov out of the Carriage: Minor Characters, Exclusion, and *The Brothers Karamazov*’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 58.3 (2014), 419-36.

<sup>79</sup> Gillian Beer has argued that both wealth and reputation (as established by gossip) are equally important in determining a character’s worth in the novel. See Gillian Beer, ‘Circulatory Systems’, p. 54. Spacks looks at the connection between word “speculation” in its monetary and narrative senses. See Spacks, *Gossip*, chapter 8.

<sup>80</sup> Matzner-Gore, ‘Kicking Maximov out of the Carriage’, p. 434.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Spacks, *Gossip*, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Bakhtin was also wary of second-hand judgements for a slightly different reason: the absolved one of the need to dialogise with any given individual, and are predicated on the mistaken belief that we can know someone “from the outside”; second-hand truth ‘degrad[es] and deaden[s]’ man (*Problems*, p. 59) since we can never fully know the depths of someone else’s personality, which we always approach “from the outside”. See Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 264-68.

which he postulates that everything is permitted if God does not exist takes on a life of its own as it is repeated orally in a variety of different contexts. His theory, Miusov reports, was discussed at a local gathering of ladies [14, 64]; one might speculate as to whether Khokhlakova was present at the gathering, for later in the novel she declares to Alyosha, ‘простите, что я вас называю иногда Алешей, я старуха, мне все позволено’ [15, 13]. The phrase vaguely recalls Ivan’s maxim that if God were shown not to exist, ‘тогда ничего уже не будет безнравственного, все будет позволено’ [14, 65]. The point is that Ivan’s theory has been perverted as it spreads: on the printed page of his article it constitutes a serious, metaphysical argument, but as it does the rounds in the Skotoprigonevsk rumour mill it is (mis)appropriated by eccentrics like Khokhlakova who use it to justify the most trivial of transgressions (calling Alyosha by his diminutive, rather than the more formal “Alexei Fyodorovich”).<sup>83</sup> ‘One can never be quite sure where [gossip] goes,’ writes Spacks, ‘how it changes in transmission, how and by whom it is understood.’<sup>84</sup> Mme Khokhlakova’s misappropriation of Ivan’s theory is one of its least harmful reincarnations (it is Smerdyakov who famously, and more seriously, mishears Ivan’s hypothetical clause in the indicative: the dependent clause *if God does not exist* becomes the independent assertion that *God does not exist* in order to justify the murder), but I think Khokhlakova’s example, perhaps because it is so well hidden in the text, serves to show just how far gossip can penetrate into provincial society. Ivan would learn too late (or had he chosen to ignore?) the lesson of *Felix Holt* that ‘there is hardly any mental misery worse than that of having our own serious phrases, our own rooted beliefs, caricatured by a charlatan or hireling’ [FH, 115].<sup>85</sup> Or to put it in

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<sup>83</sup> We note also that Ivan’s *future* vision (*vse budet позволено*) has become *present* (*vse позволено*).

<sup>84</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Of course, Smerdyakov’s actions are only a caricature insofar as they do not grasp the complexity of Ivan’s double-voiced word: Ivan both wants and doesn’t want his father dead.

Dostoevskian idiom, the characters of *The Brothers Karamazov* represent not a pure idea but an ‘идея, попавшая на улицу’ [10, 28].

Rumour—oral by its very nature—is an inherently *unstable* medium of communication, which can be corrected only when we engage in the task Heidegger sets for us: making the thing one’s own. This is something Kolya Krasotkin has yet to learn. All his ideas come to him as if at a second remove: he reads *translations* of French books, and when he calls himself a socialist, Alyosha muses that he is using words that aren’t his own (‘вы не свои слова говорите’ [14, 500]). His views, in fact, come from Rakitin and he is terrified of being discovered as a fake, as someone who hasn’t *read* the theories he expounds. When Alyosha challenges him about his attribution of an idea to the literary critic Belinsky, he says: ‘если не написал, то, говорят, говорил. Я это слышал от одного... впрочем, черт...’ [14, 501]. Here Kolya’s knowledge is at a triple level of remove: it has come via Rakitin (here unnamed), who is reporting what “they” say, what they say is that Belinsky “said” it. It seems fitting that writers who had initially made their living as critics and journalists, as members of a class who subsisted on second-hand summations of literary texts, should in their later career as novelists highlight the pitfalls of mediated discourse.<sup>86</sup> Whilst Dostoevsky’s fiction relies on gossip and second-hand accounts, he enjoins circumspection when confronting the words of others.

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<sup>86</sup> Leah Price suggests that Eliot was suspicious of the anthology as a genre because it might be relied upon by people who hadn’t read (purchased?) her novels for themselves. In other words, it might appeal not (as she hoped) to *re-readers*, but to *non-readers* of her novels, i.e. to those who wanted to circumvent the hard work of making the text their own. See her *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 134.

## Conclusion

The language of the provincial town in Dostoevsky and Eliot is both captivating and cautionary. The tragic and chaotic interplay of traditional and conservative worldviews, along with the diffuse and autonomous spread of gossip and rumour, are not curious adornments to the novel, but the very engine of its plot. But the plots to which small town language gives rise involve, as all plots do, an unedifying array of actions that the writers do not themselves endorse. In particular, the propensity of residents to use language to establish finalised reputations of their neighbours, reveals a baser human instinct which both writers view as condemnatory insofar as it ignores the multifaceted potential of each individual. But neither is society served by an anarchic language that rests on relativism: the divorce of word and referent, and the spread of gossip unchecked by the evidence of experience, benefits only those who are positioned to take advantage of others.

Nevertheless, the language of the town is scarcely disavowed in the novels. Both gossip and analogy are, after all, employed *by* the novelists as they carry out their ethical instruction. What is a novel—especially a realist novel—if not an analogy writ large? And what is a narrative if not a captivating tale of other people's woes? Eliot and Dostoevsky's novels redeem the language of the small town at the same time as they censure it. Wanting to transcend the rustic naivety of tradition, and unsure of the promises held out by modernity, these novelists not only highlight the deficiency of the soundscape of the small town, but transform it into something altogether more sonorous.

## Chapter 3

### The Heroic Surplus: Is Greatness Possible in the Chronotope of the Provincial Town?

Пусть будет не одна добродетель, но  
независимость и деятельность.  
—Pierre, in *War and Peace*<sup>1</sup>

Для частной жизни одной не живут люди с  
пламенной душой.  
—Alexander Herzen<sup>2</sup>

In his essay on the chronotope, Bakhtin defines the novel as ‘a large fiction influenced by biographical forms’.<sup>3</sup> Such a reductive definition has at least the virtue, in its final adjective, of asserting that novels must centralise a hero. This is largely taken for granted, even in the multi-hero plots of Dostoevsky and Eliot, especially because the most complex of those novels, *Middlemarch* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, begin with explicit statements that assert the centrality of a key protagonist. The novels test whether that centrality can hold.

In that light, it is useful to assess these authors’ conceptions of heroism precisely against their designated heroes. Can Miss Brooke survive as a heroine in *Middlemarch*, even as “Miss Brooke” dissolves into the tapestry of *Middlemarch*? Does Eliot want her to? Why does Dostoevsky defrock Alyosha Karamazov, and does this necessarily entail the collapse of the hagiographic ideal? In order to determine the extent to which these characters embody their authors’ heroic aspirations, it is useful to provide an overview of the heroic models they inherited,

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<sup>1</sup> L. N. Tolstói, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 20 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960-1965), VII (1963), p. 318.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1954-1964), XXI (1961), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 84-258. Here, p. 130.

rejected, or appropriated, before analysing the fate of their heroes in the unheroic chronotope of the provincial town in an age of reform. Whilst heroism may have been possible in epic adventures on the border, on the field of battle, or at sea, what becomes of it in the present tense of the novel, in the middling milieu of the provincial town, in communities that oppose heroic activity?

### **The Heroic Heritage and the Realist Novel**

When Karamzin came to dedicate his magisterial *History of the Russian State*, he articulated a belief that history was determined by the will of a single individual, one who, in this instance, incarnated the institution of tsarism: ‘История народа принадлежит Царю’.<sup>4</sup> This view was remarkably resilient throughout the nineteenth century, such that even opponents of autocracy, such as the Decembrists, idealised the Princes of Kievan Rus’ as exemplars of benevolent rule and civic responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Whilst Karamzin and the Decembrists differed as to the role of these regal figures, construing them respectively as the directors of history and models for emulation, they nevertheless ascribed singular historical significance to powerful individuals. Other influential representatives of this tradition include Thomas Carlyle, whose *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840)<sup>6</sup> attributed to a pantheon of Great Men the power to determine history, and Napoleon III, whose *History of Julius Caesar* (1865) balked at the suggestion that great rulers could be capable of anything

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<sup>4</sup> N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskago*, vol. 1 (St Petersburg: Smirdin, 1830).

<sup>5</sup> On the role assigned to Kievan princes in the poetry of the Decembrists, see Margaret Ziolkowsky, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

other than majestic acts, and asserted that the will of Caesar alone was ‘enough for the world to obey it’.<sup>7</sup>

Although neither Carlyle nor Napoleon III viewed greatness as the preserve only of military men or national leaders, both writers singled out for greatness a man who performed these two roles and who, since his ascendancy in the 1790s, was heralded as a force of history even by his enemies: Napoleon Bonaparte. They were not alone. In a letter of 1796, for example, the Russian general Suvorov spoke of him in superhuman terms: ‘Comme il va, ce jeune Bonaparte! C’est un héros, un géant, un sorcier. Il triomphe de la nature et des hommes; il a tourné les Alpes, comme si elles n’existaient pas’.<sup>8</sup> Even his detractors recognised his power, and when the Emperor of the French finally did turn against Russia’s interests in 1805, and against Russia itself in 1812, the apocalyptic language that surrounded his legend betrayed a belief that he hailed from no earthly kingdom: he was not only a pretender, but Anti-Christ.<sup>9</sup> Since he was a figure revered from England to Russia, his legend serves as a useful case study in respect of the ways literary culture across the continent portrayed the heroic ideal.

The initial extremes of feeling towards Napoleon were inevitably affected by his defeat, exile, and death, upon which his admirers and critics were forced to reassess his legacy, and, implicitly, to reassess whether it was any longer tenable, in an age of peace, to locate the heroic in a figure of military might. This reassessment charted different courses across the continent. In England, according to James Chandler, 1819 proved the decisive moment at which disillusionment with a model of heroic militarism set in (a model that, for many Romantic poets, was exemplified in

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<sup>7</sup> Napoleon III, *History of Julius Cæsar*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1865), p. xiv.

<sup>8</sup> A. V. Suvorov, *Pis'ma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), p. 311

<sup>9</sup> On the use of apocalyptic language about Napoleon, see Molly W. Wesling, *Napoleon in Russian Cultural Mythology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), chapter 1.

Napoleon). For Chandler, the events of Peterloo in August of that year, constituted a symbolic and literal moment at which public attention moved away from the battlefield and became more concerned with Britain's intractable social problems. As the heroes of Wellington's campaign massacred unarmed workers in St Peter's Field, it was clear that the glory days of the Napoleonic campaign were over.<sup>10</sup> Napoleon's currency as a reformer would outlive this date (in Carlyle, he is a warrior not on the battlefield but in the civic realm, rescuing the French state from the throes of anarchy),<sup>11</sup> but the military myth was moribund; Britain's own military hero, the Duke of Wellington, had no such reforming instincts to fall back on, and his reputation as Prime Minister never remotely approximated that of commander: his conduct in the Catholic Question, we read in *The Mill on the Floss*, had 'thrown [...] new light on his character' and it was now possible to 'speak slightingly of his conduct at the battle of Waterloo' [*MF*, 74].<sup>12</sup>

In France and Russia—where the figure of the Byronic hero, the titanic individual challenging and succumbing to fate, had a more fruitful and long-lasting legacy—the reassessment of Napoleon was more gradual. Stendhal, who admired the ideals of the French Revolution and detested the petty-bourgeois milieu of the Restoration, with its 'piddling hypocrisy' (in Auerbach's memorable phrase) and corrupt ruling classes,<sup>13</sup> created in Julien Sorel a superior individual born too late for his heroic aspirations, many of which are modelled on his reading of *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. But even Fabrice del Dongo, who was born in time for Waterloo, can do nothing to change the course of history: by the time Stendhal wrote his novel, that

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<sup>10</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See the lecture "Hero as King".

<sup>12</sup> The plot of *Middlemarch*, set in the late 1820s, takes place at a time when 'Wellington and Peel [were] generally depreciated' [*MM*, 357].

<sup>13</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 456.

battle was long since lost. For Stendhal, heroism in the post-Napoleonic age must express itself in virtues more personal than public. According to James Day, Julien comes to ‘reject conventional heroic norms [and ...] accept[s] a personal kind of heroism’, one of authenticity, integrity, serenity, and moral superiority.<sup>14</sup>

Just as Julien Sorel had to admit that military glory was forever out-of-reach for a man of his standing and epoch, so Vigny’s Captain Renaud of *Servitude et grandeur militaires* is forced to ‘temper [his] earlier disposition to equate the achievement of glory with military action’.<sup>15</sup> But it is with Napoleon himself, rather than his own unheroic milieu, that Vigny’s hero is dissatisfied: he comes to view him as a petty egoist, and is greatly more impressed by England’s Admiral Collingwood, who undertakes years of unsung service at sea for the protection of the Realm. Vigny’s work emphasises classical virtues such as honour, and suggests that civic commitment and service are worthy surrogates for military action.

In Russia, Pushkin’s conception of the heroic underwent a different evolution. In his 1815 poem “Napoleon on Elba” (1815), Pushkin presents a dynamic and powerful Napoleon, a Byronic figure in charge of his own destiny. In Andrew Kahn’s words, the poem contains ‘a rhapsody of militaristic tribute as the emperor yearns for the sound of battle’.<sup>16</sup> This view of Napoleon as a great military warrior, now smashed on the rocks of fate, is present also in Pushkin’s “Napoleon” (1821), written on the occasion of the Emperor’s death. However, in later poems written in ‘a world where military action no longer defined the heroic, [and in which] the new emphasis

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<sup>14</sup> James T. Day, *Stendhal’s Paper Mirror: Patterns of Self-Consciousness in His Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 187.

<sup>15</sup> Robert T. Denomé, ‘Alfred de Vigny’, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Nineteenth Century French Fiction Writers: Romanticism and Realism, 1800-1860*, vol. 119, ed. by Catharine Savage Brosman (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), pp. 312-33. Here, p. 326.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Kahn, *Pushkin’s Lyric Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 231.

was on the beauty of moral perfection as the measure of individual worth',<sup>17</sup> Pushkin chose to juxtapose military conceptions of heroism with virtues such as kindness, charity, and sacrifice. Kahn analyses Pushkin's poem 'The Hero' (1830) as a dialogue between the competing heroic claims of military glory and classical exemplarity,<sup>18</sup> suffice it here to say, however, that the image of Napoleon that came to dominate Russian literary culture after Pushkin's death was not drawn from his lyric poems, but from works such as *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. In the former narrative, Tatyana explores Onegin's study and finds a bust of Napoleon: it was on Napoleon, and Byron (whose portrait overlooks him), that Onegin had modelled himself, but Tatyana sees through the mask. The image of Napoleon is no longer exclusively that of a superhuman, but becomes the pathetic bourgeois upstart who seeks to establish himself in a myriad of love interests and petty rivalries. Napoleon the self-made-man is less conqueror than everyman ('мы все глядим в Наполеоны').<sup>19</sup>

The period in which this reassessment of Napoleon took place was coincident, in England, with the demise of Romanticism and the rise of the realist novel. In Russia, this process was delayed, but by the time of Belinsky's prominence in the late 1830s and early 1840s, it was clear that the novel was to be the definitive genre of the age. Alongside (or even causal of) this development of literary taste, was the rise of social history as a discipline. The most prominent of the social historians was Thomas Macaulay, who argued that history's most significant transformations 'are not achieved by armies, or enacted by senates [...] They are carried on in every

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 246-59.

<sup>19</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 16 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii SSSR, 1937-1949), VI (1937), p. 37 (chapter 2, stanza 14).

school, in every church, behind ten thousand counters, at ten thousand firesides'.<sup>20</sup> Even Carlyle, in his essay on Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1832), conceded that a time was coming when history would foreground the temple, workshop and social hearth, rather than the court, senate and battlefield.<sup>21</sup> A historiography that dealt with the lower orders, with manners, fashion, diet, and custom, at first competed with, but increasingly eclipsed, the historiography of the Great Man in all his guises.<sup>22</sup>

The question that arises is how the literature of Europe post-1840 (the year of Napoleon's final journey, and of Carlyle's lectures) can create heroes at all. In a world dominated by attention to the infinitesimal, by allegiance to science, by democracy, and (by and large) by peace at home, is there a place for an individual who inspires our confidence, admiration, and even worship? According to Chandler, the growing historical consciousness that occurred in the wake of Napoleon's defeat drove writers to create representative 'figurehead[s] for the state of things in [a] given age but who [were] precisely not literal head[s] of state'.<sup>23</sup> Hazlitt's designation of Wordsworth as 'a pure emanation of the spirit of the age' seems to fulfil such a call, although Chandler does go on to suggest that for Hazlitt no single individual could be said to represent an epoch, preferring instead an 'irreducible multiplicity of

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Lays of Ancient Rome and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems* (London: Dent & Sons, 1910), p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Selected Essays* (N.p.: T. Nelson and Sons, n.d.), p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> On the rise of social history, particularly with respect to women's biographies, see Rohan Maitzen's excellent article "'This Feminine Preserve': Historical Biographies by Victorian Women", *Victorian Studies*, 38.3 (1995), 371-93. Maitzen argues that the rise of the discipline enabled women biographers to assert the role of women in history. In a sense, the subject of these biographies, which often accorded significant weight to a subject's private life, can be seen as an attempt to wrest power away from the official spokesmen of an epoch, to challenge the reader's notion of what is significant. In this way, the function of these biographies is analogous to that of gossip, which, as I demonstrated in my previous chapter, serves as a form of communication which enables women to challenge the predominantly male discourse.

<sup>23</sup> Chandler, *England in 1819*, p. 174. Writing on the Russian context, Luba Golburt notes that in this period 'reign-based chronologies are superseded by new ones, now delineating periods by distinctive "character" rather than specific dates'. See her *The First Epoch: The Eighteenth Century and the Russian Cultural Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). Here, p. 7.

representatives and representations of the spirit of the age'.<sup>24</sup> In 1841, Emerson's *Representative Men*—in which Napoleon is recast as a product of the democratic movement rather than its director—offered an alternative vision of representation to that of pre-Romantic historiography, according to which historical eras were, at least nominally, exemplified in their monarchs (the Age of Elizabeth, etc.).<sup>25</sup>

Hazlitt and Emerson still believed outstanding individuals, however flawed, could be representative of a particular period. Even their pluralism had its limits: Hazlitt was not about to confer the representative crown on anyone but the famous and talented. Likewise, in the Russian context, Alexander Herzen—a man who had himself endured a provincial exile that did not allow for the realisation of his heroic aspirations<sup>26</sup>—failed to comprehend how the radical critics could dismiss the contributions made by the Decembrists who, for Herzen, far better exemplified the spirit of the age than did the superfluous man (as the radicals had christened the idealists of the first part of the nineteenth century):

Тип того времени, один из великолепнейших типов новой истории — это *декабрист*, а не Онегин. Русская литература не могла до него касаться целые сорок лет, но он от этого не стал меньшим.

Как у молодого поколения не достало ясновидения, такта, сердца понять все величие, всю силу этих блестящих юношей, выходящих из рядов гвардии, этих баловней знатности, богатства, оставляющих свои гостиные и свои груды золота для требования человеческих прав, для протеста, для заявления, за которое — и они знали это — их ждали веревка палача и каторжная работа? — Это печальная загадка.<sup>27</sup>

Here Herzen does not differ greatly from Hazlitt in designating a small elite as representative of the age. But there are historical reasons why Russian realism did not

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<sup>24</sup> Chandler, *England in 1819*, p. 185.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> On Herzen's exile in Vyatka, see Aileen Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016), chapter 8.

<sup>27</sup> Aleksandr Gertsen, 'Eshche raz Bazarov', in *Ss*, XX.1 (1960), pp. 335-50. Here, p. 341. On Herzen's valorisation of the Decembrists, see Ludmilla A. Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 15-22.

adopt this approach. For Belinsky, a belief in historical determinism, which argued that man could not rise above the limits of his environment and achieve greatness in spite of it, forced him to concede (in practice, at least) that the creation of positive heroes could not occur until the social conditions of his time had changed for the better; he died without identifying any.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the growth of statistics, with its postulation of an “average man”, and the positivist emphasis on methods of verification, led later critics such as Chernyshevsky to argue that art should reflect life without embellishment. Chernyshevsky was not naïve enough to think that art could (or even should) offer transcription of the phenomenal world,<sup>29</sup> but with his emphasis on the quotidian, perfected in his diary entries, the critic preached against an aesthetic that accommodated any hero who was “larger than life”, and recast idealist notions (for example, of love) in materialist or physiological language (the palpitations of the heart).<sup>30</sup>

In addition to contemporary scientific and aesthetic discussions, the development of the realist hero owed much to a force altogether more powerful—in practice, if not in aspiration—in England than in Russia: democratisation. The passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832 extended the franchise to many urban centres, whilst its successor of 1867 doubled at a stroke the number of eligible electors. As Franco Moretti notes, democracy puts a high premium on equality, and

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<sup>28</sup> On Belinsky’s view of the positive hero, see Rufus W. Mathewson Jr., *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 2nd edn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), chapter 2. On the future-oriented nature of Belinsky’s aesthetics (that is, his belief that Russian literature lacked world-historical significance in the present, but might attain it in the future), see Victor Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), pp. 119-26.

<sup>29</sup> On Chernyshevsky’s realism, see Charles A. Moser, *Aesthetics as Nightmare: Russian Literary Theory, 1855-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> On Chernyshevsky’s diaries, his attention to quotidian detail, and his materialist language, see Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); on the growth of statistics and the average man, see Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky’s Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 22-26.

as such it 'is rather antiheroic; it thrives on universalistic and standardized values, around which it has to create the widest possible consensus'.<sup>31</sup> This was the world that Carlyle, and, subsequently in the literary sphere, the critic Lukács distrusted and deplored. No longer could an individual act on behalf of his society, since he was beholden to the will of a people who did not understand their own interests; what Moretti calls 'the subdivided reality of the modern world'<sup>32</sup> could not accommodate Lukács's preferred genre of the epic, in which the hero could count on an assumed (not contested) set of values, in which he was free from the triviality of his milieu. Instead, the novelistic hero was constrained by (and yet simultaneously alienated from) his society, pulled down by the force of 'terrestrial gravity'.<sup>33</sup> Hegel too recognised that his was an age which had become fragmented, made up of a network of laws and individual states that prevented a single individual acting on behalf of the whole world.<sup>34</sup> The warrior hero now contends with the citizenry as the agent of history.

From the start of their careers as novelists, Dostoevsky and Eliot accept this reality, rejecting the models of great, Romantic, and epic men as the protagonists of their fiction. Moreover, their rejection of the model went much further than that of writers such as Stendhal. Writing of Stendhal's attitude to the heroes of his fiction, Roger Pearson succinctly formulates the writer's approach:

the hero should be larger than life, should display the energy that is no longer to be seen in contemporary society, should offer us through his inner musings an imaginative and heroic conception of life that is at variance with the harsh reality which it is the job of the rest of the novel to depict.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 2nd edn, trans. by Albert Sbragia (London: Verso, 2000), p. 192.

<sup>32</sup> Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> See Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Pearson, *Stendhal's Violin: A Novelist and His Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 16.

Despite their unheroic activity, Stendhal's heroes nevertheless stand above the masses. Other writers took an opposite strategy. Thackeray, for instance, relentlessly cut great men down to size (Napoleon is a 'wretched upstart and swindler' and a 'Corsican wretch'),<sup>36</sup> ironising them, and, in the same breath, elevating underachieving celebrities to the status of great men. (Nicholas Dames has shown how Thackeray variously deifies and debunks, exalts and punctures, his heroes.<sup>37</sup>) Dickens and Gaskell, meanwhile, present ordinary heroes who take on the political establishment, and are efficacious in social reform. None of these approaches hold true for Eliot or Dostoevsky.

Although Eliot admits the existence of great men, she turns her readers' attention away from their achievements and towards their domestic life. However, unlike the case of Thackeray, this domestication is shorn of the ironic, as the heroes of the past are imbued with a level of sublimity that exists independently of, but does not entirely eclipse, their world-historical acts. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, her narrator comments on the path of historical progress:

The blessed work of helping the world forward, happily does not wait to be done by perfect men; and I should imagine that neither Luther or John Bunyan, for example, would have satisfied the modern demand for an ideal hero, who believes nothing but what is true, feels nothing but what is exalted, and does nothing but what is graceful. The real heroes of God's making are quite different: they have their natural heritage of love and conscience which they drew in from their mother's milk. They know one or two of those deep spiritual truths which are only to be done by wrestling with their own sins and their own sorrows. [*SCL*, 229]

Without denying the significance of Luther and Bunyan, Eliot situates them among a class of men exemplified in her own fiction by the struggling, stumbling clergyman Mr Tryan. In *Middlemarch*, the narrator doubts whether the greatest man of his age—

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<sup>36</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. by Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 322.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Dames, 'Brushes with Fame: Thackeray and the Work of Celebrity', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56.1 (2001), 23-51.

‘if ever that solitary superlative existed’—would not in a certain light resemble a bumpkin, and comments in relation to the astronomer Herschel that:

Most of us, indeed, know little of the great originators until they have been lifted up among the constellations and already rule our fates. But that Herschel, for example, who “broke the barriers of the heavens”—did he not once play a provincial church-organ, and give music-lessons to stumbling pianists? Each of those Shining Ones had to walk on the earth among neighbours who perhaps thought much more of his gait and his garments than of anything which was to give him a title to everlasting fame: each of them had his little local personal history sprinkled with small temptations and sordid cares, which made the retarding friction of his course towards final companionship with the immortals. [MM, 146]

The images of Luther, Bunyan, and Herschel are primarily employed as a defence of her realist aesthetics, famously articulated in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, or chapter 5 of “Amos Barton”. In the latter passage the narrator defends the choice of a hero who was ‘so very far from remarkable’, ‘unmistakably commonplace’, ‘whose virtues were not heroic’, but who represents the ‘majority of your fellow-countrymen’ [SCL, 37]. In other words, Eliot’s stated solution to the problem of heroic depiction in an unheroic age is to insist that there is poetry and pathos in typical men and environments. By emphasising typicality, she goes a step further than Emerson in her response to Carlyle (whom she admired).<sup>38</sup> This approach to realism, critics have found, is just as much ethical as aesthetic. Thomas Pavel, whose history of the novel might be taken as representative of the critical tradition precisely because it is not a specialist work on Eliot as such, argues that in *Middlemarch* we should not lament Dorothea’s anonymity, since the novel affirms the ‘equivalence between public heroism and private splendor’.<sup>39</sup> Dorothea’s triumph, in Pavel’s reading, is that she is able to ‘accept the social conditions that orient her life’ and satisfactorily integrate

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<sup>38</sup> On Carlyle’s relationship to the Leweses, see Gordon S. Haight, ‘The Carlyles and the Leweses’, in *Carlyle and His Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of Charles Richard Sanders*, ed. by John Clubbe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 191-204. See also Eliot’s short essay on Carlyle (1855) in [SCW, 187-92].

<sup>39</sup> Thomas G. Pavel, *The Lives of the Novel: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 230.

herself into Middlemarch society, having abjured her mistaken idealism.<sup>40</sup> In this reading, she follows a Darwinian path of development, wherein adaption is the condition of survival.<sup>41</sup> Whether Eliot's later heroes are quite satisfied with this integration, is a question I examine below. Nevertheless, it is an examination that must be conducted against the assumption that for Eliot the heroic impulse is best explored in ordinary, not extraordinary, protagonists.

In light of the above, it is not difficult to see why Belinsky's heirs in the Russian radical tradition were so profoundly impressed with George Eliot.<sup>42</sup> Not only had Belinsky asserted the necessity of typicality in literature, but, in Julie Buckler's words, 'Russian critics lauded Eliot precisely for those qualities most valued in Russia's own national literature—seriousness of purpose, psychological realism, positivism, a deep understanding of a socio-cultural setting, and a commitment to the moral and spiritual development of her readers'.<sup>43</sup> Positivism notwithstanding, Dostoevsky's readers might make similar claims for his work, and yet Dostoevsky only very rarely presents the poetry and pathos of ordinary life. Indeed, his approach to hero-creation has little in common with that of Eliot. To be sure, both writers reject the Great Man theory without reservation, but Dostoevsky's heroes are utterly atypical in their make-up; moreover, they are often quite conscious of their own hubris. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky, ever the paradoxicalist, defended his art in the language of typicality. He pre-empted criticism of the underground man by stating that 'такие лица, как сочинитель таких записок, не только могут, но даже

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>41</sup> On Eliot's familiarity with Darwin's thought, see Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> See for example Mikhail Mikhailov, 'Dzhorzh Eliot', *Sovremennik*, 11 (1859), 103-30.

<sup>43</sup> Julie Buckler, 'Victorian Literature and Russian Culture: Translation, Reception, Influence, Affinity', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 206-26. Here, p. 218.

должны существовать в нашем обществе' [5, 99], and thought that his creation of Raskolnikov, who aspires to the status of a great man, was vindicated by real life criminal cases he saw going through the courts. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the narrator stresses at the outset that Fyodor Karamazov is a *type* ('это был странный тип, довольно часто однако встречающийся' [14, 7]), and mentions that his love of role-playing (which is, after all, one of his most eccentric features) is characteristic of a great many people [14, 11]. Moreover, Dmitry's mother's decision to enter into matrimony with Fyodor Pavlovich shows that she belongs to a class of women 'столь не редки[е] у нас в теперешнее поколение' [14, 8]. Alyosha himself, according the narrator, 'носит в себе иной раз сердцевину целого' [14, 5]. He not only reflects, but also incarnates in the deepest sense, the spirit of the age.

Other attempts had been made at such a representation. Dobrolyubov famously thought that Goncharov had captured the malaise of Petersburg society in the protagonist of *Obломov*, and lambasted the author for creating a slumberer rather than a positive type. Turgenev's attempt to capture the spirit of the age in a scientist was also ambivalent, with Pisarev effectively alone among the critics in his praise of Bazarov, Turgenev's student of natural science. (Pisarev lauded the exemplary heroes of science—the Darwins, Lyles, Buckles, and Vogts.)<sup>44</sup> In Alyosha, Dostoevsky tried to create a typical hero who could reflect and, paradoxically, model contemporary behaviour. His oddities do not disqualify him, but rather equip him for this task, since the narrator disputes the idea that odd men are most commonly isolated cases. In Harriet Murav's words, 'the eccentric holds the key to the meaning of an historical

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<sup>44</sup> On this appreciation, see Dmitry Pisarev, 'Progress in the Animal and Vegetable Worlds', in *Selected Philosophical and Political Essays* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), pp. 297-496.

moment'.<sup>45</sup> It is not as necessary to agree with Dostoevsky, as to recognise that his artistic craftsmanship was informed by, even as it moved away from, the concept of typicality articulated by critics such as Chernyshevsky—whose veneration by the radical youth exemplified the view that greatness was no longer the preserve of an elite, but could be enjoyed by men of any rank (*raznochintsy*) and of secondary professions (critic rather than poet).<sup>46</sup>

When Dostoevsky took up the challenge of hero-creation in his final novel, he did so according to a hagiographic conception. Jostein Børtnes writes that Alyosha is 'completely different from the *typical* characters of the realistic novel',<sup>47</sup> whilst Gary Saul Morson regards him as "generic refugee". This term encompasses a host of characters who are not at home in the world of the novel. Examples include Tolstoy's Andrey Bolkonsky, an epic hero forced to learn the lessons of novels; Turgenev's Bazarov, a 'hero from a utopia, forced to live in the novelistic world';<sup>48</sup> Dorothea Brooke, a latter-day Saint Theresa who inhabits a world where epic or saintly action is impossible; and Alyosha Karamazov, who begins Dostoevsky's final novel in search of heroic feats, only to check his desire for greatness with the demands of prosaic love.<sup>49</sup> In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the giving of onions replaces signs and wonders as the matter of record. As I will go on to show, however, it is by no means clear that Dostoevsky is entirely satisfied with such small-scale activity, as he proves unable to abjure the heroic models he inherited. In fact, neither Dorothea Brooke nor Alyosha Karamazov, neither George Eliot nor Fyodor Dostoevsky, can fully divest themselves

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<sup>45</sup> Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 128.

<sup>46</sup> See Paperno, *Chernyshevsky*, e.g. pp. 11, 205.

<sup>47</sup> Jostein Børtnes, *Visions of Glory: Studies in Early Russian Hagiography* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1988), p. 287.

<sup>48</sup> Gary Saul Morson, 'Genre and Hero/*Fathers and Sons*: Inter-generic Dialogues, Generic Refugees, and the Hidden Prosaic', *Stanford Slavic Studies*, 4.1 (1991), 336-81. Here, p. 356.

<sup>49</sup> Gary Saul Morson, 'The God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic', in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004), pp. 107-24, especially pp. 111-12.

of the heroic impulse for greatness: a “surplus” desire for heroism remains to be satisfied by the integration into the community that the novels seem to recommend. Radicalism, social action, and saintliness have a lure for these authors; that this lure is not necessarily realised on the pages of the novel, or in the confines of the nineteenth-century town, may, in fact, be cause for regret rather than celebration.

### ***Felix Holt: Radicalism Tamed?***

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot created a typical man—a Second Adam—who was able to find his fulfilment in the organic community of Hayslope. Sally Shuttleworth sees that novel as offering a static picture of man’s social relations, which ends where it begins, and which exorcises its disruptive elements, such as Hetty.<sup>50</sup> In *Silas Marner*, the hero makes his home in another rural community. Shuttleworth is right to suggest that Eliot does not esteem Raveloe, whose values are called into question, as highly as Hayslope, but the pattern of social integration is essentially the same. Both novels end with the title character at home in his native or adoptive community.

With *Felix Holt*, however, things change, and the question emerges: how can the hero survive, and even triumph, in a nineteenth-century provincial town? The novel begins with the return of the prodigal Felix, who has been studying in Glasgow. Also recently arrived in the town of Treby Magna is flighty Esther Lyon, who had been enrolled in a school in France (and reads dangerous French authors to boot). The story unfolds so as to bring idealistic, ascetic Felix into a relationship with the newly-matured Esther in an environment more demanding of its heroes than that of Eliot’s rural villages. Writing on Eliot’s vision of sympathy, Elizabeth Ermarth notes

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<sup>50</sup> See Sally Shuttleworth’s Introduction and chapter on *Adam Bede* in *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

that as Eliot's oeuvre develops, she comes to insist on sympathy between people only casually related, as purely familial allegiance gives way to the 'mutual influence of dissimilar destinies' that we find in Eliot's later social webs.<sup>51</sup> As societies develop along a trajectory from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* the challenges of social interaction—now not only with family, but with neighbours and strangers—becomes more pronounced.

A more precise statement of the historical moment in which *Felix Holt* is set is articulated in the epigraph to chapter 3:

'Twas town, yet country too; you felt the warmth  
Of clustering houses in the wintry time;  
Supped with a friend, and went by lantern home.  
Yet from your chamber window you could hear  
The tiny bleat of new-yeaned lambs [...] [*FH*, 39]

The idyllic history of new-yeaned lambs is contrasted to the development of private property ('clustering houses') and public houses ('supped with a friend')—both of which are important to the novel's dénouement. Bakhtin had suggested that the provincial novel typically stresses the 'uninterrupted, age-old link between the life of generations and the strictly delimited locale'.<sup>52</sup> But in Eliot's towns, we encounter the moment of interruption: the coachman describes the historical moment when time passes 'from one phase of English life to another', as the town and country, which 'previously had no pulse in common' [*FH*, 8], are brought together by the spectre of reform, industrialisation, and dissent. That 'mysterious distant system of things called "Gover'nment"', is now impinging on the countryside, 'filling the air with eager unrest' [*FH*, 8] with such recent initiations as crop rotation and railways [*FH*, 8-9]. Trebians and Middlemarchers of the pre-reform era can still, if only just, believe that

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<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, 'George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 40.1 (1985), 23-42. Here, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> Bakhtin, 'The Chronotope', p. 124.

they are living in the centre of the world, but the interruptions of modernity gradually dispossess them of this illusion.

The nature of this interruption is captured in the novel's epigraph, excerpted from Drayton's *Polyolbion*, a collection of epic songs describing the topographical make-up of the British Isles, and including colourful accounts of local traditions, legends, and culture. When Drayton wrote the lines, he did not intend any irony:

Upon the midlands now the industrious muse doth fall,  
The shires which we the heart of England well may call [*FH*, 2].

When read in the context of *Felix Holt*, however, the reader confronts a tension between text and para-text. The poetic genre, the archaic language, the reference to the Greek tradition of the mythical muse, and the ambiguous connotations of 'industrious', all raise false expectations of the novel, as does the narrator in the Introduction when he alludes to a 'modern Odyssey' [*FH*, 5] that might well take place in Treby Magna—a town whose Latin name presages greatness. In fact, however, the novel will not be a tale of public feats, such as those of Achilles, but rather the 'private lot of a few men and women', who, unlike the epic hero or the Great Man, are '*determined by a wider public life*' [*FH*, 43; my italics]. The chronotope of Treby Magna in 1832 is one utterly uncongenial to greatness. The question that Avrom Fleishman asks of Middlemarch is equally relevant to Treby: 'in such a massive and slow-moving organism, what room is there for individual organisms to distinguish themselves, or assert heroic freedom?'<sup>53</sup> It is the world of Mrs Transome's 'petty habits and narrow notions' [*FH*, 28], of 'small facts and petty impulses' [*FH*, 34], of 'petty desires' and 'petty creatures' [*FH*, 105], of would-be Parliamentarians like Harold Transome with his 'petty private ends' [*FH*, 223]. Felix

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<sup>53</sup> Avrom Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 182.

himself would be content to remain ‘a man of this generation’ who tries ‘to make life less bitter for those within [his] reach’ [*FH*, 223]. He cares primarily for ‘very small things such as will never be known beyond a few garrets and workshops’. Such equivocation (the negative “less bitter”, the quantifier “few”) hardly inspires readers with confidence that the Radical will live up to his titular expectation. Moretti was right to suggest that the rise of democracy—against which the novel was both written and set—is not necessarily hospitable to great individualities.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Felix’s achievements by the end of the novel are minimal. Speaking to Esther about his life path, he asserts: ‘I distinctly see that I can do something better’ [*FH*, 103]. But what is that ‘something’? Is it really just the negative resolution than the world ‘shan’t be any worse for me, if I can help it’ [*FH*, 53]? Beyond offering lessons to little Job Trudge, and establishing a night-school for the Sproxtton workers (an opportunity few avail themselves of), Felix seems to resist practical action for the betterment of his fellow-men. Mary Barton, in the course of the novel that bears her name, manages to exonerate her lover and expose a corrupt class of factory owners; Felix manages to get sentenced for manslaughter, and all but ensure a Tory is returned to Parliament.

The narrator seems to endorse Felix’s small-scale vision, offering specific warnings about the dangers of hero-worship and questioning the value of heroic acts. As Vigny had discovered in his re-evaluation of Napoleon, many an exalted being will ‘sink from the ranks of heroes into the crowd for whom the heroes fight and die’ [*FH*, 73]. The novel proceeds to provide an enactment of this maxim in the relationship between haggard Mrs Transome and handsome Mr Jermyn. It is difficult to imagine a relationship more bitter or tragic in all of Eliot’s fiction; and it is easy to

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<sup>54</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 192.

forget that the pair once worshipped each other, going so far in their mutual devotion as to conspire to have an innocent man imprisoned [FH, 334]. Some three decades later, that love has dissipated into resentment, as their history has imprisoned them in a time and place that has suffocated their heroic longings. If Jermyn is in the wrong *chronos*, Mrs Transome is in the wrong *topos*. ‘As I said before,’ Jermyn complains, ‘I had given up lines of advancement which would have been open to me *if I had not stayed in this neighbourhood*’ [FH, 335; my italics]. Mrs Transome, meanwhile, believes herself to be the head of a regal dynasty (her descendants are not sons, but ‘heirs’ who will enjoy a ‘reign’ [FH, 20]), but though her air ‘would have fitted an empress in her own right’, her cares and occupations ‘had not been at all of an imperial sort’ [FH, 26]. Her powerlessness is continually emphasised and, as Dorothea Barrett writes, we are frequently reminded ‘of the impotence of her actual situation in comparison to a man’s situation or to the situation of certain women in other epochs’.<sup>55</sup> Certainly the authorial interjection that ‘after all, she was a woman, and could not make her own lot’ [FH, 341] could, without a large imaginative leap, been seen as an expression of Eliot’s own bitterness at the difficulties she faced as a woman writer in the nineteenth century.

However, not all critics agree that Eliot is entirely sceptical of hero worship. Initially, many critics were pleased at Eliot’s portrayal of Felix, and thought him an attractive representative of the radical cause. Blackwood, her publisher, stated that the author’s politics ‘are excellent and will attract all parties’.<sup>56</sup> Particularly extreme praise of Felix as a Radical came from Russia, when, in 1868, P. N. Tkachev published his review of the novel in the journal *The Cause*. His long article, entitled

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<sup>55</sup> Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot’s Heroines* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 107. Barrett also provides a convincing account of Mrs Transome’s “homelessness” within the novel, suggesting she is a character who wants (and deserves) the status of a protagonist, but that this is denied to her (p. 102).

<sup>56</sup> Blackwood’s letter to Eliot (26 April, 1866) [GEL, 247].

*Men of the Future and the Heroes of Petty Bourgeoisie*, lauds Felix for rising above the pettiness of his environment.<sup>57</sup> Tkachev is impressed with Felix's ability to hold fast to his ideal in a world of philistine compromise:

Гольт решает посвятить всю свою жизнь этому делу [...] [Он отказывается] от всего, что могло бы отклонить его в сторону. Он не только отрекся [...] от житейского комфорта ради своей идеи, он готов отречься, во имя ее, от любимой женщины.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, he commends Felix for what he sees as maximal devotion to his cause when he decides to stop profiting from ineffective drugs and, ignoring the advice of his *meshchanka* mother, weds himself to poverty. To be sure, Felix might have chosen a career other than that of a watchmaker in order to effect change on a grander scale, but Tkachev approves of his decision to share the lot of the poor man instead of taking advantage of the comforts that his neighbours take as their birth-right. Felix's devotion to the cause of the poor man—Tkachev's translation of Felix's desire to 'make life less bitter for those within my reach' is a more materialist 'устроить жизнь менее тяжелой для бедных людей'<sup>59</sup>—is only compromised by his falling in love with Esther. For Tkachev, the ideal man of the future must be determined by devotion to his political ideal alone, and love, whilst a legitimate emotion, must not compromise the revolutionary agenda.<sup>60</sup> Marriage for the radical critic ought not to be considered in purely personal terms, but rather for its significance in the progressive cause.<sup>61</sup> Despite Felix's failings in the arena of romantic love (the

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<sup>57</sup> Republished in P. N. Tkachev, *Liudi budushchego i geroi meshchanstva* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>61</sup> In this respect, Tkachev echoes Chernyshevsky's view of his love for Olga Sokratovna, which he detailed for posterity in his diaries, and which led to a marriage that would serve as an example of reconfigured social relations in the new age. As Paperno has shown, the growth of "calculated" marriages, conceived not on the basis of romantic love but social duty, shows the success of Chernyshevsky's model and its fictional incarnation in *What is to be Done?* For an example of a calculated marriage, see Paperno, *Chernyshevsky*, pp. 33-36 (the example in this instance is that of

temptations of which a bourgeois artist such as George Eliot could not be expected to withstand), Tkachev regards him as a man of the future, born too early to realise his proto-revolutionary ideals. In fact, the title of Tkachev's article indicates that he thought that Felix would be a perfectly ordinary specimen in a future socialist society, and that heroism was inimical to the equality that would reign in utopia. In *The Devils*, Shigalyov, whose system may be based on Tkachev's article, articulates just such a view, when he advocates the lopping off of a million heads in order to ensure complete equality.<sup>62</sup> But even Tkachev can do little more than assert the strength of Felix's *ideological* commitment, since he accomplishes no programme of social action in the novel.<sup>63</sup> For Tkachev, Felix is essentially a heroic type, even if he has not yet demonstrated the ascetic commitment of Chernyshevsky's Rakhmetov. In positing his heroism, Tkachev implicitly challenges the conservative readings of the novel that emphasise Felix's commitment to gradual (rather than revolutionary) improvement.

More recently, Hilda Hollis has offered a challenge to the conservative reading from a different angle. Like Tkachev, she detects a revolutionary strand in the ideology of the novel, but (unlike Tkachev) she does not see Felix as its progenitor. Rather, she treats Felix sceptically and questions whether his prosaic pronouncements can really be read as objective statements of Eliot's own ethical ideal. Hollis argues that Felix's parroting of Arnoldian virtues of culture is too

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Sofia Kovalevskaya); on Chernyshevsky's own marriage as a model for his reader, see the introduction to the same book; on his unique approach to diary writing, see chapter 1.

<sup>62</sup> A possible connection is conjectured by Andrzej Walicki in *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 249.

<sup>63</sup> Since both Tkachev and Felix share a distaste for disorder, which they both believe can be averted under the leadership of a superior individual or vanguard, one might suppose that Felix would give succour to Tkachev's Jacobinism. More information on Tkachev's programme of governance can be found in Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, trans. by Francis Haskell (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1960). For a general treatment of Tkachev's article that doesn't specifically deal with his engagement with *Felix Holt*, see Deborah Hardy, *Petr Tkachev: The Critic as Jacobin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), chapter 6.

satirical to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, Hollis does ascribe to Eliot a heroic desire to fundamentally reshape society: it is merely the case that this reshaping is not accomplished by Felix. Hollis argues that Felix has ‘a self-understanding as a Theresa figure’ and ‘fashion[s] himself as a hero’ out of self-interest: to excuse his demagoguery, to control Esther, to bring himself to rapture with the sound of his own voice.<sup>64</sup> These are hardly qualities Eliot would endorse. For Hollis, society ‘does not change through such passive cooperation [as Felix’s]’,<sup>65</sup> and she argues that the trades-union man, with his genuine understanding of the plight of the working class and his belief in the power of the mob, is no less an object of sympathy than Felix, who espouses more gradual meliorism.

My own reading of *Felix Holt* does not intend to overturn what I regard as the dominant conservative ideology of the novel (one that treats the reshaping of society with some scepticism), and I think that Hollis, in her useful problematisation of Felix’s status as Eliot’s mouthpiece, exaggerates in stating that ‘the conservatism expressed by Felix does not reflect Eliot’s political perspective; there is no more reason to take Felix as her absolute spokesman than any of her characters’.<sup>66</sup> It seems to me that the novel is not nearly as dialogic as Hollis claims, that the trades-union man is not of the generic stature to form an effective challenge to Felix, and that one could hardly say that the cunning Matthew Jermyn, the opportunistic Harold Transome, or frivolous (later submissive) Esther Lyon have an equal claim to be representatives of authorial viewpoints. Moreover, Eliot’s conservatism is embedded

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<sup>64</sup> Hilda Hollis, ‘Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or George Eliot’s Mouthpiece?’, *ELH*, 68.1 (2001), 155-177. Here, p. 165.

<sup>65</sup> Hollis, ‘Felix Holt’, p. 173.

<sup>66</sup> Hollis, ‘Felix Holt’, p. 174.

within the plot structure of the novel, and does not depend on articulation by particular characters.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, I suggest that the novel does demonstrate that Eliot's scepticism of heroic activity is matched by a desire for it. This contradiction is revealed both in the language and structure of the novel. At first sight, for instance, the narrator's statement at the end of chapter 16 appears to lend support to the conservative reading, endorsing (to borrow Pavel's phrase) the equivalence of public heroism and private splendour. The text, it seems, exemplifies the poetry and pathos of ordinary life in a post-heroic epoch:

What we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and recent realities—a willing movement of a man's soul with the wider sweep of the world's forces [...] We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little—might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units; in this way we might break sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted with. Let us rather raise a monument to the soldiers whose brave hearts only kept the ranks unbroken, and meet death—a monument to the faithful who were not famous, and who are precious as the continuity of sunbeams is precious, though some of them fall unseen and on barrenness. [FH, 157]

On the surface, and without context, this passage extols the virtues of an everyday heroism quite opposed to the Great Man theory and, despite the presence of soldiers, it contradicts the view that military leaders are a rich source of heroic exemplarity. The heroic here is not as Carlyle celebrated in *On Heroes*, but rather a version whose influence he admitted in "On History", the slow maturation of 'a hundred acorns planted silently by some unnoticed breeze'.<sup>68</sup> However, such a reading cannot be sustained once we know that these sublime words are in apposition to bumbling Mr

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<sup>67</sup> For Ruth Bernard Yeazell, Felix's meliorism aligns closely with Eliot's, and the author is so fearful of any association between her hero and violent disorder, that any time violence rears its head, the narrative gaze switches quickly to Esther, whose moral development adds necessary conservative ballast to the novel's plot. See her 'Why Political Novels Have Heroines: *Sybil*, *Mary Barton*, and *Felix Holt*', *Novel*, 18.2 (1985), 126-44.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Selected Essays*, p. 234.

Lyon, a man unconnected to the ‘larger sweep of the world’s forces’, and devoid of all consciousness that his acts fall unseen on barren soil. Moreover, the act which occasions this narratorial reflection is nothing more than his attempt to convince Harold Transome that the franchise should not be further extended. The ironisation at work here precludes us from ascribing to Eliot a view of heroism that is limited to Wordsworth’s ‘little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love’ [*FH*, 165]. Just as Hollis suggested that we should detect a fissure between Eliot’s voice and Felix’s, so also must we acknowledge one between the apparent surface-meaning of her narrator’s words and their ironisation at the hands of the author. In other words, the passage just quoted—with its valorisation of anonymous men who ‘fall unseen and on barrenness’—is no more an objective statement of Eliot’s conception of the heroic than Felix’s statements are a transcription of her own thought.

In this instance, the effect of the irony is one of grotesque parody, since Mr Lyon is comically over-parted by the sublimity attributed to him. When it comes to Felix, however, the tension Eliot creates between his heroic aspirations and prosaic accomplishments is invested with greater seriousness. Felix is torn, as we have seen, between his demagogic devotion to his ideal (what we might call his maximalism), and his longing to be of use to the few within his reach (his minimalism). Drawing on my analysis of the theme of moral distance in chapter 1 and applying it to the study of heroism in *Felix Holt*, we might say that when heroic virtue is spatialised, Felix is morally impelled to help those in close proximity, but also aware that the arena of heroic action is located at a distance. (We recall that in her reworking of the Good Samaritan, George Eliot displayed an ambivalence as to the maximum field of sympathy.) Indeed, despite his rhetoric about helping those close at hand, Felix cannot wait to escape Treby Magna, a town he has scorned since his arrival from

Glasgow. He dreams of going away ‘as soon as I can to some large town’, to ‘some ugly, wicked, miserable place’ where he can stand up for the men of his class [*FH*, 222-23]. Like Ivan Karamazov, he prefers charity at a distance (what Dickens called “telescopic philanthropy”). Grand action seeks extremes: to carry on the work of social and political reform, Felix needs an environment that is wicked, not just petty. The chronotope of Treby Magna, pettiness incarnate, with its dim political consciousness, cannot compete with the urban centres of political activity. The narrator understands this well enough, commenting that ‘we hardly allow enough in common life for the results of that enkindled passion and enthusiasm which, under other conditions, makes world-famous deeds’ [*FH*, 267]. Felix is not yet ready to renounce these world-famous deeds, and since the conditions of his present chronotope make them unrealisable, he defers them to a future chronotope, that of the post-reform city. This, in fact, is precisely what happens in the novel, as Felix and Esther abscond to a nameless town, whose name the narrator prefers to keep secret lest Felix be troubled by any visitors [*FH*, 398]. In truth, the name of the town is of little importance; what matters is that it is *not here*, not Treby Magna. Unlike Adam Bede and Silas Marner, Felix is a character who ‘withstands integration’.<sup>69</sup>

There is not sufficient evidence in the novel to determine the ethical evaluation Eliot gives to this move, although she clearly does not see it as lamentable in the same way that Jermyn’s exile is: the latter’s final resting place, the even less distinct ‘at a great distance: some said “abroad”’, is construed as ‘that large home of ruined reputations’ [*FH*, 397]. What it is possible to argue, however, is that insofar as Eliot is sympathetic to Felix, she understands that his heroic impulses—arising from a nature described at one point, quoting *Coriolanus*, as ‘too noble for the world’ [*FH*,

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<sup>69</sup> Shuttleworth, *George Eliot*, p. 128.

241]—cannot flourish in Treby. Even given the ironic skepticism with which she treats Felix’s self-righteousness, she still elects to rescue him from the here-now chronotope of the novel, whose tense, Bakhtin noted, is intrinsically present;<sup>70</sup> instead of celebrating this presentness, she facilitates his heroic longings by placing him outside Treby, outside the pages of the novel. Just as Eliot’s own greatness could not find expression in the ‘industrious midlands’ but needed the more public arena of the capital, so neither can Felix’s ambition be sublimated in a world of pettiness. Gradual meliorism, however much espoused by the author, needed authorial acceleration.

Since it is entirely typical of the novel as a genre that its chief protagonist should either depart or die, there is nothing unique about the structure of *Felix Holt*, or, indeed, *Middlemarch* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Dorothea and Alyosha depart for a brighter future elsewhere. Nevertheless, an inversion of sorts occurs in all three novels, at least when considered from the perspective of the tradition of the Bildungsroman (and all three novels deal with the protagonists’ maturation). In that genre, the hero usually leaves home at the start of the novel, matures on his sojourn, and returns home a changed man. Eliot and Dostoevsky, however, invert the structure, such that their heroes return from abroad at the start of the novels, and insist that their maturation occur in their “home” environment, after which period of preparation they are ready to fight their cause elsewhere, in the future. In *Felix Holt*, such a process is not especially convincing, since Felix is not in need of maturation,<sup>71</sup> and Esther, who recently arrived in Treby from France, doesn’t attain it: her girlish devotion to her Byronic heroes, filtered through silly novels,

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<sup>70</sup> Bakhtin, ‘Epic and Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 3-40. Here, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Franco Moretti regards both *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* as ‘terrible novels’ on the basis of the irritating perfection their protagonists evince right from the start. Since it is taken for granted that Felix and Daniel will fulfil their vocation, they are in no need of genuine apprenticeship and hence, for Moretti, the Bildungsroman on British soil comes to an end with their publication. See *The Way of the World*, pp. 8, 223-38.

merely transforms itself into the slavish submission to Felix, whom she worships as if a god ('you could do wonders' [FH, 375]). The structure of *Felix Holt* (and particularly its ending) compels us to question whether the genre and chronotope of the novel, both which should prove fertile ground for Eliot's stated ethical good of diffuseness, are sufficient for the creator and her creations, who are less able than is sometimes supposed of casting off a heroic impulse. The question returns with a vengeance in *Middlemarch*.

### ***Middlemarch*: The Epic "Homed"?**

The Prelude to *Middlemarch* describes the life of Saint Theresa, who went out with her brother to 'seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors'. Whilst this great feat of Theresa and Rodrigo is immediately ironised as mock-epic through the use of the verb 'toddled' and reference to 'domestic reality' meeting them 'in the shape of uncles' and 'turning them back from their great resolve', Theresa does, ultimately, achieve what she wants. She succeeds in finding 'her epos in the reform of a religious order' [MM, 3].<sup>72</sup> Later-day Therasas, by contrast, are beset by a 'meanness of opportunity' that has provided for them 'no epic life' in which there can be found the 'constant unfolding of far-resonant action' [MM, 3]. In the nineteenth century, there was 'no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul', and a modern-day Theresa's idealism is 'disapproved as extravagance' [MM, 3]. This is what Morson means when designating Dorothea a "generic refugee". To quote that critic:

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<sup>72</sup> An insightful analysis of the prologue can be found in U. C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Middlemarch: An Avuncular View', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 30.1 (1975), 53-81. Criticising Mr Brooke's negligent guardianship of Dorothea, he argues: 'Mr Brooke inverts the role of St Theresa's uncle: instead of preventing an unnecessary martyrdom, he facilitates it' (74).

The Prologue to *Middlemarch* compares its heroine to Saint Theresa, whose nature “demanded an epic life”; but “later-born Therasas” unfortunately live in a time, and a genre, that makes epic or saintly action impossible. Dorothea’s story thus becomes the story of a heroine from one genre forced to live in another.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst one might contest the conflation of epic and saintly models here—epic heroes inhabit environments hospitable to heroism, whilst saints are almost universally ostracised from their fellow-men—Morson’s term is still a useful shorthand to denote the non-coincidence of Dorothea and her generic chronotope. There was a deeply held sense, in both Eliot and Dostoevsky, that the moral and scientific complexity of the nineteenth century did complicate, if not entirely preclude, the kind of heroism that earlier generations could exhibit. Thus, in *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin bemoans the difficulty of action in an age without a unified or ‘coherent social faith and order’ (to use Eliot’s language):

Тогда люди были как-то об одной идее, а теперь нервнее, развитее, сенситивнее, как-то о двух, о трех идеях зараз... теперешний человек шире, — и, клянусь, это-то и мешает ему быть таким односоставным человеком, как в тех веках... [8, 433]

Eliot and Dostoevsky differ, of course, in their evaluation of this disintegration, and diverge sharply in their visions of how best to confront it, but the problem is nevertheless assumed and stated by both writers.

A standard reading of *Middlemarch* presents Dorothea as a character who begins with a ‘Theresa-Complex’ (to use Laurence Lerner’s memorable term),<sup>74</sup> and who gradually learns that her idealism is incompatible with her own age of ‘indefiniteness’ [*MM*, 4], that her desire for beneficent activity is best realised in ‘unhistoric acts’ and an ‘incalculably diffusive’ heroism that has long and rightly been

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<sup>73</sup> Morson, ‘The God of Onions’, p. 112.

<sup>74</sup> Laurence Lerner, ‘Dorothea and the Theresa-Complex’, in *George Eliot: Middlemarch: A Casebook*, ed. by Patrick Swinden (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 225-47. Lerner defines the Theresa-complex as ‘a yearning to do good in the world which is so intense that it must answer to some emotional need in the Theresa herself’ (p. 225).

associated with Eliot's ethical vision [MM, 838]. The narrator finally consigns Theresa to history in the Finale, saying: 'there is no inward creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life...' [MM, 838]. The 'what lies outside', the "world" of the provincial town—a socio-economic milieu painted throughout with realist exactitude—succeeds in draining Dorothea's idealism. Rather than ending on a note of bombastic triumph, the novel redefines heroism in a modern, deterministic world, and offers a more clear-headed appraisal of heroic activity in the nineteenth century than had Carlyle in *On Heroes*.<sup>75</sup>

Various critics argue convincingly for such a reading. Among the most persuasive is Nicola Trott, who maintains that movement of the novel is from the Prelude's 'impossible standards' to the 'achievable ends of the Finale'.<sup>76</sup> Trott argues that the diffuse actions of the Finale elevate the novel to the status of a "home epic" and constitute the 'highest embodiment of that limited ideal'.<sup>77</sup> The ideal she has in mind here is empathy, such that Dorothea becomes 'a heroine of the epic of "alternative points of view"'.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, Joseph Wiesenfarth suggests that since 'opportunities for fulfilling oneself in the grand heroic way are rare and extraordinary',<sup>79</sup> Eliot offers her readers a 'heroine of compassion'<sup>80</sup>, and expands the scope of heroic virtues to include integrity, fellow-feeling, intelligence, and love.<sup>81</sup> Alison Booth examines Dorothea's status as a heroine—not hero—and suggests that all Eliot's heroes (men included) display what she regards as the 'feminine ideal of

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<sup>75</sup> Such is the argument of Joseph Wiesenfarth, 'Carlyle and the Prelude to *Middlemarch*', *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies*, 50/51 (2006), 143-46. Here, p. 146.

<sup>76</sup> Nicola Trott, 'Middlemarch and the "Home Epic"', in *Master Narratives: Tellers and Telling in the English Novel*, ed. by Richard Gravil (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 139-57. Here, p. 157.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot's Mythmaking* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977), p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>81</sup> See *ibid.*, chapter 8, *passim*.

selflessness' (as opposed to the masculine cult of the assertive Great Man).<sup>82</sup> The ultimate expression of this heroism is the abnegation of the self as 'the heroine or hero earns quiet honor by subsuming her or his self in the common life'.<sup>83</sup> Booth argues that whilst Dorothea is an 'exceptional being', she divests herself of egoism and 'diffus[es her] identity' at the end of the novel.<sup>84</sup>

What emerges from these critics (and Pavel, quoted in the introduction) is that heroism in *Middlemarch* has been reconfigured: action (heroic feats) is superseded by virtue (classical and modern). Empathy, integrity, compassion, intelligence, love, self-renunciation: this is the stuff of George Eliot's heroic vision, and it is by no means inferior to the epic activity of Achilles or the public work of Carlyle's Great Men. Indeed, it seems to me that Eliot recognises the reality of a world in which banality (rather than evil) and obscurity (rather than opposition) call for a mode of ethical behaviour that does not blithely recapitulate out-dated models. Throughout the novel, she exposes characters who do not adapt their vision to the reality of modernity, such as when the narrator comments on Ladislav's preference for fairy-tale heroics:

If Mr Casaubon had been a dragon who had carried her off to his lair with his talons simply and without legal forms it would have been an unavoidable feat of heroism to release her and fall at her feet. But he was something more unmanageable than a dragon: he was a benefactor with collective society at his back [...] [*MM*, 209]

Both Carlyle and Lukács regretted that the modern age was one of 'false simulacra',<sup>85</sup> of ethical forms that were, in Galin Tihanov's words, 'infested by soulless and

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<sup>82</sup> Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 130.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>85</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 116.

petrified conventions’,<sup>86</sup> and in this passage Eliot materialises those ‘legal forms’ to expose the gap between Ladislav’s heroic self-understanding and the real world—the ‘what lies outside’—with which Ladislav must, in reality, contend. St George is no match for a benefactor.

As far as Dorothea is concerned, Eliot presents her as a character born not too early (like Tkachev’s Felix), but too late. In another place, at another time, she might have achieved something momentous, have attained fame, that would have brought mourners to her ‘unvisited tomb’ [*MM*, 838]. But she cannot be heroic in the milieu of Middlemarch, an environment in which she is always an exile. She doesn’t even speak the language of the town. Brought up in Switzerland, she now finds herself, in respect of the tenants on Brooke’s farm, ‘on a mission to people whose language I do not know’ [*MM*, 29], and in respect of her own social stratum, she ‘never called anything by the same name that all the people around me did’ [*MM*, 537]. She stands out from her surroundings like a ‘fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day’s newspaper’ [*MM*, 7], just as her spartan dress and want of jewellery set her apart from the bejewelled Celia and Rosamond.<sup>87</sup> Rosamond—herself dreaming of escape from Middlemarch—notices, not without a certain awe, that Dorothea’s clothes are ‘all out of fashion’, and that they would be better draped on an Imogene or Cato’s daughter. ‘To Rosamond,’ we are told, ‘she [Dorothea] was one of those county divinities not mixing with Middlemarch mortality’ as well as a ‘dramatic heroine’ who wore a halo [*MM*, 432]. Meanwhile, Mrs Cadwallader’s assessment of Dorothea’s generic position is scathing: ‘think what a bore you might become to yourself and your fellow-creatures if you were always

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<sup>86</sup> Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 169.

<sup>87</sup> On Dorothea’s unconventional dress as an epic trope, see Neil Roberts, ‘Epic and Novel in George Eliot’, in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. by Carol Adlam, Rachel Falconer, et al (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 299-310, especially p. 302.

playing the tragedy-queen and taking things sublimely' [MM, 537]. The prevailing critical consensus, outlined above, seems to agree with Mrs Cadwallader that Dorothea errs insofar as she plays the heroine, and succeeds insofar as she casts off that role<sup>88</sup> and sublimates her heroic longings into diffuse virtue, a sublimation that essentially divests her of powerful individuality (Booth's subsuming of the self) and limits her efficaciousness among her immediate neighbours (what we might call "microscopic philanthropy", or even, to borrow from Zosima's lexicon in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "active love").

Dorothea's idealism is not relentlessly ironised, however, and her desire to stand out from Middlemarch society by doing something socially significant, is treated with sympathy as well as censure. Lerner has argued that it is the object of Dorothea's ardour (her misplaced passion for Casaubon) rather than its strength that Eliot castigates.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, she at least has the self-awareness to know that if she wishes to find fulfilment of her yearnings, she must invest in her own education—against, by and large, the wishes of her community, with Mr Brooke in particular cautioning her that it won't do for a woman to know too much [MM, 388]. Like Eliot, she teaches herself Greek, venturing into the male domain of classical study, since her society has decreed that learning is the preserve of men: 'surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr Casaubon' [MM, 87].<sup>90</sup> She is not wrong:

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<sup>88</sup> Stefanie Markovits argues that acting—in the dual sense of "taking action" and "appearing on stage"—is always treated with caution by Eliot, and its negative results reinforce her conservative values. Since good cannot exist in isolation, any action will entail good as well as bad; such is the case when Felix "acts" as the head of the mob. See her 'George Eliot's Problem with Action', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41.4 (2001), 785-803.

James Day argues that in *Stendhal*, it is only when Julien Sorel stops acting the hero that he is able to realise his authentic self. See *Stendhal's Paper Mirror*, chapter 5, "Fictional Roles and the Hero's Search for (Literary) Identity".

<sup>89</sup> Lerner, 'Dorothea and the Theresa-Complex', p. 229.

<sup>90</sup> On women's educational opportunities with respect to the classics, see Isabel Hurst, *Victorian Women's Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). The most impressive account of Eliot's use of Greek legend in her novels is Richard Jenkyns's *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwood, 1980).

that ghoulish pedant *is* the most learned man in the novel, and Dorothea chooses him as Middlemarch's only escape from the status quo. What alternative did she have, condemned to live in a world in which she 'had always been giving out ardour and had never been fed with much from the living beings around her' [*MM*, 221]? She could have built cottages with Chettam (who approved of her plans), but this would involve coalescence with what U. C. Knoepfelmacher calls 'Sir James' vegetative world of Feshritt',<sup>91</sup> a world in which ever-superior Celia is endlessly bouncing her little Buddha on her knee.<sup>92</sup>

I suggest that any reading of the novel that equates prosaic goodness with moral maturity, and heroic aspiration with dangerous whimsy, conflates too readily Eliot's acceptance of the problem of heroic action in the nineteenth century with her celebration of prosaic accomplishment. In other words, Eliot may well accept that the age of heroes is past. Whether she applauds its passing is, however, open to question. In order to elucidate this point, I wish to distinguish between three perspectives of the novel's Finale: the narrator's, Dorothea's, and the author's. In my view, critics such as Trott, Wiesenfarth, Pavel, and Booth, have too readily accepted the narrator's positive defence of diffuseness, which is clearly expressed in the novel's famous closing maxim that 'the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistorical acts' [*MM*, 838]. Whilst the narrator does not hold that progress is *entirely* dependent on diffuseness (it is only 'partly' dependent on it, and 'half-owing' to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life), it is nevertheless the only half he mentions, and as such it is fair to regard it as the dominant prism through which he conceives positive heroic action.

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<sup>91</sup> Knoepfelmacher, 'Middlemarch: An Avuncular View', p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> On the ironisation of Celia, see Lerner, 'Dorothea and the Theresa-Complex'.

Seen from Dorothea's perspective, however, diffuseness is *not* the chief positive good. Dorothea had originally 'longed for work which would be directly beneficent like sunshine and rain' [MM, 475], and, in her view, this is precisely what she attains at the close in a life *still full* of emotion and with 'beneficent activity which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself' [MM, 836]; in other words, through her marriage to Ladislaw, she finds an arena in which her social programme can be realised. The fact that she must achieve it *through Ladislaw*, and not on her own, does not bother her as much as it does those who knew her (and subsequently feminist critics) who 'thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed in the life of another'; in fact, she 'like[s] nothing better' than that she should give 'wifely help' to Will as an 'ardent public man' [MM, 836]. (After all, her idealism was no weaker when she gave herself to Casaubon as an amanuensis.) It is perfectly acceptable to ask, of course, why Eliot decides to have Dorothea give up,<sup>93</sup> so long as we recognise that the question implies an ethical judgement imposed on, rather than emanating from, Dorothea's own experience. I believe that J. Hillis Miller is right to argue that Dorothea has not lost her ardour at the close of the novel, that her falling in love with Will and her decision to give her life to him are 'based on ardor, feeling, and "will" (in the sense of a spontaneous life force) rather than on clear-seeing theory',<sup>94</sup> and that, far from conceding the defeat of her idealistic aspirations, Dorothea, in fact, 'fulfils herself by becoming a wife and mother'.<sup>95</sup> If we recall Trott's phrasing of the novel's trajectory as one from the Prelude's impossible standards to the Finale's

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<sup>93</sup> Booth, *Greatness Engendered*, p. 137.

<sup>94</sup> J. Hillis Miller, 'A Conclusion in Which Nothing is Concluded: *Middlemarch's* "Finale"', in *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Karen Chase (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 133-56. Here, p. 142.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

achievable ends, we must admit that it is a trajectory of which Dorothea is not herself cognisant.

That Dorothea does not herself conceive of her actions as being primarily diffusive does not mean, of course, that the narrator is wrong. Lack of self-awareness is, after all, a defect, and Dorothea's heroic self-understanding is not necessarily as valid as the omniscient narrator's assessment of the true nature of her heroism. Indeed, Miller admits as much when he comments that 'Dorothea is never [...] shown as able to articulate her understanding as clearly as the narrator'.<sup>96</sup> However, it is my contention that the *author's* sympathies lie just as much with Dorothea, as they do with the narrator's eloquent formulation of the value of diffuseness. In other words, whilst Eliot might recognise Dorothea's contribution to the growing good of the world lies precisely in its diffuseness, she laments this as much as she celebrates it. The final lines of *Middlemarch*, after all, allow for another "half" of heroism, an altogether more direct and "calculable" part.<sup>97</sup>

The language that usually surrounds discussions of the effectiveness of Eliot's heroines in the public sphere, and, indeed, that of historical women more generally, belongs overwhelmingly to the semantic field of *influence*. In her study of nineteenth century women's biographies, for example, Rohan Maitzen notes how biographers frequently stress the importance of the indirect agency of female subjects, and she quotes Hannah Lawrance's lament that in the present age (that is, the nineteenth century) so little was known about 'the women whose powerful influence moulded the characters to whom we owe our national greatness'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Alison Booth argues that women's most effective means of social engagement is through the

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>97</sup> On Eliot's own struggle against anonymity see Bonnie J. Lisle, 'Art and Egoism in George Eliot's Poetry', *Victorian Poetry*, 22.3 (1984), 263-78.

<sup>98</sup> Maitzen, "The Feminine Preserve", p. 381; see also pp. 382-86.

infiltration of ‘the public sphere with feminine influence’.<sup>99</sup> This view, incidentally, seems to have obtained in Russia too. Since women often ran literary salons, they were credited with an influence on the development of Russian literature, even without producing any novels. Irina Paperno has shown how Chernyshevsky valued the influence of Olga Sokratovna and Avdotya Panaeva in this respect (the latter he congratulated for her influence on Nekrasov, rather than for her own artistic production).<sup>100</sup> Within literary works we see women capable of influence rather than direct action. At the end of *Rudin*, for example, Turgenev appears to lament that the heroine, Natalya, was born ‘out of due season’ (to quote Frank Seeley) and the best she can hope for is that her ideals will be bequeathed to her children and will live on in the next generation.<sup>101</sup> This feminine ideal becomes entirely de-gendered in Dostoevsky, as the epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* (the corn of wheat falling to the ground and yielding much crop) provides a structuring principle to the book, as well as a foretaste of Zosima’s ethical ideal. Indeed, when she appraises the reasons why Zosima is more effective than Dostoevsky’s previous holy men, Ziolkowsky asserts that it is precisely his ‘influence’ (not: action) in the world of the novel that secures this reputation.<sup>102</sup>

Does Eliot genuinely endorse this celebration of influence at the expense of action? Certainly, the novel’s ending seems to find problematic rather than celebratory the heroine’s diffuse efficaciousness. Like the ending to *Felix Holt*, the Finale of *Middlemarch* exempts Dorothea from a lifetime of domestic utility in Middlemarch by transplanting her to a bigger, better arena: George Eliot’s London.

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<sup>99</sup> Booth, *Greatness Engendered*, p. 134.

<sup>100</sup> See Paperno, *Chernyshevsky*, p. 99.

<sup>101</sup> Frank Seeley, *Turgenev: A Reading of His Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 181.

<sup>102</sup> See Ziolkowsky, *Hagiography*, p. 153.

In chapter 51, Ladislav had recognised what needed to be done in order to win Dorothea's affection:

Why should he stay? If the impassable gulf between himself and Dorothea were ever to be filled up, it must rather be by his *going away* and getting into a thoroughly different position than staying *here* and slipping into deserved contempt as an understrapper of Brooke's. Then came the young dream of wonders that he might do—in *five years*, for example: political writing, political speaking, would get a higher value now public life was going to be wider and more national, and they might give him such distinction that he would not seem to be asking Dorothea to step down for him. *Five years*:— [MM, 507; my italics; punctuation in the original]

'Going away', 'in five years': Ladislav knows that Middlemarch does not provide a chronotope for heroism. Rather than insisting that Dorothea content herself with doing good for the few within her reach, Eliot lets her escape, freeing her from the novel's 'terrestrial gravity'. Dorothea has neither submerged nor sublimated her epic impulse, and the epic has not been "homed". Dorothea ends the novel not at home but elsewhere, on a street (much to Celia's horror) and 'among queer people' [MM, 820]. As Shuttleworth writes, 'Dorothea might ultimately wish to surrender desires for the self and to achieve full incorporation within the surrounding organism but George Eliot saves her from this fate'.<sup>103</sup> I have already questioned whether this *is* Dorothea's desire, but Shuttleworth is certainly right about George Eliot's reluctance to abandon Dorothea to the provincial organism. It is my belief that by exiling Dorothea to London, Eliot suggests that her heroic vision has not been stilled, but will be rekindled elsewhere—but, unlike in Middlemarch, she is now able to enjoy an arena where beneficent action is possible, and, unlike in *Middlemarch*, it is unencumbered by those inconvenient features of realism: excessive introspection and struggle.

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<sup>103</sup> Shuttleworth, *George Eliot*, p. 9.

In an early chapter, Dorothea outlined her vision for married life with Casaubon:

It would be my duty to study so that I might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. And then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life *here—now*—in England [*MM*, 29; my italics].

Dorothea is forced to come to terms with the fact that she will not find this ‘grand’ chronotope in *Middlemarch*. It is testament to the contradictory nature of Eliot’s concept of two-halved heroism that she then absolves her heroine of inhabiting the everyday world of the novel at the close. Contrary to Booth’s assertion, Dorothea does not subsume herself in the common life, but escapes it. In *Middlemarch*, only the Garths, and their adoptive Fred Vincy, are content with prosaic anonymity. Eliot will not let Dorothea succumb to this democratic spirit. Far from accepting the narrator’s claim that the Theresa of “Miss Brooke” has acquiesced to stand among the ranks of the ‘many Therasas’ [*MM*, 3] of *Middlemarch*, my reading suggests that Eliot still clings to a heroic ideal of individual singularity, despite the narrator’s best attempts to disavow it. Although when viewed in this light the ending can be seen as a betrayal of the narrator’s sublime vision, which Eliot partly shared, it does assume that there is no single key that will unlock her conception of the heroic. This heroic impulse is nothing more than a potential, and the beneficent action of Mrs Ladislaw is never explicated. Nevertheless, it betrays Eliot’s hope that the Great Woman is not a contradiction in terms as she interrogates the narrator’s ironic assumption that ‘nature [has] intended greatness for men’ [*MM*, 389]. However much Eliot might admire Mary Garth’s heroism of the home, she knew too well from her own biography that exile is, however regrettably, the only resort for those unable to settle for anonymity.

## Excursus: Dostoevsky's Divided Heroes

By retaining this heroic surplus, Eliot has stopped short of the ethical vision of her Russian contemporary, Leo Tolstoy. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy stated that the Great Man was a fiction, that generals, ministers, and kings had, in fact, remarkably little to do with the movement of history,<sup>104</sup> and that it was anachronistic to ascribe to them the powers of an epic hero:

Древние оставили нам образцы героических поэм, в которых герои составляют весь интерес истории, а мы все еще не можем привыкнуть к тому, что для нашего человеческого времени история такого рода не имеет смысла.<sup>105</sup>

Napoleon is again in view here, and, as Tolstoy was serialising his novel in *The Russian Messenger*, Dostoevsky too was bringing that Great Man down to size in the same journal. As Molly Wesling has noted, the demythologisations were quite different. Tolstoy unmasked Napoleon from the outside, showing him in his corporeal vulgarity; Dostoevsky's Napoleon, revealed in *Raskolnikov*, is disembodied and ideational, surrounded by a halo of terror.<sup>106</sup> *Raskolnikov*'s heroic aspirations are repeatedly undermined in the novel, and shown to be utterly dependent on a contingency over which Napoleon ought to triumph. Zametov's question, 'Уж не Наполеон ли какой будущий и нашу Алену Ивановну на прошлой неделе топором уколошил?', neatly demystifies *Raskolnikov*'s hubris: he is not unique, but rather one future Napoleon among many (recalling Pushkin's 'мы все глядим в Наполеоны'); he is not the conqueror of Egypt, but of "our" named, singular Alyona Ivanovna; he did not act in History, but merely last week; and his supposedly grand

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<sup>104</sup> Ilya Stambler brings Tolstoy and Carlyle's views of history into dialogue in his article 'Heroic Power in Thomas Carlyle and Leo Tolstoy', *The European Legacy*, 11.7 (2006), 737-51.

<sup>105</sup> Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 211.

<sup>106</sup> Wesling, *Napoleon in Russian Cultural Mythology*, p. 123.

action is accomplished with a verb—roughly approximating “to bump off”—that could not be more at odds with its Napoleonic subject.

Moreover, Raskolnikov did not commit his murder with the idealism of his forebear. Whilst Napoleon—in the assessment of such luminaries as Carlyle and Pushkin—sought to preserve the ideals of the French Revolution, spreading Enlightenment in the trail of his star, Raskolnikov turns in on himself. His murder, he eventually discovers, is motivated not by a desire to enact a viable social programme, but constitutes rather a test of will, ‘an aspect of self-inquiry, of pure experiment’.<sup>107</sup>

For Dostoevsky, there is something about the Russian character, so often divided between its Petrine and Orthodox heritage, that makes meaningful social action difficult, and none of his characters ever really achieve it. This difficulty is particularly pronounced in *The Gambler*, in which ethnographic meditations figure heavily. Joseph Frank suggests that the novel reads as an ‘ambivalent commentary’ on the Russian national character which, on the one hand, resists the ‘Philistine penny-pinching of the Germans’, the ‘perfidious patina of the French’ and the ‘solidly helpful but unattractively stodgy virtues of the English’,<sup>108</sup> but on the other is not capable of the industry of those nations. The English Mr Astley is right (in Dostoevsky’s estimation) when he says to Aleksey:

Вы имели некоторые способности, живой характер и были человек недурной; вы даже могли быть полезны вашему отечеству, которое так нуждается в людях, но – вы останетесь здесь, и ваша жизнь кончена... На мой взгляд, все русские таковы или склонны быть таковыми [...] Не первый вы не понимаете, что такое труд (я не о народе вашем говорю)’ [5, 317].

For Dostoevsky, only the common people (*narod*) had the wherewithal to labour.

What they lacked, however, was the vision. Dostoevsky’s heroes tend to be so

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<sup>107</sup> Robert L. Jackson, ‘Napoleon in Russian Literature’, *Yale French Studies*, 26 (1960), 106-18. Here, p. 113.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 181.

consumed with the latter that they scorn the former. None of his heroes have what we might call “proper” jobs.<sup>109</sup>

In *The Idiot*, it falls to the scion of a noble family to enact salvation in modern-day Russia. Dostoevsky had intended to create a quixotic figure without the comic qualities of Cervantes’s prototype; as Gary Rosenshield notes, Aglaya Epanchina shares Dostoevsky’s desire for a serious reincarnation of Don Quixote and takes Myshkin to be precisely the embodiment of her own chivalrous idea, reciting Pushkin’s “The Poor Knight” to that effect.<sup>110</sup> However, neither Dostoevsky’s ideal of a saviour, nor Aglaya’s of a knight, can be realised in the modern world of St Petersburg, since Myshkin is too isolated from society to be its champion. In the past chronotope of knightly escapades—of battles in far off lands, of maidens locked in castles, of uncontested belief in the values of honour and love; of a temporality that did not erode idealism—it was possible to believe in a single vision, and necessary—rather than ridiculous—to give up home and hearth in search of its realisation.

But the knight’s singular vision (‘он имел одно виденье’) cannot be sustained in the novel, as Myshkin’s love is divided between two objects: Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna. Aglaya’s ideal is shown to be illusory as, in Joseph Frank’s words, ‘nothing could be less characteristic of the Prince than the deeds of military valor performed during the Crusades by the Poor Knight in the service of the Christian faith’.<sup>111</sup> His heroic values are more akin to those ascribed to Eliot by Trott, Wiesenfarth, and Booth: compassion, meekness, and humility. But unlike Eliot’s incarnation of such virtues, Dostoevsky exposes them as utterly insufficient to combat

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<sup>109</sup> Michael André Bernstein argues that this contributes to the class rage of some of his protagonists: ‘it is fascinating how many of his most tormented Abject Heroes are unemployed, or merely embittered, university intellectuals’. *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 96.

<sup>110</sup> Gary Rosenshield, *Challenging the Bard: Dostoevsky and Pushkin, a Study of Literary Relationship* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), p. 224.

<sup>111</sup> Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, p. 334.

a world of intrigues, jealousies, scandals and conflicting love interests. Like Ladislav in search of his dragon, Aglaya does not understand that the mode of heroism she craves is long out of date.

Lebedev is aware of this, and laments it. He recalls the heroic deed of a cannibal who handed himself into church authorities, despite the torments that might await him, and asserts that he was compelled to do so by a ‘связующая, направляющая мысль’ that could be relied upon to animate or constrain moral behaviour in the past [8, 315]. This thought—similar to the ‘national idea’ in sync with which young Theresa’s heart beat [*MM*, 3]—is no longer uncontested in the modern age, and, as Aileen Kelly has demonstrated, almost all of Dostoevsky’s characters bear within themselves their creator’s divided conscience, which she argues is a struggle between faith and reason that is never resolved.<sup>112</sup> Kelly argues that this struggle—expressed succinctly in Dostoevsky’s claim that he was a ‘дитя века, дитя неверия и сомнения’ [28:1, 176]—should not be understood as an age-old conflict between faith and doubt whose conclusion is essentially foregone, but rather a specific manifestation of a nineteenth-century struggle that juxtaposes humanism and Christianity, and finds both alluring and problematic.

If great feats, such as the cannibal’s, are unachievable in the modern world since there is not a common set of values to undergird them, all that is left for Dostoevsky’s heroes, it seems, is the hope that their small actions might diffuse into the wider world. This is the ideal expressed by Zosima, in his metaphor that goodness ramifies like ripples in a pond. Apart from in his restoration of Marie, Myshkin is hardly able to achieve even this, as his smallest acts are misconstrued and merely propel the novel’s tragic dénouement. Nevertheless, long before *The Brothers*

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<sup>112</sup> Aileen Kelly, ‘Dostoevskii and the Divided Conscience’, *Slavic Review*, 47.2 (1988), 239-60.

*Karamazov*, there is evidence that Dostoevsky did believe, like Eliot, that prosaic accomplishments were valuable by virtue of their diffuseness. He excoriated the men of Herzen's generation who (in his provocative reading) declared their devotion to the betterment of humanity without acting to take the necessary steps to begin that process, who wanted titanic results without prosaic effort. Rather than trying to restructure society, Herzen's generation would be better, Dostoevsky argued, to teach a single child to read: 'Шагайте вместо семи миль по вершку [...] снизойдите, снизойдите до мальчика' [18, 68]. In the notebooks for *The Idiot*, the Prince himself was conscious that great feats for the good of humanity should come second to acts of service to our neighbours: 'Князь объявляет, когда женится на Н<астасье> Ф<илипповне>, что лучше одну воскресить, чем подвиги Александра Македонского' [9, 268]. The question remains whether Dostoevsky himself was any more satisfied with such small-scale accomplishments (and their implied anonymity) than Eliot. He did not, after all, start a provincial school for children like Tolstoy, but taught crowds of people in Moscow in his Pushkin address. More importantly, we must ask whether these small acts fully exhaust Dostoevsky's conception of the heroic or whether there is another "half" of heroism that he has yet to abjure. This question will form the basis of my treatment of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which I question Gary Saul Morson's claim that prosaics—his doctrine holding that ordinary, undramatic, and unnoticed actions are more important, historically and morally, than large-scale, conventionally "historic" events<sup>113</sup>—is apotheosised in the novel.

Certainly, no such synthesis had occurred by the time Dostoevsky wrote *The*

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<sup>113</sup> Morson's most succinct formulation of this term can be found in his *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 126-28. For him prosaics recognises the 'efficacy of the ordinary' (p. 126).

*Adolescent*, in which Versilov, himself divided,<sup>114</sup> correctly divines that the eponymous Arkady is torn between two visions of the future: one of great deeds in the world, the other of prosaic happiness at home:

Милый мой, я вовсе не хочу прельстить тебя какою-нибудь буржуазною добродетелью взамен твоих идеалов, не твержу тебе, что “счастье лучше богатырства”; напротив, богатырство выше всякого счастья. [...] Я именно и уважаю тебя за то, что ты смог, в наше прокислое время, завести в душе своей какую-то там “свою идею” (не беспокойся, я очень запомнил). Но все-таки нельзя же не подумать и о мере...[13, 174]

Happiness or heroism (*bogatyrstvo*)—this is Arkady’s choice. Dostoevsky’s use of *bogatyrstvo* (a kind of primal heroism) is particularly suggestive here: to be heroic, for the young generation, is not a matter of attaining to the status of a literary protagonist (‘герой’). Dostoevsky had created many compelling protagonists to whom the designation of *geroi*, but not *bogaty*r, could pertain (the Underground Man is a *geroi* who barely moves, let alone acts). Versilov seems to recognise that the desire for heroic activity is entirely legitimate, and that it necessitates action in life as well as status in the novel. Unfortunately for Arkady, however, *bogatyrstvo* is unattainable in nineteenth-century Russia, whilst happiness is unsatisfying. Lermontov’s lament still obtains: ‘богатыри – не вы’.<sup>115</sup> In a decidedly unepic era (the designation ‘прокислое время’ could almost have been written by Lukács), Arkady is forced to temper his idealistic aspirations (‘завести в душе своей какую-то там “свою идею”’) by remembering that everything has to be kept in moderation

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<sup>114</sup> In the novel, Versilov is torn between the so-called “Geneva idea” (that is, the possibility of virtue without Christ) and the “Christ on the Baltic idea” (a vision of Christ returning to earth). In the view of Charles Arndt (‘Wandering in Two Different Directions: Spiritual Wandering as the Ideological Battleground in Dostoevsky’s *The Adolescent*’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 54.4 (2010), 607-25), Versilov’s act of smashing Makar’s icon at the end of the novel ‘symboliz[es] his own divided nature’ (p. 621). Elsewhere Aileen Kelly succinctly characterises Versilov as ‘half-predator, half-idealist, [and] devoured by doubts’ (‘Dostoevskii and the Divided Conscience’, p. 256). On Arkady’s maturation, through a synthesis of his European and Russian heritage, see Lina Steiner, *For Humanity’s Sake: The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011).

<sup>115</sup> M. Iu. Lermontov, ‘Borodino’ in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), I, p. 24.

(‘подумать и о мере’).

Dostoevsky did, of course, provide positive models unencumbered by the burden of a divided conscience. These include Sonya Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*, Makar in *The Adolescent*, Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Tikhon in his various guises. The latter was conceived, in Dostoevsky’s notes for *The Life of a Great Sinner*, as a response to the failed heroes of Russian literature, past and present (‘Это уж не Костанжогло-с, не немец (забыл фамилию) в Обломове, и не Лопуховы, не Рахметовы’ [29:1, 118]). The list shows Dostoevsky’s engagement with the discourse of heroism in mid-century, but ultimately Dostoevsky had not much improved on the efforts of his forebears: neither Sonya, nor Makar, nor Tikhon, nor Zosima ever attain to the status of protagonists in Dostoevsky’s works. They are all ostracised from the world (and in one case the pages) of the novel proper and live in isolation (it is revealing that *The Devils* can stand with or without its expunged chapter). The question of whether Dostoevsky could incarnate his heroic aspirations in the thick-and-thin of the novelistic universe, to be tested in a specific historical time and social context, is one to which I now turn.

### ***The Devils: The Death of the Romantic Hero***

The chronotope of *The Devils* is less clearly historicised than that of *Treby Magna* and *Middlemarch*, although L. Saraskina does challenge Bakhtin’s view that time and biography are essentially unimportant in Dostoevsky. Saraskina has undertaken the task of dating each incident in the novel in calendar time, showing that the action occurs between the end of September and beginning of October 1869.<sup>116</sup> Whilst one

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<sup>116</sup> See L. Saraskina, *Besy: Roman-preduprezhdenie* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), esp. chapter 1.

might view Saraskina's findings as too systematic, it is certainly true that the environment of the novel belongs distinctly to the world of the 1860s and its conflicts.

These conflicts are both ideological and metaphysical. As Joseph Frank explains, *The Devils* is structured along two different generic axes—what Frank calls the Pamphlet and the Poem.<sup>117</sup> Dostoevsky had initially intended to dispatch the work quickly, conceiving it as a political pamphlet in which Peter Verkhovensky, modelled on the real-life Sergey Nechaev, would take centre stage. Like Shigalyov, whose system memorably begins with absolute freedom and ends in absolute despotism, Verkhovensky subscribes to the beliefs of his real life prototype in despotic leadership and a levelling of individuality.<sup>118</sup> But whereas Shigalyov's theory, which sets one tenth of humanity against the remaining masses, is deferred to the future (he requires at least ten of his group's meetings to discuss his programme), Verkhovensky insists that it must be implemented immediately. He criticises the group for its provincialism, believing that the group have been constrained by their environment: 'Я понимаю, что вам здесь в городишке скучно, вы и бросаетесь на писаную бумагу' [10, 313]. Here, in the derisive *gorodishko*, they are unable to implement their ideas and are content to let them remain on paper. As Anne Lounsbury has shown, for Dostoevsky's provincials, significance and greatness are the preserve of the capital, not the province.<sup>119</sup> Verkhovensky's role, as he conceives it, is to show them that even the small town provides an arena for action, but it must be grasped not in spouting liberal chatter, but through a politically-motivated assassination. The

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<sup>117</sup> See Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, Part 4.

<sup>118</sup> These ideas were put forward in Nechaev's *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, which was influenced by Tkachev's *Heroes of the Future*. On the *Catechism*, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, pp. 444-47. It fully endorsed the manipulation of leaders for the benefit of the revolutionary cause. Such ideas justify Peter Verkhovensky's manipulation of Varvara Petrovna and Madame von Lembke in *The Devils*.

<sup>119</sup> Anne Lounsbury, 'Dostoevskii's Geography: Centers, Peripheries, and Networks in *Demons*', *Slavic Review*, 66.2 (2007), 211-29.

bungled murder of Shatov at the close is testament to Verkhovensky's inability to orchestrate one death, let alone a hundred million.

However, it is the protagonist of the Poem who has a greater claim to evaluation as the hero of the work, and in a letter to Strakhov in October 1870 Dostoevsky noted that Stavrogin had eclipsed Peter Stepanovich in terms of narrative centrality: 'выступило еще новое лицо, с претензией на настоящего *героя романа*, так что прежний герой (лицо любопытное, но действительно не стоящее имени героя) стал на второй план' [29.1, 148; Dostoevsky's italics]. Consequently, it is my contention that Dostoevsky's conception of the heroic is better tested against Stavrogin, who is at any rate the object of the characters' hero-worship.

Stavrogin's ethereal nature is surprising given his colourful backstory, much of it fashioned out of the topoi of Romantic iconography, not least visible in the aura of madness that he projects. Also surprising is the disaster his presence precipitates, since he is perfectly capable of acts of kindness, as when he warns Shatov and Lebyadkin that their lives are in danger.<sup>120</sup> His youthful escapades, in which he killed at least two people and crippled a third, remind the townsfolk of Shakespeare's Prince Harry, whilst his journeys around Europe and to Egypt, Iceland, and Jerusalem, however improbable, recall Romantic disaffection with domestic life—a disaffection that might be channelled into exciting exploits on the border, abroad, or at sea, but which cannot be dissipated in the provincial town. He might have fared better, to recall the distinction in my Introduction, in a regional rather than provincial novel. Moreover, his journey to Iceland was part of a scientific expedition [*uchennaia ekspeditsiia*] [10, 45], briefly suggesting that he had the potential to be potential to be a heroic man of science, like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. As it happens, he does

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<sup>120</sup> Richard Pope and Judy Turner discuss the positive potential of Stavrogin, calling him a person of 'intelligence and talent' who fails 'abjectly' in life and does 'so little good'. See their article 'Toward Understanding Stavrogin', *Slavic Review*, 49.4 (1990), 543-53.

birth a monster.

Certainly, the residents of the town attribute to him a Byronic personality, even in the present, and they expect him to avenge himself of Shatov's slap as in a Corsican vendetta [10, 167]. Marya Lebyadkina, meanwhile, believes he belongs to the chivalric genre, calling him variously her knight and prince. One of the most interesting and, I believe, insufficiently documented clues to his character comes from the narrator, who compares him to the Decembrist M. S. Lunin ('L—n' in the text) [10, 165]. The narrator notes that Lunin revelled in the sensation of danger, liked to duel, met with convicts in Siberia, and fought wild bears in the forest.<sup>121</sup> Pope and Turner's claim that the invocation of Lunin is designed to show that Stavrogin surpasses the Decembrist in 'sheer wickedness' and 'viciousness' seems greatly overstated, since there is nothing in Dostoevsky's text, or the source material from which he drew his portrait, to indicate that Lunin exhibited either of those vices.<sup>122</sup> More to the point is the observation of S. B. Okun, who suggests that 'Достоевского Лунин интересовал не как мыслитель и революционер [as he had interested Herzen and Pushkin], а как бесстрашный человек, всегда пренебрегающий опасностью'.<sup>123</sup> Okun's absorbing biography of Lunin does indeed present him as a firebrand, who at one stage in his military career challenged the Grand Duke Constantine to a duel. This, at least, was the legend, and the difficulties Okun experiences in reconstructing the incident testify to the depth of legend that surrounded Lunin,<sup>124</sup> one which Dostoevsky matches in Stavrogin.

How familiar Dostoevsky was with Lunin's biography is not entirely clear,

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<sup>121</sup> The fighting of beasts seems to have been a Romantic activity, and is poeticised by Lermontov in *Mtsyri*.

<sup>122</sup> Pope and Turner, 'Toward Understanding Stavrogin', p. 544.

<sup>123</sup> S. B. Okun', *Dekabrist M. S. Lunin* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1985), p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 14ff.

and since he is mentioned nowhere else in the writer's oeuvre, it would be wrong to overstate his influence over Dostoevsky's creative imagination. L. G. Gofman is right to suggest that the 'сходные с Луниным черты Ставрогина—безумная отвага и какая-то сверхчеловеческая сила характера—развивались совершенно независимо от живого образца неустрашимого и гордого декабриста'.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, Dostoevsky's source—the reminiscences of the Decembrist Svistunov, published in *The Russian Archive*<sup>126</sup>—provides enough information about Lunin to expose the differences between Stavrogin and this particular prototype. In the memoirs, Lunin appears hungry for a fight, and eager to spread his love of duelling among his regiment. Svistunov notes that the 'ощущение опасности было для него наслаждением'.<sup>127</sup> More recent biographies confirm this, with Okun noting his reputation as an enthusiastic dueller.<sup>128</sup> But when it comes to Stavrogin's duel with Gaganov, nothing could be more dissimilar: he repeatedly stresses (and much to his opponent's annoyance) his desire to reconcile, such that Irina Reyfman argues that he fails to live up to the honour code and at any rate achieves the opposite of his intention (Gaganov is enraged rather than pacified).<sup>129</sup>

Moreover, Svistunov makes clear that Lunin had an active Catholic faith that could not be more alien to Stavrogin (who taught Shatov, in typically Slavophile rhetoric, that Catholicism was not true Christianity). A detailed study of Lunin's Catholicism by Glynn Barrett shows that it controlled his political thought and action.<sup>130</sup> He also shows that Lunin was well aware of his tempestuous nature, and

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<sup>125</sup> L. G. Gofman, 'Dekabristy i Dostoevskii', in *Tainye obshchestva v Rossii v nachale XIX stoletii: Sbornik materialov, statei i vospominanii* (Moscow: Glavlit, 1925), pp. 192-98. Here, p. 197.

<sup>126</sup> 'Отповед' P. N. Svistunova', *Russkii arkhiv*, 2 (1871), 334-53.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>128</sup> Okun', *Dekabrist M. S. Lunin*, p. 11

<sup>129</sup> See Irina Reyfman, *Ritualized Violence Russian Style: The Duel in Russian Culture and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 243-44.

<sup>130</sup> G. R. Barratt, 'The Catholicism of Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 49.115 (1971), 255-71.

turned to Catholicism as a necessary ‘defence against himself’.<sup>131</sup> Whilst we cannot assume that Dostoevsky undertook historical research on Barrett’s scale, Svistunov nevertheless makes it abundantly clear, much to his own bewilderment, that Lunin held fast to the tenets and practices of Catholicism.<sup>132</sup> By the time he arrives back at Skvoreshniki for the second time, Stavrogin no longer has any faith to sustain him, and relies entirely on himself. Joseph Frank writes that ‘his quest is a spiritual experimentation totally preoccupied with itself, totally closed within the ego, and hence incapable of self surrender to the absolute that it is presumably seeking’.<sup>133</sup> I suggest that by the time the novel begins, his titanic will, constantly tested and stretched, is the only absolute he has left—and by the end of the novel, he doesn’t even have that.

Like Raskolnikov, whose Napoleonic ambition collapsed into self-enquiry and experiment, Stavrogin has no lasting positive impact on his environment. As Stepanian puts it, Prince Harry never assumes the civic role of King Henry.<sup>134</sup> Lunin, of course, was compelled by his patriotism to rise up against autocracy for the good of society.<sup>135</sup> Stavrogin has no such social programme, and is charged by Shatov of having lost touch with his homeland altogether—he is, after all, a nobleman’s son, a particularly perilous Dostoevskian category.

The ways in which Stavrogin differs from the historical Lunin are important not so much in themselves, as in the way they illustrate the difficulty of heroism in the 1860s. In *The Idiot*, Lebedev had compared the machine age to the age of the twelfth-century cannibal. Lunin was active in *the same* century as Stavrogin, and yet the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>132</sup> Svistunov, ‘Otpoved’’, p. 349.

<sup>133</sup> Joseph Frank, ‘The Masks of Stavrogin’, *The Sewanee Review*, 77.4 (1969), 660-91. Here, p. 669.

<sup>134</sup> Karen Stepanian, ‘Realizm Dostoevskogo v bol’shom vremeni (Shekspir, Servantes, Bal’zak, Makanin)’, *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul’tura*, 30.1 (2013), 13-64. Here, pp. 22-23.

<sup>135</sup> On Lunin’s patriotism, see Okun’, *Dekabrist M. S. Lunin*, p. 22.

latter, however much influenced by a Byronic model, cannot play the Byronic hero of his own era:

Но все-таки с тех пор прошло много лет, и нервная, измученная и раздвоившаяся природа людей нашего времени даже и вовсе не допускает теперь потребности тех непосредственных и цельных ощущений, которых так искали тогда иные, беспокойные в своей деятельности, господа доброго старого времени. Николай Всеволодович, может быть, отнесся бы к Л-ну свысока, даже назвал бы его вечно храбрящимся трусом, петушком,— правда, не стал бы высказываться вслух. Он бы и на дуэли застрелил противника, и на медведя сходил бы, если бы только надо было, и от разбойника отбил бы в лесу - так же успешно и так же бесстрашно, как и Л-н, но зато уж безо всякого ощущения наслаждения, и единственно по неприятной необходимости, вяло, лениво, даже со скукой. [10, 165]

The divided nature of the time precludes the visceral enjoyment of life, and all its direct and integral sensations (sensation being a particularly important guarantor of authenticity for the Romantics). Stavrogin is characterised not by bold exploits, but by negation (his non-response to Shatov's blow), moral anaesthesia, and silence. As Leatherbarrow argues, 'Stavrogin is essentially a non-character, an ever-shifting composite whose "meaning" is derived from the misreading of others'.<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile, Davison comments on the prominence of Stavrogin at the start of the novel and his disappearance in the final third: the novel is a story of 'Stavrogin's loss of centrality in his world and it is told by making him lose centrality in the structure of the novel'.<sup>137</sup> I think that what Peter Thorslev says about Byronic heroes holds precisely for Stavrogin on this point: 'with the loss of his titanic passions, his pride, and his certainty of self-identity, he loses also his status as hero'.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, Stavrogin is not just a victim (as the final line of the above quotation suggests) of the

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<sup>136</sup> William Leatherbarrow, 'Misreading Myshkin and Stavrogin: The Presentation of the Hero in Dostoevskii's *Idiot* and *Besy*', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 78.1 (2000), 1-19. Here, p. 15.

<sup>137</sup> R. M. Davison, 'The Devils: The Role of Stavrogin', in *New Essays on Dostoyevsky*, ed. by Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 95-114. Here, p. 96.

<sup>138</sup> Peter L. Thorslev Jr., *The Byronic Hero* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 187.

ennui of the so-called superfluous men. He is more angry than Onegin or Pechorin, and devoid of Romantic passions. He is capable of cold, calm, and rational action.

Of course, Lunin's idealism also failed, as his comrades were shot, hanged, or exiled after the events of 1825. But he was defeated by a force outside himself, the tsarist state. Such heroic expiration has plentiful representation in literature, and bestows upon the sufferer an air of the tragic. Stendhal's heroes attain it. Julien Sorel, for example, falls under the guillotine with the awareness that his superior character can never be reconciled to his banal environment. As Day writes, he is condemned to failure, but dies in the knowledge of his superiority to the common man.<sup>139</sup> Heroic figures like Lunin and Sorel die with their integrity intact, in full knowledge that they have (in Lunin's case) preserved an authentic self and (in Julien's) created one. Lunin and Julien Sorel were victims to a social order that could find no place for them. Such an end is categorically not experienced by Stavrogin, who is well respected by the townsfolk and endowed with the talent and dynamism to lead.

The reasons for Stavrogin's failure are primarily internal. In his final letter to Dasha at the end of the novel, he admits his failures: 'Я пробовал везде мою силу [...] Но к чему приложить эту силу — вот чего никогда не видел, не вижу и теперь' [10, 514]. His whole life has been a test of his will with nothing positive to show for it. Unable to find an object of belief, or to venerate that object with the passion of Kirillov and Shatov, he poetically laments: 'На бревне можно переплыть реку, а на щепке нет' [10, 514]. Like Myshkin, he is too divided within himself to offer hope to those who put their trust in him. But whereas Myshkin's inability to understand or rescue his society led to the tragic death of the novel's heroine,

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<sup>139</sup> Day, *Stendhal's Paper Mirror*, p. 189.

Stavrogin's diffuse opinions occasion a social disintegration that no-one can arrest. He is useless both at home and abroad (in the letter, he recognises that if Dasha were to move to Switzerland with him, it would effectively be a death sentence: 'Да и зачем вам хоронить со мной вашу жизнь?' [10, 513]). At most, the "home" of the small town only accelerates a demise that had begun elsewhere. Stavrogin comes home only to die. His death is pathetic rather than tragic (certainly, there is no catharsis), but in killing off Stavrogin, Dostoevsky has acted with greater fidelity to his hero's nature than Eliot did when she freed Dorothea from the fetters of *Middlemarch*: Stavrogin's titanism is neither sublimated into prosaic goodness, nor rekindled to promise public service elsewhere. In death, the spent hero does what Dorothea could not do: he comes to terms with an unheroic chronotope. In this case, this coming-to-terms can only be considered a defeat.

In this respect, his end resembles that of Lydgate in *Middlemarch* or Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*—other figures whose backstories falsely raise the prospect of a hero of science. Far from spearheading reform of the district ('преобразования необходимы'), Bazarov becomes entangled in a love intrigue that puts paid to his materialist ambition: 'И ведь тоже думал: обломаю дел много, не умру, куда! задача есть, ведь я гигант! А теперь вся задача гиганта - как бы умереть прилично, хотя никому до этого дела нет...'.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Lydgate eventually gives up his heroic ambition of 'intellectual conquest and social good' [MM, 145], preferring to cure gout at a continental bathing place than attend the poor. But whereas Bazarov was defeated by an internal inability to harmonise the demands of ideology with the stirrings of the heart, Lydgate's defeat is brought about at the hands of a community unwilling to tolerate innovation. As Lilian Furst writes, his demise

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<sup>140</sup> I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1960-1968), VIII (1964), p. 396.

shows ‘the strength of entrenched conservative forces aligned against him’.<sup>141</sup> A ‘heroic breast / Breathing bad air’ [MM, 177]),<sup>142</sup> Lydgate’s elects for exile and descends into that ‘good number’ of men he had desired to resist—men ‘who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little’ but whose lives come to be ‘shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross’ [MM, 144]. His defeat in this sense is quite different to Dorothea’s, since Dorothea does not evince disappointment at having to “retreat” to the capital; Lydgate, by contrast, does have the self-awareness to see himself as a failure, even if others view him as a success. In the case of Stavrogin, Bazarov, and Lydgate, death is the fitting end for careers that have nowhere left to go (after his exile, Lydgate, we are told, ‘died prematurely’ [MM, 835] and the final years of his life are described as those of a ‘murdered man’ [MM, 835]). This was the fate that Eliot could not bring herself to inflict on Dorothea,<sup>143</sup> even as she had inflicted it on Maggie Tulliver.<sup>144</sup>

By the time he wrote *The Devils*, Dostoevsky had yet to create a figure who could challenge either the banality of human evil or the epigraph’s demonic forces (the Gadarene swine) which, as Holland notes, belong more properly to

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<sup>141</sup> Lilian Furst, ‘Struggling for Medical Reform in Middlemarch’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48.3 (1993), 341-61. Here, p. 361.

<sup>142</sup> Avrom Fleishman judges that Lydgate’s defeat in Middlemarch is ‘far more to the community’s discredit than to his’ (*George Eliot’s Intellectual Life*, p. 169).

<sup>143</sup> According to François Jost, the Bildungsroman cannot accommodate death, either because its form is autobiographical, or because it would be pointless for a character to achieve *Beziehungsziel* only to end up in the grave. Thus we might suggest that, by the end of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea’s *Beziehungsziel* has yet to be attained. See his *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1974), p. 137.

<sup>144</sup> Dorothea’s end, however, is not really comparable with Maggie’s (whose end *is* tragic) since in *The Mill on the Floss*, the environment of St. Ogg’s unequivocally defeats Maggie, whereas the environment of Middlemarch is only partly to blame for Lydgate’s downfall. Thus U. C. Knoepfelmacher: ‘George Eliot does not denounce the Middlemarchers as harshly as she attacked the society of St. Ogg’s in *The Mill on the Floss*. Rather, than indicting the town as the City of Destruction such that as that which had suppressed Maggie, she regards it as a microcosm of the fallible world which characters and readers must learn to accept.’ *Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 194.

hagiography.<sup>145</sup> The swine run riot in the environs of Skvoreshniki, and the novel provides no compelling Christ-figure to exorcise them. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the question becomes whether the novel as a secular genre can provide effective means of conquering such demonic forces—or of modelling divine ones.

### ***The Brothers Karamazov: Religion Made Prosaic?***

As if to foreground this question, Dostoevsky begins his final novel with a preface that highlights potentially contradictory generic impulses. The narrator originally promises a *zhizneopisanie*, a noun which implies the novel will be centred on a single character and his adventures in the world. The plurality of the novel's title is thus undermined in "From the Author" with its singular emphasis on Alyosha; the same had been true of *Middlemarch*, which held out a study of provincial life, only, in the Prelude, to offer a much narrower focus on the novel's later-day Theresa. With Dostoevsky, however, the hagiographical overtones of the author/narrator's categorisation are much more pronounced.<sup>146</sup> A *zhizneopisanie*, whilst not necessarily dealing with religious subjects, is usually infused with religious language and is essentially hagiographical in tone. Writing of Kostomarov's *Russian History in the Lives [v zhizneopisaniiakh] of its Principle Figures*, for example, Yu. Sazonova identifies the writing as 'в строго житийном стиле'.<sup>147</sup> By employing such

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<sup>145</sup> Kate Holland, *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration: Dostoevsky and the Question of Genre in the 1870s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), pp. 65-66.

<sup>146</sup> The "author" of "From the Author" has attracted critical attention. The most detailed account of which I am aware is in Lewis Bagby's 'Brief and Lame: The Introduction to Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 55.2 (2011), 229-44. To my mind, Bagby's argument that there are multiple voices in dialogue within the preface (which he seeks to demonstrate through forensic examination of each sentence) is greatly too complex. However, he is right to suggest that the note conditions our reading of *The Brothers Karamazov*: without it, would we be tempted to view Alyosha as the hero at all? (p. 229).

<sup>147</sup> Iu. L. Sazonova, *Istoriia russkoi literatury: drevnii period*, vol. 2 (New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1955), p. 153.

terminology, the narrator immediately locates his hero in the saintly tradition.

The suggestion that *The Brothers Karamazov* will foreground an exemplary subject is further heightened by the use of the word *novel* (which recurs 11 times in “From the Author”). Given that, according to Bakhtin’s definition, novels owe a debt to biographical forms, the implication here is of a singular heroic figure, albeit this time in a secular key. Saints’ lives, biographies, and novels (certainly in the original sense of *romances*) assume this centrality and, in the first two genres, the hero’s success is essentially a foregone conclusion. As Børtnes has shown, saints are destined to glory from childhood, the glorification being a requisite of the genre.<sup>148</sup> As for biographies, even when the biographer came to question over time his initial enthusiasm for his subject, as Viazemsky did in his biography of Fonvizin,<sup>149</sup> the subject of the genre must nevertheless be a man of renown.

However, the narrator undermines the readers’ expectations of a singular heroic figure by claiming that Alyosha is a ‘деятель неопределенный, не выяснившийся’ [14, 5]. As Vetlovskaya notes, the narrator here inverts the traditional modesty *topoi* of hagiography, according to which the writer should question his own ability to describe the saint’s life; in *The Brothers Karamazov* it is the hero whose abilities are questioned.<sup>150</sup> In this sense Alyosha is firmly established as belonging to fragmented modernity, an age of unclear ideas, a time in which it would be strange to demand clarity (‘странно бы требовать в такое время как наше от людей ясности’ [14, 5]). It is at this juncture where the novel sharply diverges from its biographical prototype, and is seen as a product of the sinfulness and decay

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<sup>148</sup> See Børtnes, *Visions of Glory*, e.g., pp. 52-55.

<sup>149</sup> On this, see Andrew Kahn, ‘Life-Writing in the 1830s: Viazemsky’s *Fon-Vizin* and Pushkin’s “Table Talk”’, *Urbandus Review*, 12 (2009/2010), 83-104.

<sup>150</sup> V. E. Vetlovskaya, *Poetika romana Brat’ia Karamazovy* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), p. 17. Vetlovskaya’s study provides a detailed account of the convergence with, and deviations from, traditional hagiography in Alyosha’s story, such as I am unable to develop here. See especially pp. 13-20.

that Lukács sees as characteristic of the modern epoch.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, his main action is immediately deferred to a second, unwritten novel; but even here the narrator worries that the second novel might be superfluous for such a humble and indefinite hero ('и одного-то романа может быть было бы для такого скромного и неопределенного героя излишне' [14, 6]).

For critics such as Morson, this modesty and indefiniteness are more appropriate to the genre of the novel than the assertions of greatness they contest, and they entail moral qualities quite different from the negative evaluations of Lukács. I will shortly seek to challenge the positive moral spin Morson gives to Alyosha's journey from hagiographical to novelistic hero. Where Morson is right, however, is his designation of Alyosha as a refugee in the world of the novel, here reified as the quotidian cattle-house of Skotoprigonevsk.

Alyosha is a character who is ill at ease with his environment. Running from vice (or else rising above it), he prefers to hide away in a monastery than deal directly with the world of Skotoprigonevsk. In this respect, he models his life on hagiographical ideals, in which distance from the world is directly proportionate to divine proximity (an assertion challenged, as I showed in chapter 1, by Dostoevsky's rewriting of Luke 10), and the isolated monastery serves as the centre of glorification.<sup>152</sup> In a sense, the world of the novel comes to him when the Karamazovs visit Zosima's cell. From that scene on, he gradually comes to engage with the town, finally leaving the monastery altogether at the end of book 7. He casts off his beloved cassock, and dons the clothes of a man-about-town—and he does so directly, without the armour of disguise enjoyed by Alexey, the Man of God. This

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<sup>151</sup> See Tihanov, *Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time*, p. 155.

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Bortnes, *Visions of Glory*, p. 73. On the directly proportionate link between seclusion and holiness in monastic practice, see David Prestel, 'The Kievan Caves Monastery: What Do Monks Have to Do with the World?', *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 33.2-4 (2006), 199-216.

novelistic development is also seen in his attitudes to Zosima: whilst he originally believes ‘в духовную силу своего учителя, и слава его была как бы собственным его торжеством’ [14, 29] and is greatly affronted by a divine justice that would let his body decay, he comes to appreciate Zosima in more prosaic terms: his *Life of Zosima* is shorn of all things miraculous. Alyosha knows that the world outside the monastery walls is full of temptations, but Zosima, in contrast to monastic practice, encourages him to meet those temptations face-to-face. It is not a commission he accepts willingly. In fact he believes that the town is a source of temptation rather than an amphitheatre for action, causing him to neglect his duty of care to Zosima: ‘он горько упрекнул себя, что мог на мгновение *там, в городе*, даже забыть о том, кого оставил в монастыре на одре смерти и кого чтил выше всех на свете’ [14, 146; my italics]. Skotoprigonevsk poses a threat to a righteousness that is only possible on the border, the place of refuge to which generations of holy men had fled in their pursuit of sanctification.<sup>153</sup> His encounter with the less than harmonious town will compel him to confront ‘неясность и путаница’ [14, 170]: he will be forced to mediate battles whose animating impulses (love and women) he little understands, before shedding his ascetic lifestyle and himself marrying Lise (although the marriage does not occur in the novel). In short, his path in the novel is one which Fyodor Pavlovich recommended at the meeting in Zosima’s cell: ‘монах святой,’ he teases, ‘ты будь-ка добродетелен в жизни, принеси пользу обществу, не заключаясь в монастыре на готовые хлеба и не

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<sup>153</sup> For this reason, righteousness is possible in the borderlands of Siberia too, hence Raskolnikov (and Mitya’s) exile there. The same holds for heroism. For example, Dostoevsky labels Foma Danilov, a soldier whose heroic refusal to recant his faith is ridiculed by Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a ‘замученный русский герой’ [25, 12]. Indeed, although at the start of this chapter I characterised the second-half of the nineteenth century as a time of peace, this description only holds for metropolitan and provincial Russia; in fact, conflicts were occurring on the borders of the Empire (the Crimean War, the Polish insurrection, the Russo-Turkish war). On the border, in the adventure space of Siberia or the battlefields of Crimea, the heroic activity remained much more realisable than it did in the centre of provincial Russia.

ожидая награды там на верху, - так это-то потруднее будет' [14, 83]. Virtue in the desert monastery is, Fyodor believes, a *fait accompli*.<sup>154</sup> But without the promise of success, when the arena of that virtue is transposed to the chronotope of Skotoprigonevsk, of the "horizontal" here-now, which can guarantee no such rewards, it is much more difficult.

In asking Alyosha to come to terms with the world, the monk promotes a move from sacred to secular space, as well as from a sacred to secular genre, and it is this transition Alyosha finds difficult. However, he is not alone in recoiling from engagement with Skotoprigonevsk. Not here, not now: many if not most main characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* disdain their chronotope. Ivan longs to escape to Europe, even though Europe is a graveyard. All Ivan's heroes belong to the there-then chronotope of the past: 'Дорогие там лежат покойники, каждый камень над ними гласит о такой горячей минувшей жизни, о такой страстной вере в свой подвиг, в свою истину, в свою борьбу и в свою науку' [14, 210]. Faith, battle, and science; or, alternatively, St Theresa's Spain, Scott's Scotland, Newton's England: Ivan knows these chronotopes have passed, that they are graveyards, but their appeal is still strong. Mitya, meanwhile, believes he will only be able to reinvent himself in America, belonging, the narrator tells us, to that class of men who believe that a change of place will enable, if not heroic activity, then at least a modicum of happiness: 'только бы не эти люди, только бы не эти обстоятельства, только бы улететь из этого проклятого места и - все возродится, пойдет по-новому! Вот во что он верил и по чем томился' [14, 330]. Smerdyakov wants a career in Moscow; Captain Snegiryov and his son want to leave ('Папа, говорит, какой это нехороший город наш, папа! [...] Папа, переедем в

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<sup>154</sup> He is wrong, of course. Rakitin and Ferapont are proof of that.

другой город, в хороший, говорит, город, где про нас и не знают' [14, 189]); Rakitin will likely make a name for himself in the publishing trade in St Petersburg. Against this exodus, Alyosha is sent out into the world—not, in his context, the world of Petersburg, Moscow, or Europe, but the world of Skotoprigonevsk. At the close of the chapter “Cana of Galilee”, when Alyosha embraces the earth, it seems as if he has embraced Zosima’s commission, as if he has come to terms with the reality of the novel, a reality not organised according to the vertical axis of timeless moments of suffering and (guaranteed) transfiguration, but according to the horizontal axis of slow temporal struggle in which the future is “open”.

This chronotope is unheroic, and by consenting to inhabit it, Alyosha must abandon his desire for *podvigi*—the *podvigi* that, as I suggested in my Introduction, Goncharov held distinguished Siberians from Russian provincials. But without the divine assistance enjoyed by his saintly forebears, does Alyosha become, in Vladimir Kantor’s words, ‘бессилен в столкновении со злом мира’?<sup>155</sup> Clearly, he does nothing truly momentous. However, Morson calls for us to reassess the contribution that Alyosha, and the creed he comes to learn, make to the novel. Morson argues that the story of the novel can be summarised in the following way: ‘Alyosha begins the novel with the wrong sort of faith. How he finds the right faith is his story in the novel’.<sup>156</sup> (This path recalls Trott’s designation of *Middlemarch* as a novel that progresses from impossible standards to achievable ends.) He begins the text as an idealist who hopes for immediate exploits, which will be ‘sudden, dramatic, visible, and unmistakable’.<sup>157</sup> In valuing the immediacy of these exploits, the extremist nature of Alyosha’s faith (though not its object) resembles that of the socialist ideals of young radicals with whom Dostoevsky sympathised, even as he regarded them as

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<sup>155</sup> Morson, ‘The God of Onions’, p. 189.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

misguided.<sup>158</sup> Through his interactions with Zosima, who does not endorse such extremism, Alyosha comes to value what Morson calls “prosaic” Christianity, a Christianity of small acts of kindness, a Christianity that values the ‘slow internal improvement of each soul’ and ‘change that happens almost invisibly and whose beneficent results must be taken largely on faith’.<sup>159</sup> Grushenka’s legend of the onion (a small and seemingly insignificant gift) epitomises prosaic Christianity, and when Alyosha goes to Grushenka and treats her as someone better than he, he gives her his own onion. Other examples of the triumph of prosaic goodness in the novel include someone putting a pillow under Mitya’s head as he sleeps, the woman who gives the elder just sixty kopecks as a donation to someone still poorer, Herzenstube’s gift of some nuts to Mitya, and many more. For Morson, these acts are all of eternal significance, even though that significance might be deferred in time. He rightly reads the chapter “Cana of Galilee” as portraying Jesus as the ‘bringer of small prosaic delights’,<sup>160</sup> as Dostoevsky’s retelling of the miracle does not function (as it does in John’s gospel) as a sign of Jesus’s messianic appointment, but on the Son of God as a source of joy and happiness to poor people who had run out of wine.

Morson’s analysis is, I think, extremely well-grounded in the text, from the epigraph onwards. However, where I disagree with him is the implication that *The Brothers Karamazov* represents a synthesis of his previous vacillations about apocalyptic Christianity and prosaic goodness.<sup>161</sup> After all, does Alyosha in fact graduate from “wrong faith” to “right faith”, from “generic refugee” to a character at home in the world of the novel? In my view, the Dostoevsky of *The Brothers Karamazov* does not succeed in “homing” Alyosha in the world of the novel as

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 116

<sup>161</sup> On which see Gary Saul Morson, ‘Introductory Study’, in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, vol. 1, trans. by Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Evanston University Press, 1994), pp. 1-117.

successfully as, say, Tolstoy homed Nikolay Rostov in *War and Peace*. Dostoevsky, I believe, was not quite as content as Tolstoy—or, for that matter, Zosima—to embrace prosaics as the best or only moral code.

In particular, I question whether the notion of diffuse goodness can satisfy either Alyosha or Dostoevsky. Certainly, he does pack his novel with examples of what might be called “deathbed heroes”, that is heroes who inspire (or influence) good deeds in others, but achieve little singular distinction of their own. Zosima’s brother is one such hero, as he tells the young Zinovy to live for him [14, 263]. Zosima himself does not have many great deeds to boast of, but is an inspiration for Alyosha in death. Ilyusha’s illness and death is a seed that unites the boys. However, this emphasis does not fully account for Alyosha’s ardent nature, or the fact that there are *podvigi* in *The Brothers Karamazov* of which Dostoevsky seems to approve. Mitya’s desire to do something immediate for “the babe” even at the risk of exhibiting Karamazov impulsivity, does not, it seems to me, find a satisfactory alternative in someone propping up his head with a pillow.<sup>162</sup> Mitya’s longing for an immediate feat is not condemned or ironised in the passage, though, as Morson shows, it may be unwise, given the usual results of Karamazov impulsivity. Rather, it seems to function as an instance of Mitya coming to terms with Zosima’s doctrine of universal responsibility, which, we recall, was formulated in the following manner: ‘всякий пред всеми за всех виноват, не знают только этого люди, а если б узнали—сейчас был бы рай!’ [14, 270]. Morson’s own judgement about Mitya’s wisdom may be apposite, but wisdom is not a virtue to supplant all others in Dostoevsky’s fiction, and the wisest actions are not always the most virtuous. Morson argues that ‘Taken together, the dream and the incident with the pillow [...]

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 116

form a question and its answer. The pillow and the dream are two irreconcilable answers to the same question of ‘how shall we solve the problem of evil and suffering? By one small good deed at a time’.<sup>163</sup> Rather, I think, they provide two irreconcilable and equally powerful answers to that question.

More importantly, perhaps, Morson’s analysis overlooks aspects of Alyosha’s character, and hints laid as to his future activities. “From the Author” had insisted that Alyosha would attain to significant activity [*deiatel’nost’*] in the second of a projected two novels. In the second novel, Alyosha would achieve something ‘в наше время’ [14, 6]. That novel, of course, was never written, and there is no justification for analysing developments that might occur in a text that does not exist. However, it is also important to remember, as D. D. Blagoy argues, that Dostoevsky himself intended his proposed sequel to condition our reading of the novel.<sup>164</sup> Blagoy, and later James L. Rice,<sup>165</sup> painstakingly reconstructed the different accounts of potential sequels to the novel. A summary of their findings may reveal Dostoevsky’s dissatisfaction with Alyosha’s prosaic accomplishments, even if it does not allow us to state with certainty the feats of heroism to which he intended Alyosha to attain.

In the prologue, the author/narrator states that *The Brothers Karamazov* is set back in time thirteen years. The sequel will occur in the present day. Almost all the main characters were to reappear, according to the memoirs of Dostoevsky’s widow, ‘когда они успели бы многое сделать, многое испытать в своей жизни’.<sup>166</sup> Alyosha would marry Lise, but at some point leave her for Grushenka, and in

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>164</sup> D. D. Blagoy, ‘Put’ Aleshi Karamazova’, *Izvestiia akademii nauk SSSR: Seriiia literatury i iazyka*, 33.1 (1974), 8-26.

<sup>165</sup> James L. Rice, ‘Dostoevsky’s Endgame: The Projected Sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*’, *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 33.1 (2006), 45-62.

<sup>166</sup> A. G. Dostoevskaiia, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971), p. 370.

*Karamazov II* these love interests would be more central. Blagoy thus views the burgeoning relationship between Alyosha and Lise of *Karamazov I* as preparation for a more dramatic love story in *Karamazov II*. Although Blagoy admits that the concrete evidence as to the contents of the second novel is sparse, he attaches great weight to Suvorin's memoir, in which the biographer recalls a meeting with Dostoevsky. He reports what was said:

[Достоевский] сказал, что напишет роман, где героем будет Алеша Карамазов. Он хотел его провести через монастырь и сделать революционером. Он совершил бы политическое преступление. Его бы казнили. Он искал бы правду и в этих поисках, естественно, стал бы революционером.<sup>167</sup>

This account has been roundly dismissed by some critics.<sup>168</sup> However, James Rice has identified another source in an obscure Odessan newspaper, *Novorossiiskii Telegraf*, whose reporter had attended a reading Dostoevsky gave from the novel. The reviewer wrote that Alyosha would become a schoolteacher and had arrived at the idea of assassinating the tsar.<sup>169</sup> Rice notes that neither Suvorin nor the reviewer for the *Novorossiiskii Telegraf* seem at all surprised by the projected sequel: indeed, the reviewer clearly sees Alyosha's band of schoolboys as future revolutionaries and can imagine no reason for their sudden inclusion were the plot not to develop in such a direction.

With Dostoevsky in particular, we should be careful about relying too heavily on projected plans, especially ones for which no first-hand evidence exists. He constantly revised his plans, and Morson has shown, both he and his characters

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<sup>167</sup> A. S. Suvorin, *Dnevnik A. S. Suvorina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo L. D. Frenkel', 1923), pp. 15-16.

<sup>168</sup> Vetlovskaiia, for example, thinks it highly unlikely that Dostoevsky would 'сделать из святого революционера'. However, Suvorin does not state that Alyosha will lose his faith, only that he will commit a political crime (a prospect Vetlovskaiia is ready to concede). See Vetlovskaiia, *Poetika*, p. 191.

<sup>169</sup> See Rice, 'Dostoevsky's Endgame', p. 49.

respond to events in the novel and events in the world unpredictably.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, if Blagoy and Rice's research is right, it will be obvious that it offers a challenge to Morson's theory of prosaics in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For Morson, Alyosha is on a path from extreme to prosaic faith; for Blagoy and Rice, his path takes him from passive inactivity to revolutionary activity. In their reading, *Karamazov I* is a staging-ground for *Karamazov II*: his desire for an immediate deed (*skoroi podvig*) is not sublimated into prosaic diffuseness, but remains unquenched at the end of the novel. In Rice's words, 'Alesha ends *The Brothers Karamazov* by girding up his loins, preparing himself and his boys for the evil ahead'.<sup>171</sup> Joseph Frank and Diane Thompson, who explicitly reject the suggestion that Alyosha could become a socialist revolutionary, nonetheless do not discount the notion that Alyosha will go out into the world beyond Skotoprigonevsk, before returning to the monastery.<sup>172</sup>

Within the text of *The Brothers Karamazov* itself, there are plenty of indications that Dostoevsky does not intend to condemn his hero to a legacy of influence alone. Zosima tells Alyosha that he has much journeying still to do and that 'дела много будет' [14, 71]. Moreover, the text creates expectations of Alyosha that are still unfulfilled at the novel's close. Both Diane Thompson and Vladimir Kantor, for example, note that when Alyosha's mother holds him before the Virgin Mary, we are intended to see a parallel between Alyosha's fate and Christ's. For Thompson,

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<sup>170</sup> See Gary Saul Morson, 'Tempics and the Idiot' *Celebrating Creativity: Essays in Honor of Jostein Børtnes*, ed. by Knut Andreas Grimstad and Ingunn Lunde (Bergen: University of Bergen Press, 1997), pp. 108-35. In his article 'Paradoxical Dostoevsky', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 43.3 (1999), 471-94, Morson suggests that just as Dostoevsky did not have a complete plan when he started on *The Idiot*, so 'even when completing [*Karamazov*], he did not know whether he would continue it' (p. 492).

<sup>171</sup> Rice, 'Dostoevsky's Endgame', pp. 60-61.

<sup>172</sup> For a fierce dialogue between these critics, see an exchange of letters between Rice, Frank and Thompson in the *TLS*. They respond to Rice's article of 1 January 2010, which is a pared down version of his 'Dostoevsky's Endgame' and his article 'The Covert Design of "The Brothers Karamazov": Alesha's Pathology and Dialectic', *Slavic Review*, 68.2 (2009), 355-75. The relevant correspondence makes for entertaining reading and can be found in the *TLS* editions of 22/1/2010, 12/2/2010, 26/2/2010, 29/3/2010, and 9/4/2010 (in each case, p. 6).

this incident ‘marks [Alyosha] as a singular mortal, chosen to fulfil some divine purpose’.<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile Kantor writes, ‘надо учесть, что богоматерь в мировой культуре воспринималась не просто как заступница, но и как символ матери, отдавшей своего сына на крестный путь борьбы и страдания ради спасения человечества’.<sup>174</sup> No amount of onions constitutes a ‘крестный путь борьбы’. For Morson, Cana seems to be the final word on heroism; for Christ, it was but a prelude to Golgotha. It seems to me that prosaics, at least in its Tolstoyan expression, is in fact a difficult set of values to Christianise, since it tends to deny that the “practitioner” has any conscious horizon beyond the self or the immediate family—and consequently, in view of Dostoevsky’s religious vision, it is not easy to apply this theory to works such as *The Brothers Karamazov*. It does not deny that such small-scale deeds can have far-reaching ramifications, but it does suggest that these are, as it were, unintentional: ‘History is made, Tolstoy suggests, by the countless small, daily actions, hidden in plain view, *whose motives and cumulative operation we do not understand*’.<sup>175</sup> But this is not a Christian worldview. The Bible ascribes conscious apocalyptic significance to the smallest of actions: Jesus tells his disciples that ‘as you did it one of the least of these my brothers, *you did it to me*’ (Matt. 25.40); the Sermon on the Mount gives particularly clear motivations for obedience, and the cumulative operation that will flow from it (see, e.g., Matt. 5.4, 14-16); Saint Paul writes that temporary earthly affliction ‘*is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*’ (2 Cor. 4.17); and those most “prosaic” of all activities—eating and drinking—are commended by Paul with a view to their eternal significance: ‘So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God*’ (1 Cor. 1.31;

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<sup>173</sup> Diane Oenning Thompson, *The Brothers Karamazov and the Poetics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 82.

<sup>174</sup> Vladimir Kantor, *Brat’ia Karamazovy F. Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983), pp. 162-63.

<sup>175</sup> Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, p. 126. My italics.

cf. Col. 2.17). When Morson commends the women of faith for giving just sixty kopecks, he does not see this as a reflection of the biblical example of the widow's mite; in that instance, Jesus commends the supplicant not for giving a little, but for giving all: 'For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in *all she had to live on*' (Lk. 21.4). Maximalism in this sense is a Christian value opposed to prosaics. As I demonstrated in my first chapter, Christian narratives such as the parables are not only intended to provide ethical guidance for the quotidian context that gave them birth, but can also be interpreted as theological grand narratives that inform and constrain human activity throughout all time.

That Alyosha is not satisfied with small-scale contributions to the proximate sphere is still more evident at the end of the novel, when he conjectures, in almost Aesopian language, a possible future in which the boys might engage in 'самые важные дела', might achieve various distinctions [*pochesti*] or might fall into 'великое несчастье' [15, 195]. Still more significant is Blagoi's point that Alyosha commends Ilyusha for that most revolutionary of acts: rebellion. Alyosha says of Ilyusha: 'Он был славный мальчик, добрый и храбрый мальчик, чувствовал честь и горькую обиду отцовскую, за которую и восстал [...] он смело один восстал на весь класс' [15, 195].<sup>176</sup> These are not the words of someone happy to challenge oppression through acts of prosaic goodness. Sometimes rebellion, even when it involves the shedding of blood (as Ilyusha's did when he bit Alyosha's finger), is noble. Like Mitya's desire to go off after "the babe", the wisest idea is not always the most appealing. Wisdom is a Tolstoyan virtue more than it is a Dostoevskian one.

Such a reading challenges the view many have of Dostoevsky as the great

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<sup>176</sup> See Blagoi, 'Put' Aleshi Karamazova', p. 23.

conservative. Rice is happy to make this challenge, arguing that Dostoevsky was never servile to the state, and had told Suvorin that there would be circumstances in which he would not denounce the activities of a revolutionary group.<sup>177</sup> Aileen Kelly, meanwhile, shows that Dostoevsky in his later years frequently approved of the socialists' ideas of social change much more than he did the complacency or quietism of the Right.<sup>178</sup> If a sympathetic attitude to socialism seems strange in light of the harsh treatment the practitioners receive in *The Devils*, then we should remember, Blagoy notes, that *The Devils* is to a large degree *satirical* in tone, and that even within that work Dostoevsky recognised a large spectrum of socialist types: they are not all Nechaevs.<sup>179</sup>

My point here is not primarily an ideological one. Kelly, Rice, and others have shown that Dostoevsky's contradictory views never achieved a comfortable synthesis. Rather, I suggest that Morson's view of Alyosha as someone who graduates from the wrong faith to the right faith invites revision when applied to *The Brothers Karamazov*. Alyosha, eternally homeless and 'too noble for the world', is someone who *never* becomes comfortable in the world of the novel, who never manages to reconcile himself to the chronotope of the here-now. Like Felix and Dorothea, he takes leave of his chronotope at the end: 'скоро я *здешний* город покину' [15, 195]. Skotoprigonevsk, like the town of *The Devils*, has been emptied: Ivan, delirium-riddled, is the only Karamazov to remain. Skotoprigonevsk can ultimately sustain neither heroism nor *karamazovshchina*: it opposes the former, and exhausts the latter. Prosaic acts of goodness, of course, are possible in Skotoprigonevsk, and they are there in abundance. But they are insufficient to ward off unprosaic evil, and they do not entirely satisfy Dostoevsky or Alyosha.

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<sup>177</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Kelly, 'Dostoevskii and the Divided Conscience', *passim*, but see, e.g., pp. 244-45, 249.

<sup>179</sup> See Blagoi, p. 21.

Prosaics—or “active love”—is Zosima’s doctrine, not Dostoevsky’s (or at least, only partly Dostoevsky’s). That satisfaction must be postponed in time and space, thirteen years down the line when the hero will be 33 years old, symbolic, Kantor suggests, because it is the age at which Christ ascended Golgotha.<sup>180</sup> Then, elsewhere (probably in the capital), Alyosha will be able to achieve the *podvigi* hinted at in *Karamazov I*. After all, he rose from his epiphany at Cana as a fighter, but by the close of the novel has yet to find a suitable battlefield. Certainly, it transpires that the ground he embraced was not that of Skotoprigonevsk, but a more abstract “humanity” or “Russia”. Like Ivan, he cannot quite bring himself to practice “microscopic philanthropy”.

## Conclusion

In her study of the ascetic hero in Russian literature, Marcia Morris argues that Dostoevsky alters the traditional path of Russian saints. In hagiography, the path these holy men take is one of separation from the world, to initiation into the spiritual life, to non-return to the world (since it has nothing else to teach them, why not stay in seclusion?). She contends that in Dostoevsky’s final novel the “return” happens, giving a path of: separation—initiation—return.<sup>181</sup> This is testament, she claims, to the value Dostoevsky places on community as the only way to find fulfilment. As I have shown, many of Eliot’s critics argue that a separation from, and subsequent reconciliation with, one’s neighbours describes the trajectories of her heroes. In my readings, however, I have sought to show how the characters of Felix, Dorothea, and

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<sup>180</sup> Kantor, *Brat’ia Karamazovy F. Dostoevskogo*, p. 183.

<sup>181</sup> Marcia Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

Alyosha question, rather than confirm, these values. I have not meant to suggest that community life, prosaic living, and “microscopic philanthropy” are unimportant to Eliot or Dostoevsky; they are. Rather, I suggest that these are only one half of their conceptions of the heroic, and one which is perhaps taken too frequently by critics as metonym for heroism as such. In her essay on *Antigone*, Eliot suggested that the heroine was torn by the ‘antagonism between valid claims’, of service to the state and of sisterly piety [*SCW*, 245]. To borrow this language, we might say that for Eliot and Dostoevsky, for Dorothea and Alyosha, there is an antagonism between the heroic and the prosaic, and it is somewhat too convenient to collapse the former into the latter. To glorify the prosaic in the language of the heroic risks making it an unquestioned good, and both Eliot and Dostoevsky knew well the perils of insisting that any doctrine, even one as apparently inoffensive as diffuseness, could tyrannise when exalted. That there is no one “good”—that reformers, martyrs, revolutionaries are ‘never fighting against evil only; they are also placing themselves in opposition to a good’ [*SCW*, 246]—should make us wary of such exaltation.

The extent to which Eliot and Dostoevsky rejected the prosaic vision can be seen by comparison to Tolstoy, who had the courage of his prosaic convictions to ground his characters in the home, the true end of his much-valued, but only so-called, “insignificant” actions.<sup>182</sup> He does this even as he incurs the displeasure of readers who ‘find fault’ (in Edward Wasiolek’s words) with a character like Natasha who ends with a fattened waist, deadened wit, and narrowed eyes.<sup>183</sup> In his essay “Some Words About *War and Peace*”, Tolstoy had written: ‘Для историка, в смысле

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Andrei Zorin’s comment on Nikolay and Marya in *War and Peace* in ‘Tolstoy Replays History’, *TLS* (18 March 2015) <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1532362.ece>> [accessed 26 September 2015]: ‘the story of Nikolai and Maria actually ends in the epilogue – as they exit history nothing is left for them but to live happily ever after, and then die’.

<sup>183</sup> Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy’s Major Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 98. Of course, not all Tolstoy’s characters are so content with domestic life (see epigraph).

содействия, оказанного лицом какой-нибудь одной цели, есть герои; для художника, в смысле ответственности этого лица всем сторонам жизни, не может и не должно быть героев, а должны быть люди'.<sup>184</sup> I suggest that Eliot and Dostoevsky wanted heroes as well as men, as the domestic impulse competes with the heroic impulse. A heroic chronotope is only hinted at in these novels, which locate it elsewhere and in the future. An attempt to portray this heroism would be to insist that the novel revert back to an epic mode that ill-suited realist writers wedded to the representation of the modern world and its complexities. Once these writers have shown that a heroic chronotope does not exist in Middlemarch or Skotoprigonevsk, they have only two choices. Either they can leave their characters there to languish or (as in Stavrogin's case) die; or they can exile them elsewhere. That they elect for exile might be regarded as the lesser sin, even as it is less true to life.

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<sup>184</sup> Tolstoi, *Sobranie sochinenii*, VII, p. 385.

## Chapter 4

### **The Professions in the Provinces: The Appropriation and Perfection of Medical and Legal Discourse in the Provincial Town and Novel**

Я не юрист, но [...] [22, 72]

Я, конечно, не медик, но [...] [23, 138]

The previous chapter showed how the discourse of heroism in nineteenth-century Russia and England fared in the provincial town. My aim in this chapter is to show how Dostoevsky and Eliot depict the mutations of another type of (urban) discourse—that of medicine and the law—in a provincial setting. In their novels, Dostoevsky and Eliot avail themselves of medical and legal developments—particularly the discourses of psychology, physiology, and laboratory medicine—of which their provincials have no knowledge, or which they poorly understand. I draw attention to the provincial limitations to professional knowledge, suggesting that both chronologically and spatially the novelists set themselves in opposition to the medical and legal understanding they depict. As urban, well-educated writers, Dostoevsky and Eliot offer a sustained critique of the practices of law and medicine in their small-town communities. It is, however, a critique of the professions' provincial application (or mutation), not professionalism as such.

As can be seen in the repeated minimal pair in the epigraph to this chapter, Dostoevsky conceived of the author's craft as both similar to and different from that of a lawyer and doctor. Well acquainted with the experiences of accusation and ailment, Dostoevsky was able to position himself in opposition to the professions, whilst at the same time committing himself to a refinement of legal and medical discourse. In his *Diary of a Writer*, he articulates his ambivalence regarding the legal

system in particular; referring to the establishment of the legal profession in the wake of the court reforms of 1864, in which closed sessions of an inquisitorial nature were replaced by adversarial open trials, he writes: ‘блестящее установление адвокатура, но почему-то и грустное [...] Что ж, неужто я посягаю на адвокатуру, на новый суд? Сохрани меня Боже, я всего только хотел бы, чтоб все мы стали немного получше’ [22, 73]. Arguably, the primary aim of Dostoevsky’s novels is not to do away with the professional discourse of his time, much less, as one scholar has argued, to establish an antinomy between positive law and Christian grace;<sup>1</sup> rather, he seeks to redeem—or, to use a word with less religious charge—to *perfect* the discourse he so powerfully critiques. Likewise, despite his frequent caricatures of malfeasant medical men in novels such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky referred to himself as a diagnostician of society’s ills, pronouncing those who claimed to be healthy as sick and diseased [26, 107].

Eliot’s writings lack her Russian counterpart’s caustic opprobrium. Nevertheless, legal and medical incompetence features heavily in her novels, with lawyers Wakem and Jermyn among her least sympathetic characters. As we have seen, Tertius Lydgate, a more promising professional, is a failure, albeit an attractive one. Like—and more than—Dostoevsky, Eliot responds to the professional failure she depicts not by abandoning the discourse of the professions altogether, but by improving upon it, by employing medical and legal techniques to which her characters had no access. For example, Lydgate, trained in the dissection schools of Paris in the late 1820s, is highly skilled in the techniques of pathological anatomy, but cannot draw upon the findings of physiology and laboratory medicine, which developed only later in the nineteenth century. Unlike his creator, he was unable to

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan A. Esaulov, ‘The Categories of Law and Grace in Dostoevsky’s Poetics’, in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 116-34.

read *Problems of Life and Mind*.<sup>2</sup> In his exploration of this subject, Richard Menke writes that in her novelistic techniques George Eliot ‘imitate[s] but also surpass[es]’ the practices of nineteenth-century physiology.<sup>3</sup> In relation to the law, Lisa Rodensky has argued that whilst Victorian novelists adopted norms from legal proceedings to structure their work, they have one weapon at their disposal that jurists did not: an ability to get inside the minds of their characters.<sup>4</sup> Underlying these assumptions is a belief that the novelist is better able to adjudicate between truth and falsehood, to account for the importance of individual subjectivity, and to treat critically the evidence of the empirical gaze, than the lawyers and doctors they depict.<sup>5</sup>

### **From Observation to Experiment**

When, in 1876, George Eliot explained in a letter to Joseph Payne that ‘my writing is simply a set of experiments in life’ [*GEL* 6, 216], or when the narrator of *Middlemarch* declared St Theresa to be an instructive test case through which readers might ‘know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time’ [*MM*, 3], she signalled her movement away from the narrative stance of a natural historian, observing the phenomenal world with mimetic fidelity, to the that of an experimenter, taking it upon herself to create, not merely

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<sup>2</sup> On George Eliot’s editorship of Lewes’s work, see K. K. Collins, ‘G. H. Lewes Revisited: George Eliot and the Moral Sense’, *Victorian Studies*, 21.4 (1978), 463-92.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Menke, ‘Fiction as Vivisection: G. H. Lewes and George Eliot’, *ELH*, 67.2 (2000), 617-53. Here, p. 635.

<sup>4</sup> Lisa Rodensky, *The Crime in the Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> In respect of Dostoevsky, a similar argument is made by Harriet Murav in *Russia’s Legal Fictions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), esp. pp. 153-54. Writing of the court cases that Dostoevsky witnessed, Murav suggests that the author ‘enters into a competition of sorts with the prosecution, defense lawyer, and the medical experts. This competition centers around who is most qualified to understand the behavior of the female defendant’ (p. 153). The author, of course, wins out.

reflect, connections and interrelations that had previously been hidden.<sup>6</sup> Charting this development, Sally Shuttleworth comments that in *Adam Bede*, Eliot was guided ‘not by theory or imagination, but by concrete observation’, whereas in her later work she is more interested in creating an overarching ‘schema within which [...] observations [can be] placed’.<sup>7</sup> This narrative movement, from observation to experiment, from empiricism to a new kind of rationalism, reflects a broader epistemological shift in nineteenth-century scientific discourse, one whose contours are clearly visible in the practice of medicine in France and Germany, but which had a profound effect in England and Russia too.<sup>8</sup>

The medical historian Erwin Ackerknecht suggests that the years 1794-1848 constitute the heyday of hospital medicine, in which observation of the patient was seen as the antidote to the classical, bookish instruction that had reigned in the medical schools of pre-Revolutionary France.<sup>9</sup> The observation-based approach of practitioners such as Bichat, Pinel, and Broussais owed much to the philosophy of empiricism as propounded by thinkers such as Locke and Condillac, as well as to the sensualism of Georges Cabanis. Although each of these men made unique contributions to medical science, they were united in their emphasis on physical examination, on autopsy, and on statistics—the “three pillars” of Parisian medicine.<sup>10</sup> The hospitals of early nineteenth-century Paris offered Europeans an education which

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<sup>6</sup> I am suggesting that “experiment” denotes more than a method by which abstract ideas are incarnated in flesh-and-blood characters, and that the term retains highly scientific inflections. The former view is put forward in Bernard J. Paris’s classic *Experiments in Life: George Eliot’s Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> On the different national histories of laboratory medicine, see Nicholas Jardine, ‘The Laboratory Revolution in Medicine as Rhetorical and Aesthetic Accomplishment’, in *The Laboratory Revolution in Medicine*, ed. By Andrew Cunningham and Perry Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 304-23.

<sup>9</sup> Erwin H. Ackerknecht, *Medicine at the Paris Hospital* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 15. For an interesting, if not necessarily historical, account of the cultural shift that occurred in the Paris Hospital, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2009).

could not be readily obtained elsewhere, and *Middlemarch*'s Tertius Lydgate (an admirer of Bichat and acquaintance of Broussais) evidently believed that there—rather than in the theoretical doldrums of Oxbridge—a first-class medical education could be had.<sup>11</sup> The Hospital also made major therapeutic breakthroughs (particularly in the realm of social health), spearheaded professional development (through strict licensing exams), elevated the status of surgery (previously seen as a form of manual labour), and bequeathed the world several instruments, notably Laennec's stethoscope, without which modern medicine would be unrecognisable.<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of the century, however, the contributions of the Hospital were rapidly eclipsed by those of laboratory medicine, whose singular French representatives were Claude Bernard and Louis Pasteur, and whose German practitioners included such luminaries as the physician Virchow, the physiologist du Bois-Reymond, the physician and physicist Helmholtz, and the physiologist and biologist Schwann. Of course, laboratory medicine had existed in some form for a long time, but, as Roy Porter notes, the nineteenth-century 'laboratory lions' created 'a distinct scientific medicine based on microscopy, vivisection, chemical investigations and everything else measurable, weighable and testable in its uniquely controlled environment'.<sup>13</sup> This decampment of medicine from the hospital to the laboratory effected a change in the understanding of disease. Whereas the physicians of the Paris Hospital had taken disease to consist in local eruptions of specific organs or (under Bichat) tissues, laboratory medicine tended to emphasise that the body was

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, Paris did not have a monopoly on the techniques of observation and dissection, which were also practiced with enthusiasm in Edinburgh and parts of Italy. However, the consistency of the empirical approach to medicine, along with its rigorous and scholarly prosecution, did make Paris a Mecca for medical students across the continent. On Edinburgh and Italy see Lindsay Granshaw, 'The Rise of the Modern Hospital in Britain', in *Medicine and Society in Britain: Historical Essays*, ed. by Andrew Weir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 197-218.

<sup>12</sup> On the successes of the Paris Hospital, see Ackerknecht, *Medicine at the Paris Hospital*, pp. 34-44.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 320.

not a bundle of separate organs, but a single, interdependent system, whose illnesses were not necessarily the result of distinct ontological pathogens, but of abnormal changes within the system as a whole. In *Cellular Pathology*, Virchow held that disease was best understood as a disturbance in the body's cellular structure.<sup>14</sup>

The “laboratory-turn” of the second half of the nineteenth century established physiology as the leading science of the era, particularly in Germany and Russia. (Despite the best efforts of popularisers such as G. H. Lewes, physiology never properly took off in England, not least because of a strong anti-vivisectionist movement, whilst in France the legacy of the Hospital was difficult to escape.) One of the concerns of that emergent discipline was to establish, once and for all, that the body could be understood mechanistically, and explained without recourse to metaphysics. Clearly, physiology did not emerge out of the blue in the 1860s; from the seventeenth century onwards philosophers (such as Descartes) and scientists (such as Harvey) had posited that the body was governed by physical and chemical processes.<sup>15</sup> But Cartesian dualism, with its laudable attempt to defend the dignity of the soul, had been insufficient to prevent the emergence of non-mechanical explanations of human life, such as vitalism. Physiologists took it upon themselves to reassert the inextricable connection between physiology and human behaviour and psychology. In France, Claude Bernard held that each process in the animate world was conditioned, or determined, by a *milieu extérieur* and *milieu intérieur*, that is by a complex amalgam of environmental and biological factors, whose tandem influence on human physiology he sought to hypothesise and verify. His student, the Russian physiologist Sechenov, was more explicit than his teacher in his disavowal of all

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 331. Botkin, one of Virchow's students, did much to popularise this view in Russia. See Galina Kichigina, *The Imperial Laboratory: Experimental Physiology and Clinical Medicine in Post-Crimean Russia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> On the shift from humoral conceptions of the body to more mechanistic ones, see Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), chapter 3.

ultimate causes and his insistence that the relationship between stimulus and response was purely physico-chemical.<sup>16</sup>

In emphasising the mechanistic nature of stimulus and response, French and German physiologists were not committed to an ideological programme of atheistic materialism, even if they refused to invoke God or the supernatural in their research. Bernard, for example, remained silent on the issue of God's involvement in the material sphere, leading several critics to describe him as a dualist.<sup>17</sup> It was not long, however, before cultural figures and commentators began to apply their understanding of physiology to the social sphere. In Russia in particular, radicals applied the mechanics of physiology to bolster their ideological devotion to positivism, determinism, and materialism.<sup>18</sup> The critic Nikolay Dobrolyubov, for example, employed new developments in physiology to 'fight against the intellectual supremacy of theological thought' which was 'part of his broader attack on the very foundations of the existing social system'.<sup>19</sup> In order to prosecute this ideological campaign, Dobrolyubov found it easier to adhere to the teachings of self-confessed "hard" materialists (such as Moleschott and Vogt) than the more modern, nuanced theories of Bernard, Ludwig, and Helmholtz.<sup>20</sup> Sechenov, highly respected as a

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<sup>16</sup> For accounts of Sechenov's science, see Kichigina, *The Imperial Laboratory*, chapter 11; Daniel P. Todes, *Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 34. Although a materialist and interested in politics, several critics note that Sechenov was not a revolutionary firebrand, and the denial of God's intervention in life was present in his work only implicitly (although the censors were surely correct in their divination of it). See, for example, Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861-1917* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 120; and M. G. Iaroshevskii, 'Dostoevskii i ideino-filosofskie iskaniia russkikh estestvopisatelei', *Voprosy literatury*, 2 (1982), 103-12, especially p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> Certainly, Strakhov took this view, arguing that although Bernard had exiled God from the laboratory, he did not go as far as to deny his existence. For Strakhov, Bernard exemplified good scientific practice in his refusal to allow science to legislate on metaphysical matters, or metaphysics to influence scientific investigation. See his essay 'Klod Bernar o metode opytov' (1866), reprinted in *Filosofskie ocherki* (St Petersburg: Tipografiia brat'ev Pantekheevykh, 1895), pp. 123-73. See also Reino Virtanen's study *Claude Bernard and his Place in the History of Ideas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), e.g., p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> See Kichigina, *The Imperial Laboratory*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 16.

scientist across Europe, somewhat tarnished his own academic credentials by penning his popular *Reflexes of the Brain*, a text that invited criticism from those who did not believe that it was possible to explain the psyche in the language of physiology and which was lambasted by the St Petersburg Censorship Committee as ‘undermin[ing] the moral foundation of society [...] being an expression of extreme materialistic views’.<sup>21</sup>

The popularisers of mid-to-late nineteenth-century science in England were less crudely materialist than their Russian counterparts. Scientists such as Tyndall wrote of the necessity of the imagination in illuminating those aspects of physics that were inaccessible by the empirical method, whilst G. H. Lewes defended science in almost religious terms: ‘the truth is that Science mounts on the wings of Imagination into the regions of the Invisible and Impalpable’.<sup>22</sup> Whereas in Russia the categories of imagination and hypothesis had been abandoned by the critics of the Left for their perceived contamination by the ethereal abstractions of such theories as Romantic *Naturphilosophie*,<sup>23</sup> English scientific discourse seemed more ready to embrace these categories as a means of remedying the defects of the empirical method. Lewes followed Bernard, whose work he was the first to champion in England (defending him as a vivisectionist), in suggesting that hypotheses were useful structural tools that should always retain a provisional character, thereby generating potential discoveries without relapsing into scholasticism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Kichigina, *The Imperial Laboratory*, p. 241.

<sup>22</sup> G. H. Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1874), I, p. 289. George Levine has produced fine analyses of the role of imagination in scientific discovery. See his *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and his ‘George Eliot’s Hypothesis of Reality’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35.1 (1980), 1-28.

<sup>23</sup> Such a rejection had been made on similar grounds decades earlier in France (for example, by Cuvier). On this, see Aileen Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Works of Alexander Herzen* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016), chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> On Bernard’s scientific method, see Virtanen, *Claude Bernard*, chapter 5.

The advances in medical science were embraced not only by those who sought to raise the level of public awareness of scientific knowledge, such as Lewes and Huxley for the English, and Pisarev and Herzen for the Russians. They also quickly seeped into other disciplines, not least the law. Legal professionals increasingly called upon medical experts to adjudicate—or at least testify—in cases which required forensic, physiological or psychological expertise. Although psychophysiological imbalance had been considered a mitigating factor in criminal cases since Plato’s time, and despite the verdict of “not guilty by virtue of insanity” being a standard defence in English law since James Hadfield’s unsuccessful attempt on the life of George III in 1800, as the century progressed, recourse to insanity pleas became a more permanent feature of the legal landscape.<sup>25</sup> In response to their frequent invocation, Parliament passed the “M’Naghten Rules” (so named after Daniel M’Naghten was controversially acquitted of killing a civil servant in 1843 whilst suffering from paranoid delusions), which specified that the insanity defence could only be used when the defendant was unaware of what they were doing, or unaware that such an action was wrong.<sup>26</sup> As medical science moved away from its empirical moorings, which could produce evidence that was, by definition, visible to judge and jury, as well as doctors, the law became increasingly indebted to medical testimony that could pronounce upon the mental state of the accused, a state that, again by definition, was inaccessible to the naked eye.

In Russia too it did not take the legal reforms to usher in insanity pleas. James Rice documents court cases in which the mental states engendered by passion, pregnancy, and epilepsy were employed in attempts to secure the defendant’s

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<sup>25</sup> See Catherine Crawford, ‘Medicine and the Law’, in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, vol. 2, ed. by W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1619-40. Here, p. 1630.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

acquittal or a more lenient sentence long before 1864.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the insanity plea was entered in defence with increasing (for some alarming) frequency after the reforms. Louise McReynolds calls the insanity plea the ‘most far-reaching aspect of the open court’, noting that the testimony of expert medical witness ‘drew attention to the evolution of the modern subjective individual’.<sup>28</sup> In his observations of court cases, Dostoevsky bemoaned the frequent recourse defence lawyers had to psycho-physiological explanations of crime, which had the potential, he believed, to overshadow the role of free will in criminal activity:

Выходит, что преступление как бы не признается преступлением вовсе; обществу, напротив, как бы возвещается, да еще судом же, что совсем, дескать, и нет преступления, что преступление, видите ли, есть только болезнь, происходящая от ненормального состояния общества, - мысль до гениальности верная в *иных* частных применениях и в известных разрядах явлений, но совершенно ошибочная в применении к целому и общему. [23, 137-38]

The context of the passage is Dostoevsky’s own defence of Kornilova (a pregnant young wife who defenestrated her step-daughter) precisely on grounds of psycho-physiological factors (a mental imbalance due to her pregnancy), suggesting that Dostoevsky’s frustration with modern medicine in the courtroom was not due to a scepticism towards science, but rather to a distrust of its unscrupulous practitioners. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, he satirises the use of insanity pleas by having the chattering Khokhlakova defend them. Speaking to Alyosha, she declares that:

Как новые суды открыли, так сейчас и узнали про аффект. Это благодеяние новых судов [...] Кто ж теперь не в аффекте, вы, я—все в аффекте, и сколько примеров: сидит человек, поет романс, вдруг ему что-нибудь не понравилось. Взял пистолет и убил кого попало, а затем его все прощают. Я это недавно читала, и все доктора подтвердили. Доктора теперь подтверждают, всё подтверждают’. [15, 18-19]

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<sup>27</sup> James L. Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), p. 175.

<sup>28</sup> Louise McReynolds, *Murder Most Russian: True Crime and Punishment in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 9.

Khokhlakova's apparent familiarity with scientific terminology—her repetition of the medical term *affekt*, her appeal to the language of verification, her designation of medical men as *doktora* rather than the more ubiquitous, and less specialised, *vrachi*<sup>29</sup>—in fact reveals a voyeuristic fascination with legal and medical procedure which is not undergirded by a true understanding of forensic practice.

Dostoevsky's explicit interest in the ways in which physiological processes affect human agency was no doubt occasioned by the specific preoccupations of Russian physiology in the 1870s. In their novels, both Eliot and Dostoevsky use and adapt the techniques of the physiological laboratory to interrogate human motivation and behaviour, neither of which can be easily explained by the more empirical methods of pathological anatomy or legal empiricism.

### **The Status of Professionalism in the Provinces and its Presentation in the Provincial Novel**

As members of the metropolitan intelligentsia, and with avowed interest in the discourse of medicine and the law, Dostoevsky and Eliot were familiar with the developments that I have sketched above.<sup>30</sup> Through this familiarity their novels are able to capture, and to a large extent criticise, the provincial ignorance or mutation of these developments. Indeed, as writers committed to the representation of the phenomenal world, they were compelled to depict the practice of the professions in a specific socio-historical situation, one which had by no means been fully shaped by the revolutions in hospital or laboratory medicine in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>29</sup> On the development of this nomenclature, see Nancy Mandelker Frieden, *Russian Physicians in an Era of Reform and Revolution, 1856-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 30-31. Frieden notes that by mid-century *lekar'* had fallen out of use as a neutral term for medical practitioners.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Eliot knew of Schwann's work, and had read Huxley's essay on cell theory. See [*QMM*, 543; 548]. Dostoevsky's extensive reading of medical literature is charted by James Rice in *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art*.

In Russia, the Crimean War did much to spearhead the professionalisation of medicine, even if the therapeutic benefits of laboratory science seemed inapplicable to daily practice until Lister's development of antiseptic techniques in 1867. Russia's preparation for, and subsequent humiliation in, that conflict, along with the regular prospect of epidemics, forced the state recognise the need to incentivise medical study, such that Nicholas exempted medical faculties from the recruitment freeze to which he had subjected other university departments in 1848.<sup>31</sup> His successor, Alexander, would grant medical students greater freedom to study in universities in Europe.<sup>32</sup> For various reasons, medicine became a popular career path in nineteenth-century Russia, particularly among women and the sons of priests: it enabled the non-gentry to enter the Table of Ranks, it provided an alternative existence to grim subsistence in an impoverished parish, and it provided an opportunity for social engagement in the downtrodden corners of the empire.<sup>33</sup> Unlike in England, however, physicians did not operate in a medical marketplace, and always remained servitors of the state, a situation that most doctors were happy enough to tolerate (or embrace) for its financial rewards. Not until 1883 was a national organisation, the Pirogov Society, formed, although the political divisions within its members has led some scholars to argue that significant professional autonomy was achieved only during the First World War.<sup>34</sup> Such a claim notwithstanding, it is clearly the case that the prestige of doctors increased during the second half of the nineteenth-century and, if they did not necessarily seek to free themselves from the power (or patronage) of state

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this, see Frieden, *Russian Physicians*, chapter 2.

<sup>32</sup> Many women, including Nadezhda Suslova, the sister of Dostoevsky's lover, availed themselves of this opportunity. On Russian female medical students who studied abroad, see Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> On this, see *ibid.*, p. 84; and Frieden, *Russian Physicians*, chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup> John F. Hutchinson, 'Politics and Medical Professionalization after 1905', in *Russia's Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History*, ed. by Harvey D. Balzer (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 89-116.

interference, they did succeed in their attempts to establish local organisations, a medical journal, and considerable *de facto* authority in the realm of public health (doctors, rather than state officials, tended to manage epidemics more effectively). Frieden concludes that ‘though the average physician continued to work for the government, he gained a stronger sense of professional identity, sought to influence public policy, and began to assume the mantle of a social reformer’.<sup>35</sup>

Lawyers in Russia enjoyed far greater, although by no means absolute, levels of professional autonomy, especially after the legal reforms of 1864. The historian Richard Wortman has traced the development of a service ethos in the Russian bar, with legal reformers developing ‘as a group dedicated to their sphere of expertise as an ethical absolute’.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, however, the nature of Russian autocracy arrested the full development of a legal consciousness, since neither the autocrat nor his bureaucratic apparatus were willing to submit themselves to the rule of law. It was, after all, difficult to transpose a modern Western legal system onto a regime that was (to quote Laura Engelstein) ‘eager for the attributes of modernity but unwilling to pay the political price’, a regime in which the tsars ‘played with judicial reform while consistently violating the rule of law’.<sup>37</sup> This generally pessimistic account of Russian legal professionalisation is countered by critics such as Jane Burbank, who suggest that if we judge the Russian legal system by the European professional standards of the day, we are bound to find it wanting.<sup>38</sup> When assessed on its own terms, we discover that lawyers did wrest significant concessions from the state, especially in terms of self-regulation and instilling the values of legal professionalism

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<sup>35</sup> Frieden, *Russian Physicians*, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Wortman, ‘Russian Monarchy and the Rule of Law: New Considerations of the Court Reforms of 1864’, *Kritika*, 6.1 (2005), 145-70. Here, p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Engelstein, “‘Combined Underdevelopment’: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia”, *The American Historical Review*, 98.2 (1993), 338-53. Here, p. 345.

<sup>38</sup> See also Rudy Koshar’s response to Engelstein, ‘Foucault and Social History: Comments on “Combined Underdevelopment”’, *The American Historical Review*, 98.2 (1993), 354-63.

into its members. The Moscow Bar was established in 1866 and took responsibility for membership, promotions, pensions, assignments, and complaints. As far as this latter category is concerned, Burbank illustrates the ways in which the Bar was eager to expose the misdemeanours of its members and to project the image of a responsible public body, untarnished by bad manners, commercialised behaviour, and carelessness.<sup>39</sup> It is, however, revealing that Burbank chose as the case study of her research the Moscow Bar, for the simple reason that such standards did not extend across the empire, and elsewhere standards of professionalisation were somewhat more lax and the state was able to exercise its influence far more freely.<sup>40</sup>

For Dostoevsky, the professionalism that lawyers either tried (Wortman) or were able (Burbank) to establish was itself was an equivocal advantage. In the *Diary* he criticised lawyers for invoking complex medical vocabulary in defence of Kronenberg, a defendant who beat his young daughter and was acquitted, and he accused them of harbouring in their breasts not a heart but ‘кусочек чего-то казенного’ [23, 12]. Following the letter of the law, much lauded in the West as the basis of a just legal system, seemed to Dostoevsky to hinder a true understanding of the individual motivations of a particular individual, and precluded a humane and paternal resolution to a given case [26, 106]. According to Gary Rosenshield, who analyses the cases covered in the *Diary* in great detail, what distressed Dostoevsky about the Kronenberg case (in addition to the raw suffering of the abused child) was that ‘the whole issue of ethics was being subordinated to procedure, to the letter of the

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<sup>39</sup> Jane Burbank, ‘Discipline and Punish in the Moscow Bar Association’, *The Russian Review*, 54.1 (1995), 44-64. (In a similar vein, Burbank defends the legal consciousness of the peasantry, suggesting that it was more developed than the intelligentsia, or historians, cared to admit. See her ‘Insult and Punishment in Rural Courts: The Elaboration of Civility in Late Imperial Russia’, *Études rurales*, 149/150 (Jan-Jun, 1999), 147-71.)

<sup>40</sup> See Brian L. Levin-Stankevich, ‘The Transfer of Legal Technology and Culture: Law Professionals in Tsarist Russia’, in *Russia’s Missing Middle Class*, pp. 223-50. A more favourable view of professionalism in the provinces is provided by Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), *passim*, but esp. p. 247.

law, and that such a subordination was being elevated to a principle above all others'.<sup>41</sup> We know that Spasovich, the defence attorney in the trial, prided himself on his professional detachment, and on one occasion told his colleagues that it was important for lawyers to separate their souls from their jobs: the defence attorney was to function not as a *chelovek*, but as an *advokat*, a professional functionary rather than a personal participant.<sup>42</sup> In the *Diary* Dostoevsky declares his inability to understand how a lawyer can defend someone he knows to be guilty, opining that 'избежать фальши и сохранить честность и совесть адвокату так же трудно [...] как всякому человеку достигнуть райского состояния' [22, 53].

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, this detached professionalism comes to the fore during Mitya's trial. Dostoevsky had intended to show the 'новейшая отвлеченность в лице молоденьких правоведов, судебных следователей и проч.' [30.1, 130] in order to dramatise 'the shortcomings of the abstract notions of law imported from the West'.<sup>43</sup> In the novel, the visitors to the courtroom are indifferent to the personal fate of the novel's protagonist, but greatly interested in the Karamazov affair as a legal case ('безучастны собственно к судьбе Мити, но все же опять-таки не к рассматривавшемуся делу' [15, 91]); the lawyers are likewise drawn to the proceedings because they are interested in its 'современно-юридическая' aspect [15, 91]; and of the judge we learn: 'На дело Карамазовых, как оказалось потом, он смотрел довольно горячо, но лишь в общем смысле' [15, 92]. The judicial errors of Dostoevsky's trial are not caused when lawyers distort the law, but when they seek to perform their duties with unflinching devotion to its letter, ignoring the subjectivity that informs Mitya's behaviour, which is extrapolated to the level of

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<sup>41</sup> Gary Rosenshield, *Western Law, Russian Justice: Dostoevsky, The Jury Trial, and the Law* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> See McReynolds, *Murder Most Russian*, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 466.

general rule (that is, as I suggested in chapter two, by reading him according to reductive analogies).<sup>44</sup> Their professional objectivity impedes a true understanding of the case at hand.

Dostoevsky's doctors are likewise too professionally detached to render useful service to their patients. Towards the beginning of the novel, Zosima recalls a conversation he had with a doctor, who confided that 'я [...] люблю человечество, но дивлюсь на себя самого: чем больше я люблю человечество вообще, тем меньше я люблю людей в частности' [14, 53]. The Moscow doctor who attends Pnyusha Snegiryov is also unable to adjust his general advice for general cases to the specific demands of the Snegiryovs' social and financial circumstances: trips to convalescent resorts in Syracuse, Italy, the Caucasus, or Paris, are hardly practicable for the poverty-stricken family. The doctor, who strides imposingly into the Snegiryovs' house in his warm fur coat,<sup>45</sup> is utterly unempathetic to his patient ('Что делать! Я не Бог' [14, 505]). Later, in the trial, the Moscow doctor will treat Mitya as a medical specimen who is illustrative of modern diseases such as manias and fits of passion. The narrator has to apologise that the doctor 'изъяснялся очень ученым и специальным языком' [15, 104]. Owing to such professional haughtiness, even supposed radicals such as Kolya and Rakitin seem to disdain the profession, with Kolya calling doctors 'шельмы' [14, 472] and Rakitin penning a verse about Khokhlakova's foot in which 'Доктора к ней ездят, лечат,/ И бинтуют, и калечат' [15, 30].

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<sup>44</sup> Bruce Robbins makes this point about the lawyers of *Bleak House* in 'Telescopic Philanthropy: Professionalism and Responsibility in *Bleak House*', in *Bleak House: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Jeremy Tambling (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 139-62. Likewise, Clare Pettitt criticises Tulkinghorn for practicing a kind of professionalism that 'circumvented accountability or responsibility' and was 'indifferent to everything but his calling'. See her 'Legal Subjects, Legal Objects: The Law and Victorian Fiction', in *The Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 71-90.

<sup>45</sup> Victor Terras draws attention to the visual nature of this scene in *A Karamazov Companion: Commentary on the Genesis, Language, and Style of Dostoevsky's Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 349.

This level of professional detachment has not quite penetrated to the heart of provincial medicine, however. In Dr Herzenstube we have a generally incompetent, but caring member of the medical profession. Herzenstube is not renowned for his medical expertise (he stuffs Khokhlakova full of potions to no obvious effect), but he is well-respected in the town due to the relationships he has developed. In particular, he is known as a philanthropist and pious man. Henrietta Mondry observes that with his customary care and kindness, he is one of the few German Jews (a doubly problematic category for Dostoevsky) to be portrayed positively in Dostoevsky's works.<sup>46</sup> His depiction in this respect is not altogether dissimilar to Gaskell's Mr Hall, who, though he was going blind and deaf, 'was still Mr Hall, who could heal all their ailments'—that is at least, Gaskell adds bitinglly, 'unless they died meanwhile'.<sup>47</sup> James Rice has shown that, in attending to his own medical conditions, Dostoevsky distrusted provincial doctors, and preferred, where he could, to solicit metropolitan or European medical care.<sup>48</sup> What emerges in *The Brothers Karamazov* seems to be a recognition that what provincial towns might lack in medical expertise when compared to the capital, they compensate for with medical men who are not so devoted to their profession that they treat diseases instead of patients, whom they view refuse to view as illustrative examples of general medical malaise. The failure of both metropolitan lawyers and doctors to understand Mitya's personality and subjectivity, their assumption that man can be decoded by his outward glances and appearance (so familiar to Dostoevsky in the physiognomies of Balzac's novels), is something that, I shall argue, Dostoevsky's polyphonic composition does much to redeem.

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<sup>46</sup> Henrietta Mondry, 'Doktor Gertsenshtube – "Obshchechelovek" ili ideia rastvoreniia iudaizma v khristianstve?', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 9 (1988), 45-61.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. by Frank Glover Smith (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> See Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art*, e.g. pp. 70-75.

Many of Eliot's characters would sympathise with Dostoevsky's attacks on a legal system that overlays flesh-and-blood loyalties with cold, procedural mechanisms. Mr Tulliver, for example, cannot fathom how the law has managed to dispossess him of his beloved mill, and can only surmise that Old Harry has had a hand in it. In *Middlemarch*, Mrs Waule believes that procedural manoeuvres that would cheat the family of Featherstone's land would be 'flying in the face of the Almighty' [MM, 341], as if (to borrow from the vocabulary of my second chapter) the abstractions of the *Gesellschaft* risk dispossessing the members of the *Gemeinschaft* of their material inheritance. In terms of their medical health, her provincials instinctively know that no general regimen will suffice for all, just as, the narrator argues in respect of Tom's education, there is no single 'regimen for all minds' [MF, 139]. It is not until the advent of Lydgate from the continent that it occurs to the denizens of George Eliot's towns that medical expertise might be found in doctors other than their own, as the young physician is called upon to cure Fred Vincy (served by Wrench) and Nancy Nash (whose physician is Dr Minchin).

With his Parisian education, Lydgate is hardly a typical representative of provincial medical practice in Reform-era England. S. E. D. Shortt has shown that developments in European medicine were slow to establish themselves in England, and that local practitioners tended to treat conservatively innovations that emanated from continental hospitals and, when they came, continental laboratories. Much of the nineteenth-century medical profession was characterised, Shortt argues, by 'therapeutic ignorance', with some seemingly innocuous innovations, such as

anaesthetic, being ignored due to a long-standing belief that pain was an essential part of the healing process.<sup>49</sup>

This is not to argue, of course, that nineteenth-century English physicians did not set themselves exacting professional standards. Doctors actively campaigned for legal rules that would shore up the boundaries of their profession (thus keeping quackery at bay), and they successfully lobbied for the Medical Act of 1858, which made it illegal to practise medicine without a license. The growth of educational facilities, periodicals, and medical societies in the nineteenth century all coincided with a rise in remuneration for medical men, who aspired to, and often attained, relative affluence. Irvine Loudon judges that both financially and socially a surgeon-apothecary might be on a level with the clergy or an attorney.<sup>50</sup> The fact that doctors needed to maintain excellent community relations in order to consolidate and expand their pool of patients likely also accounts for an unwillingness to innovate, and it seems to be precisely the conservatism of the medical market place that Lydgate fails to take under consideration when he tries to import the science of the Paris Hospital to Middlemarch: the local physicians are sceptical of a man who has been to neither of the English universities ‘but came with libellous pretention to experience in Edinburgh and Paris, where observation may be abundant indeed, but hardly sound’ [MM, 182]. The Middlemarch doctors are able, in fact, to use the rhetoric of science to maintain relations with their clients, and they recognise, even as they disparage, each others’ skills. Mrs Bulstrode, after all, does not hire Dr Minchin for nothing; rather, she believes that he alone ‘understands her constitution’ [MM, 182]. Drs Wrench and Toller have a preference, respectively, for the “strengthening treatment”

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<sup>49</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, ‘Physicians, Science, and Status: Issues in the Professionalization of Anglo-American Medicine in the Nineteenth Century’, *Medical History*, 27.1 (1983), 51-58.

<sup>50</sup> Irvine Loudon, ‘Medical Practitioners 1750-1850 and the Period of Medical Reform in Britain’, in *Medicine and Society*, pp. 219-48. Here, pp. 225-27.

and the “lowering treatment”, and neither suffers financial ruin as a result. In other words, George Eliot’s provincials do not object to doctors with a scientific pedigree; they merely reject Lydgate’s particular variant of scientific expertise, as well as the fact that it seems to be without the character and benevolent respectability they have come to expect from their medical men. To be skilled at dissection, for example, is not necessarily praiseworthy in a town that fears being dissected. Unable to match his rhetorical register to his audience, Lydgate fails where the less skilled Wrench and Toller succeed.<sup>51</sup>

“Character” was an important criterion of nineteenth-century professionalism, and Lydgate’s clinical superiority bolsters a somewhat arrogant self-image that ill-equips him to serve the community according to their values and expectations. Ultimately, he fails to understand that clinical practice cannot be severed from pastoral care, and he fatally believes that specialist knowledge alone will be enough to win the respect of the community (‘he would [...] win celebrity [...] as Jenner had done, by the independent value of his work’ [MM, 145]), and that, consequently, he can scorn the other medical men of the town since his plans for a new hospital will ‘flourish in spite of them’ [MM, 454]. Farebrother repeatedly tries to instruct Lydgate that such objectivity is inapplicable in Middlemarch, and that any decisions Lydgate makes (whom to select as chaplain, for example) are irrevocably linked to local personalities and politics. ‘In this stupid world, Farebrother counsels, ‘most people

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<sup>51</sup> Shortt makes the point that we should treat skeptically the claims that doctors were hostile to scientific developments since many of the theories they *did* employ were considered scientific at the time, and have only subsequently been shown to have limited scientific value (most famously, phrenology): ‘patients judged the profession by the criteria of their age, an authority which was incapable of distinguishing the relative scientific merit of, for example, a phrenologist or his opponent.’ He further comments: ‘Given this limitation, “valid” science becomes irrelevant to the attainment of status [...] What is of paramount importance, however, is the manner in which physicians used, not the content, but the rhetoric of science’ (Shortt, ‘Physicians, Science, and Status’, 60).

never consider a thing is good to be done unless it is done by his own set' [MM, 439].

Clinical excellence cannot exist in a vacuum.

Lydgate's failure to grasp this is particularly pronounced when the question of the coroner arises in the town. In the nineteenth century there was much discussion about whether coroners needed medical training, the position usually being held by a lawyer rather than a physician.<sup>52</sup> Lydgate is firmly of the opinion that medical knowledge should be a prerequisite of the post, since 'no man can judge what is good evidence unless he knows that subject well. A lawyer is no better than an old woman at a *post-mortem* examination' [MM, 157]. What Lydgate does not appreciate is that Mr Chichely stands before him as a coroner without medical qualification. The narrator comments:

Lydgate's private opinion was that Mr Chichely might have been the very coroner without bias as to the coats of the stomach, but he had not meant to be personal. This was one of the difficulties of moving in good Middlemarch society: it was dangerous to insist on knowledge as a qualification for salaried office. [MM, 158]

'He had not meant to be personal': however much science could defend its autonomy in the anatomy schools of Paris, in the English provinces knowledge cannot be depersonalised. Dr Sprague admits as much: Lydgate may be right 'with regard to the populous districts, and in the metropolis. But I hope it will be a long time before this part of the country loses the services of my friend Chichely' [MM, 158]. Chichely's important qualification here is that he is 'my friend' (for Mr Vincy it's that the coroner should be a 'good coursing man' [MM, 158]), emphasising the value of relationships in the town. In highlighting Lydgate's failure to adapt to his new environment, Eliot is clearly not attempting to elevate his less competent rivals, such as Wrench and Toller, to the status of paragons of medical excellence merely because

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<sup>52</sup> Crawford ('Medicine and the Law') notes that medical and legal training for the post were not required until 1926 (p. 1634).

they succeed where Lydgate fails, namely in the attention they pay to the social etiquette demanded of them. Just as Dostoevsky distrusted provincial medicine, even though he presents Herzenstube sympathetically, Eliot treats with scepticism spurious medical practice, even if its practitioners may be able to teach Lydgate a thing or two about community relations. To employ the terminology used by Janet Caldwell, Eliot may be suggesting that ‘detached concern’ is an optimal means of realising professional exactitude and humane social interaction.<sup>53</sup> In her analysis of doctors’ case notes, Caldwell suggests that, in contrast to the clinical detachment that Foucault held to be epitomised in the Paris Hospital, British physicians united the detached observation of the empirical eye with the subjective accounts of the patients’ story, thus creating an intersection of interpersonal and scientific medicine.<sup>54</sup> Whilst Lydgate is not entirely clueless when it comes to interpersonal skills (in fact, he makes a good first impression on Lady Chettam, and is a skilled listener to his patients, especially Casaubon), he nevertheless does not possess the empathy of other characters, particularly Dorothea, being ‘too ill acquainted with disaster to enter into the pathos of a lot where everything is below the level of tragedy’ [*MM*, 423]. Comparing Lydgate’s ability to that of Dorothea, Caldwell writes: ‘while Lydgate wields the acute power of cutting-edge scientific knowledge, Dorothea is an expert at understanding the human connection, and eliciting those narratives that heal the social fabric’.<sup>55</sup> As in Dostoevsky, doctors in Eliot’s fiction are challenged to synthesise personal care and scientific skill.

In her presentation of provincial medical practice, George Eliot exposes the ignorance of the townspeople, who are unwilling to embrace medical reforms that, by

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<sup>53</sup> Janice McLaren Caldwell, *Medicine and Literature: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. ch. 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

the time Eliot wrote the novel, had long since been vindicated, as well as the inability of Lydgate to minister to the Middlemarchers in such a way as to guarantee the success of his reforming ambitions. When she has Lydgate exit the town for a Continental bathing place, she simultaneously condemns Middlemarch to substandard medical care, and Lydgate to a slow demise writing a treatise on gout. The course of therapeutics that she offers in *Middlemarch* attempts, in response to these failures, to correct Lydgate's reliance on pathological anatomy by drawing on the developments that had come in its wake, and thereby to reinforce the value of medical discourse for both practitioner and patient.

### **Beyond Pathological Anatomy**

*L'observation simple ne lui suffit pas.*  
—Claude Bernard<sup>56</sup>

За множеством фактов [легко] потерять  
общность дела.  
—Alexander Herzen<sup>57</sup>

The novelist as anatomist was an important image in literary practice in the nineteenth century, especially in France, where metaphors of cutting, opening, and penetrating the social environment were regularly employed by writers eager to demonstrate the scientific exactitude of their craft.<sup>58</sup> As the century progressed and naturalism came to prominence in the work of Zola, many critics thought that this trend had gone too

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<sup>56</sup> Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: J. B. Baillière et fils, 1865), p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Aleksandr Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1954-1964), XXVI (1962), p. 212.

<sup>58</sup> On this, see David F. Bell, 'Thérèse Raquin: Scientific Realism in Zola's Laboratory', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 24.1-2 (1995-1996), 122-132, esp. 129. Tim Farrant notes the aspiration to scientific exactitude was difficult to sustain in practice, and even those writers who claim to be most true to life, such as Balzac, frequently relied on implausible plots, imagery, and melodrama, ultimately producing a vision of reality rather than reality itself. See Tim Farrant, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2007), chapter 5.

far, reproaching the author of *Thérèse Raquin* with a predilection for brutalism that forsook the sublime imperatives of art.<sup>59</sup> In Russia, similar charges were levelled against Dostoevsky, with one critic accusing him of ‘fixing the reader in the stinking atmosphere of the underground, [which] blunts his sense of smell and accustoms him to the stinking underground’.<sup>60</sup> Regardless of its aesthetic merits, the task of anatomising society, of viewing the subject through the Foucauldian “clinical gaze”, puts the writer in a position of authority and control, as she or he lays bare hidden mechanisms, and masters and classifies nature.<sup>61</sup> It is my contention that Dostoevsky and Eliot, both well able to anatomise society, seek to destabilise the power of the anatomist’s gaze by drawing on scientific concepts that were popular in England (more than in Russia) in the 1860s and 70s. (Eliot, we recall, had called this epistemological confidence into question when she bemoaned D. F. Strauss’s dissection of the crucifixion narrative). Both by abjuring a single, authoritative point of view on external events, and by emphasising the importance of individual subjectivity, they reveal the ultimate insufficiency of the empirical method whose resurgence in hospital medicine at the start of the century was being increasingly checked by the physiological revolution these writers witnessed.

The premium that the novel placed on empirical reality, and in particular on sight as a reliable means to access and understand that reality, owes much to legal and scientific legacies that long predated the revolutions in hospital medicine. Barbara Shapiro’s work on empiricism in England demonstrates that the novel as a genre—

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<sup>59</sup> See Bell, ‘*Thérèse Raquin*’, 122.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 168. Others were more enthusiastic about the ways in which Dostoevsky performed the ‘anatomical dissection of our gangrenous corpse—a dissection of the abscesses and illnesses of our stultified conscience, our unhealthy, rotten, still serflike life’. Cited on p. 416.

<sup>61</sup> On this, see Manon Mathias, *Vision in the Novels of George Sand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 4. Mathias’s study gives a fascinating account of how George Sand employed scientific concepts whilst divesting herself of the authoritarian assumptions of the clinical gaze.

with its frequent recourse (in writers such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding) to the language of fact, to supposedly credible eye-witness accounts, and to apparently authentic documentation—emerged out of the legal discourse that was popularised in the seventeenth century, in particular by the jury trial.<sup>62</sup> It is upon this tradition that George Eliot drew when, in chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, her narrator declares himself to be ‘as if in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath’ [*AB*, 159]. The legal formulation of the importance of fact came at the same historical moment as scientists such as Bacon, whose opposition to systematisers such as Descartes was later to win him admirers including Alexander Herzen, propagandised the value of *a posteriori* knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

Although physiologists and their champions in the second half of the nineteenth century by no means disavowed the importance of empirical research, they were sceptical of the extent to which it could account for the complexity of the human organism and its formation under the interlocking influence of the *milieu extérieur* and *milieu intérieur*. Not only, in the laboratory, did the physician’s unassisted gaze give way to a reliance on the microscope (whose help Bichat and others had done without), but the advantages of perspective, imagination, and hypothesis were reinvigorated and reemphasised.<sup>64</sup> Lewes frequently spoke of science in metaphysical terms, emphasising the limits of the scientist’s gaze and the need to reverence a universe that cannot be comprehended in a single glance: ‘every Real,’ he writes in *Problems of Life and Mind*, ‘is the complex of so many relations, a conjecture of so

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). See especially chapter 1, and pp. 203-7.

<sup>63</sup> On Herzen’s response to Bacon’s ideas, see Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance*, chapter 12.

<sup>64</sup> These categories had not been absent in the writings of empiricists such as John Locke, who (to take perspective as one example) was aware of Newton’s work on colour, showing it to be not a property of the object itself, but rather dependent on the eye of the observer. Nevertheless, the positivists of the nineteenth century clearly believed that their empiricist forebears had *overemphasised* facts and sight in their attempts to understand the scientific universe. On Locke and perspective, see Stephen Prickett, ‘Biblical and Literary Criticism: A History of Interaction’, in *The Bible and Literature*, ed. by David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 12-43, esp. pp. 24-25.

many events, a synthesis of so many sensations, that to know one Real thoroughly would only be possible through an intuition embracing the universe'.<sup>65</sup> In 1870, his contemporary Tyndall paid homage to the empirical method, before suggesting that:

philosophers may be right in affirming that they cannot transcend experience. But we can, at all events, carry it a long way from its origins... We are gifted with the power of Imagination... and by this power we can lighten the darkness which surrounds the world of the senses'.<sup>66</sup>

In France, Claude Bernard likewise spoke about the need to use, but not be limited by, imagination. The experimenter's role, Bernard argued in his *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, was to come to the laboratory with a priori assumptions (hypotheses), to imagine what nature has to teach, and then to interrogate it to see if it is confirmed or belied by experience. In emphasising the role of the mind in formulating hypotheses, and by underlining the importance of doubt as a check on the empirical eye, Bernard aligned himself with the philosophical tradition of Descartes, much more than that of Bacon.<sup>67</sup> His rationalism was warmly received by Strakhov in Russia, who thought that 'голые факты' were almost entirely useless in the quest to understand the world.<sup>68</sup> As Linda Gerstein points out, Strakhov (himself a scientist by training) thought that science should aim satisfy our theoretical (rationalistic) demands for a knowledge of basic principles, and he admired Bernard for the latter's distrust of empiricism, as well as his willingness to concede the limitations of the scientific method; that is to say, science should not arbitrate on metaphysical questions or seek to apply itself to the social, economic, or moral spheres.<sup>69</sup> In his essay on the French physiologist, he quotes approvingly Bernard's assertion that

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<sup>65</sup> Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, 2 vols, I, pp. 342-34.

<sup>66</sup> John Tyndall, 'On the Scientific Use of the Imagination', in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, ed. by Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 128-30. Here, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> See Virtanen, *Claude Bernard*, chapter 1.

<sup>68</sup> Strakhov, 'Klod Bernar', p. 148.

<sup>69</sup> Linda Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1971), chapter 3.

‘каждый человек с первого взгляда составляет себе идеи о том, что он видит, и склонен истолковать явления природы по предубеждению, прежде чем узнает их по опыту’.<sup>70</sup> Since we cannot approach phenomena without preconceived ideas, scientific progress can best be achieved by utilising those preconceptions in the form of hypotheses as a tentative fulcrum from which to branch forward.

In the 1870s, Dostoevsky shared Strakhov’s frustration with bare facts, noting that all kinds of spurious philosophies (including, much to his chagrin, spiritualism) could draw on isolated phenomena as proof of their veracity. As a result, he claimed that the way to combat spiritualism was not, as Mendeleev had tried to do, to adduce different facts that could be weaponised to disprove spiritualism point-by-point, but rather to construct a *narrative* that would subtly change people’s worldviews and gradually make them disinclined to believe in spiritualism. To use empirical evidence as a means of conquering belief was for Dostoevsky a fruitless undertaking since ‘вера и математические доказательства—две вещи несовместимые. Кто захочет поверить—того не остановите’ [22, 101]. Michael Gordin, in his analysis of the different techniques by which Dostoevsky and Mendeleev seek to discredit spiritualism, points to the limitations of empirical evidence: ‘if [for Dostoevsky] the *fact* of finding some fraud [of the spiritualists] did not convince, [the] appropriate presentation would’.<sup>71</sup>

The problem of the supposed supremacy of fact is highlighted in *The Brothers Karamazov* when Mitya is arrested and interviewed by the district attorney Nikolai Parfenovich. In a significant gesture, Dostoevsky has Nikolai Parfenovich remove his glasses from his myopic eyes as he questions Mitya and fixates on the ‘мелочи’ [14, 418] of Mitya’s case—much to the latter’s indignation. As the investigation

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<sup>70</sup> Strakhov, ‘Klod Bernar’, p. 146.

<sup>71</sup> Michael D. Gordin, ‘Loose and Baggy Spirits: Reading Dostoevskii and Mendeleev’, *Slavic Review*, 60.4 (2001), 756-80.

continues, Nikolai Parfenovich attempts to reconstruct the events surrounding Fyodor Pavlovich's murder. Uninterested in Mitya's psychology, he dismisses the defendant's effusive interjections as irrelevant to the matter at hand: 'после строгого внушения Мите он сам тотчас же прекратил все дальнейшие расспросы касательно романической стороны дела и поскорее перешел к существенному' [14, 452]. However, anyone acquainted with Mitya would know that the romantic aspects of the case, however unnameable to empirical observation, *are* the essential aspects. Nikolai Parfenovich's commitment to establishing the facts leads him to misinterpret Mitya's complicity entirely. Mitya himself recognises the poverty of this legal method when he comments that 'Факт налицо, факт говорит, кричит, но — чувства, господа, чувства, это уж другое' [14, 415]. The judicial investigation cannot account for feelings, which are a better barometer of Mitya's character than the circumstantial evidence over which Nikolai Parfenovich obsesses. It is by no means the only occasion in the novel where Dostoevsky emphasises the unreliability of sight. Grigory swears blind (to employ a rather apt expression) that he saw the garden gate open, and Trifon Borisovich, the innkeeper at Mokroe, testifies that he saw Mitya with three thousand roubles during the course of his second spree.

Of relevance to the argument of this thesis is that Dostoevsky's disavowal of the independent value of empirical evidence in the 1870s seems to juxtapose his adherence to that very same evidence in the 1860s. In *Notes from Underground*, for example, he had taken the materialists to task for failing to account for the reality of the phenomenal world. In that work, he powerfully lambasts thinkers such as Buckle for being a 'человек пристрастен к системе и к отвлеченному выводу', for being 'готов видом не видеть и слухом не слышать' [4, 112], before enumerating a long list of historical examples (from Napoleon to Attila to Stenka Razin) that disprove

Buckle's assertions about the perfectibility of man and his natural desire for a peaceable existence. The underground man performs the Dostoevskian task of shattering all systems ('разрушает и все системы'), and mercilessly berates the determinists of the 1860s for distorting the truth in order to justify logic ('исказить правду [...] только чтоб оправдать свою логику' [4, 112]). In *Crime and Punishment*, published two years later, Dostoevsky's sympathies clearly lie with his detective, Porfiry, and with the student Razumikhin, who both serve to debunk Raskolnikov's theories by pointing out they do not take into account the raw material of human nature (the latter pointing out that in them 'натура не берется в расчет' [6, 197], the former noting that the murderer 'на натуру-то и не сумел рассчитать' [6, 263]).

The value of empirical evidence is questioned, however, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, in a passage about the faith needed to believe in miracles. The argument Dostoevsky puts forward in the first paragraph of the chapter 'Старцы' is that miracles, even when presented as an irrefutable fact ('неотразимый факт' [14, 24]) will never compel faith. When presented with such a fact, unbelievers will always find some way of ignoring it, or of subsuming it into their belief system. Only once a predisposition to a religious worldview has been developed will the believer be able to accommodate faith in the miraculous. In short, 'в реалисте вера не от чуда рождается, а чудо от веры' [14, 24]. Dostoevsky then goes on to interpret the Bible in such a way as to support his thesis. The Apostle Thomas declared that he would not believe in the risen Lord until he had seen him. The question is then raised:

Чудо ли заставило его уверовать? Вероятнее всего, что нет, а уверовал он лишь единственно потому, что желал уверовать, и может быть уже веровал вполне, в тайнике существа своего, даже еще тогда, когда произносил: "Не поверю, пока не увижу". [14, 25]

There is nothing in the biblical account that would give rise to such a suggestion. On the contrary, it is only *because* Thomas has seen that he believes (John 20.29). According to the Bible, sight in this instance compels faith. Dostoevsky, on the contrary, takes the side of Ivan's devil, who declares in conversation with Ivan that 'в вере никакие доказательства не помогают, особенно материальные. Фома поверил не потому, что увидел воскресшего Христа, а потому, что еще прежде желал поверить' [15, 71]. (This is also the position of Renan, who in *The Life of Jesus* stated that 'observation [...] teaches us that miracles never happen but in times and countries in which they are believed, and before persons disposed to believe them'.<sup>72</sup>) Later, at Mitya's trial, the material proofs of the case—Grushenka's envelope, the pink ribbon, and others—will be laid out in the courtroom, and yet Dostoevsky makes it quite clear that the issue of Mitya's guilt has been pre-decided. In respect of the latter case, the narrator makes it clear that Mitya was not condemned because of the evidence against him as such, but rather from the way in which the evidence was assembled, the perspective from which it was viewed.

In his works of the 1870s, Dostoevsky's defence of rational belief systems (as opposed to isolated facts) is remarkably similar to that of Strakhov and, by extension, Bernard. Anna Schur Kaladiouk makes a convincing case for viewing Dostoevsky as a rationalist, arguing that the traditional dichotomy into which critics<sup>73</sup> have tried to place the writer (namely, someone torn between reason and faith) fails to distinguish the contours of Dostoevsky's critique of nineteenth-century science.<sup>74</sup> Kaladiouk suggests that reason and faith are both embraced by Dostoevsky, and that Ivan—rightly taken as someone who propounds beliefs antithetical to Dostoevsky's own—is

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<sup>72</sup> Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: Watts and Co., 1935), p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, p. 570.

<sup>74</sup> Anna Schur Kaladiouk, 'On "Sticking to the Fact" and "Understanding Nothing": Dostoevsky and the Scientific Method', *The Russian Review*, 65.3 (2006), 417-38.

critiqued by the author not as a rationalist, but as an empiricist, eager to prove his allegiance to ‘фактики’, but unwilling to subsume these into an overarching system of understanding (Ivan repeats on several occasions that he does not *want* to understand God’s universe).

Dostoevsky was familiar with (and in many ways sceptical of) the works of Lewes and Bernard. Despite this scepticism, his preoccupations in the *Diary* are at times closely aligned with those of positivist science. More generally, his entire doctrine of fantastic realism can be seen as analogous to Bernard’s claim (quoted here in Strakhov’s translation) that ‘величайшие научные истины имеют свои корни в подробностях опытного исследования’.<sup>75</sup> Dostoevsky’s aesthetics rest on the principle that exceptional circumstances and characters reveal something that is typical, something he repeatedly stressed to those detractors who claimed he was unhealthily fixated on pathological types—an argument I develop further later in this chapter in my discussion of the utilisation of cell theory in the novel. The shift also coincides with a move in Russian science—one which Dostoevsky welcomed—away from the hard materialism of those men of the sixties who believed, like Pisarev, that the future of Russia lay in the dissected body of a splayed frog, to the Populist recognition that science, however useful, should complement rather than contest the values of the Russian people, whom it could be employed to serve—particularly in the area of medicine. (Whatever ideological differences Dostoevsky had with the leaders of the Populist movement, he was deeply impressed by the altruism of the populists, many of whom served as doctors, nurses, and midwives throughout the empire.)<sup>76</sup> Finally, Dostoevsky’s growing distrust of bare facts coincides with his interest in provincial settings, where interpersonal relationships add a level of

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<sup>75</sup> Strakhov, ‘Klod Bernar’, p. 125.

<sup>76</sup> This shift in the nature of Russian science is charted by Frank in *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, chapter 4.

complexity to the isolated struggles of Raskolnikov and the underground man. Lewes's comment that 'every Real is the complex *of so many relations*' (quoted above; my italics) invites us to speculate as to whether Dostoevsky turned to provincial communities and families in order to explore how the emergent practices of laboratory medicine might, if not absolutely reduce man to a physiological specimen, at least shed light on aspects of man's motivation and psychology.

Like Dostoevsky, Eliot also exposes the poverty of the empirical gaze in her writings. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom Tulliver is described as a 'clear-sighted' youth [MF, 141], but is a slow learner at least in part because he 'was not given to hypothesis and experiment' [MF, 141]. His treatment of Maggie throughout that novel shows his keen sensibility to her outward actions, but an inability to interpret them correctly—much like Nikolai Parfenovich's failure to properly account for the behaviour he observes in Mitya. In *Middlemarch*, Mr Casaubon, whose *Key to All Mythologies* aspires to produce such an authoritative vision of world history, is blighted by ailing vision that has been too much spent deciphering old characters [MM, 18], a fact which for myopic Dorothea portends a kinship between her future husband and the poet Milton [MM, 10]. By inflicting sight-loss on her characters, even the most sympathetic, George Eliot seems to be suggesting that there is no single authoritative gaze that can account for the totality of phenomenal reality. Lewes had noted the selective nature of observation in *Problems of Life and Mind*, commenting that 'we only see what interests us'.<sup>77</sup> Through the trope of myopia (Mr Farebrother is similarly afflicted) Eliot calls into question the epistemological confidence of writers such as Balzac, Flaubert, and the Goncourts, insisting that, however advanced the instruments of anatomy may be, they cannot substitute for a field of vision that is

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<sup>77</sup> Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. 2, p. 248.

commanded not by an all-seeing eye, but by the multiple perspectives of different characters. Rothfield suggests that the multi-plot composition of *Middlemarch* is a means of providing such perspectives which complement rather than exclude each other.<sup>78</sup> In addition, like Mitya Karamazov, Eliot insists that sight must be accompanied by feeling if observers wish to truly apprehend reality. Ladislaw, the novel's exemplary vassal of understanding and unhampered by a quest for ultimate origins, describes the poet's activity as one in which 'knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back *as a new organ of knowledge*' [MM, 222; my italics].

Several of George Eliot's characters do try to use a scientific method that employs imagination and hypothesis to discover new complexities. Casaubon, for example, relies on his mind to 'mentally construct' the world; but the world of his imagination is that of the past ('as it used to be'). Moreover, Casaubon does not seek to conjecture reality, but to reveal it, hoping to provide a definitive account of human history, rather than to reveal new avenues for future research.<sup>79</sup> Lydgate comes closer to Eliot's ideal in his articulation of laboratory theory:

Whereas fever had obscure conditions, and gave him that delightful labour of the imagination which is not mere arbitrariness, but the exercise of disciplined power—combining and constructing with the clearest eye for probabilities and the fullest obedience to knowledge; and then, in yet more energetic alliance with impartial Nature, standing aloof to invent tests by which to try its own work [...] He was enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy... [MM, 164-65]

But Lydgate, like Casaubon, is unable to deal with what Gillian Beer calls the 'fictive

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<sup>78</sup> See Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 102ff.

<sup>79</sup> On Casaubon's failure to embrace the creative potential of myth, see Gillian Beer, 'Myth and the Single Consciousness: *Middlemarch* and "The Lifted Veil"', in *This Particular Web*, ed. by Ian Adam (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975), pp. 91-115.

nature of hypothesis'.<sup>80</sup> In his love life, he approaches Rosamond as a code to be deciphered, and errs in taking her outward perfection as a direct sign of her inward pliancy. He is clearly a good deal more intelligent than Mrs Tulliver, who, as I showed in chapter one, was utterly unable to accept any complication of the sign and the signified, but he nevertheless remains in the shadow of Bichat and the pathological anatomists of Paris, and is for this reason unsuspecting of any potential fissure between the object of his gaze as it appears to him and the inner reality of that object;<sup>81</sup> anachronistically, Eliot can ascribe to him a scientific method that through imagination 'reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens' that can be 'tracked in that outer darkness' [*MM*, 165], but he cannot sustain a scientific method for which he was born too early. His entanglement with Rosamond also leads him to abandon his scientific research, and he will ultimately end the novel by penning a treatise on gout—hardly a disease at the cutting edge of scientific research in the nineteenth century.

By stressing categories such as imagination, hypothesis, probability, relation, and provisionality, George Eliot does not mean to disparage the value of empiricism. Her novel also contains warnings about the dangers of imagination, and enumerates many hypotheses that cause trouble and distress. (Dorothea's hypothesis about Casaubon's virtue is one such example; another would be Casaubon's inference that Dorothea invited Will Ladislaw to return to the Grange; almost any supposition of Fred Vincy's would also fall into this category.) It is true, as Beer argues, that 'reason must outgo fact' in Eliot's writing,<sup>82</sup> but, as Bernard and other experimental scientists pointed out, it cannot do without it.

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<sup>80</sup> Gillian Beer, 'Plot and the Analogy with Science in Later Nineteenth-Century Novelists', *Comparative Criticism*, 2 (1980), 131-50. Here, p. 133

<sup>81</sup> For a fine analysis of Lydgate's inability here, see Peter M. Logan, 'Conceiving the Body: Realism and Medicine in *Middlemarch*', *History of the Human Sciences*, 4.2 (1991), 197-222.

<sup>82</sup> Beer, 'Plot and the Analogy with Science,' p. 140.

## ‘Experiments in Life’

The shift from hospital to laboratory medicine in the nineteenth century—a shift from the examination of an inert corpse to the interaction with the living body, and the coincident methodological manoeuvre from autopsy to vivisection—coincided with the growth of scientific disciplines that emphasised time rather than stasis. Whilst the studies of botany, geology, and evolution were already well established in the early-nineteenth century, their pioneers tended to understate the role of time, mutation, and the influence of the environment in plant, earth, and animal maturation. In France, for example, Cuvier, the great empiricist who correctly hypothesised that there was vast pre-historical life on earth but who refused to countenance the theory of organic transmutation, held that the multitude of species currently extant on earth had remained unchanged since the dawn of time. He was challenged by Lamarck, who emphasised the constant flux and change of the universe and posited that species change in ad hoc response to their conditions.<sup>83</sup> In Darwin, the mutation of organisms from homogeneity to heterogeneity would be firmly established.

In Eliot’s writing, as I indicated in the Introduction, this emphasis on time is reflected in her move away from the stasis of Dutch genre painting (*Adam Bede*) towards the dynamic complexity of novels such as *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* (that ‘dynamic quality’ of Gwendolen’s glance on the first page of the novel being one of Eliot’s more compelling enigmas [*DD*, 3]). Gillian Beer states that nineteenth-century novelists including George Eliot, in response to scientific developments, ‘move away from the models of Cuvier and Bichat to those of Darwin and Bernard,

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<sup>83</sup> On the debates in evolutionary theory in nineteenth-century France, see Pietro Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790-1830*, trans. by Jonathan Mendelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). For a succinct comparison of the different approaches taken to the development of species by Cuvier and Lamarck, see Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance*, pp. 62-66.

away from structure to function and to history. The movement in scientific thinking was from description to narration: time becomes an inherent part of theory'.<sup>84</sup> Eliot's later novels seek to destabilise the authoritative stance of the anatomist and his gaze by emphasising the complexity of relations as they unfold. We see this in her famous description of the squirrel's heartbeat:

That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our fames could not bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of the roar which lies on the other side of silence. [*MM*, 194]

Vision, while not abjured in this passage, is complicated, as Eliot's narrator insists that it must be accompanied both by feeling and by an understanding that reality is not a static specimen, but an organic, pulsating process. As Richard Menke notes, George Eliot here imports the techniques of French hospital medicine, which, since the invention of the stethoscope, had been able to record the beating heart, as well as those of the physiological laboratory of the 1870s: the sphygmograph and kymograph had made it possible to record heartbeats.<sup>85</sup> What Eliot does in *Middlemarch* is what the hospital doctors of Paris could not do: in the slow maturation of Dorothea Brooke, she records the tragedy of the ordinary human life, exposes us to the roar which lies on the other side of silence.

To underscore her preference for the dynamic power of language, George Eliot makes Ladislav, whom we first meet as a painter, more adept as a wordsmith, and in fact he prefers words to painting because 'language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being vague' [*MM*, 191]. For Ladislav, true seeing is within. What Ladislav seems to be implying here is that pictures can actually obstruct seeing

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<sup>84</sup> Beer, 'Plot and the Analogy with Science', pp. 134-35. See also her *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Late Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 149-50.

<sup>85</sup> Menke, 'Fiction as Vivisection', p. 636.

because their visual nature insists on too close a correspondence between the sign and signified—a relationship that, as I showed in chapter two, was complicated in a provincial setting. Words, which evoke rather than “perform” such correspondence, may liberate the imagination to pursue avenues of enquiry of which the clinical gaze cannot conceive. This contrasts Dorothea’s approach to words, which is to view them as clear, visual, denotative codes: ‘She piqued herself on writing in a hand in which each letter was distinguishable without any large range of conjecture’ [MM, 45].

Ladislaw’s argument—that images cannot capture movement, tone, and voice—is almost Bakhtinian in its elevation of dialogue over image (just as Eliot’s own craft favoured pen over paint) and reflects a movement in nineteenth-century science away from questions of “what is...?” to questions of “what happens when...?”. Writing on Dostoevsky, Caryl Emerson has described two kinds of readings, each emphasising a different aspect of the writer’s craft. The first, proposed by Bakhtin, stresses the primacy of the dialogic word in Dostoevsky’s art: characters, in this approach, can never be determined and no action can ever be said to be “finished”. Dialogue, for Bakhtin, holds the hope that there was *always* another way out, always a chance to avert disaster. This contrasts, by and large, Robert Louis Jackson’s image-based approach to Dostoevsky, which posits that the image in Dostoevsky’s works (usually present in revelatory and transfiguring moments) presents the reader with an authorial ideal that is given as a non-negotiable (and frequently divine) truth.<sup>86</sup>

Whilst I am not suggesting that either Dostoevsky’s practice or Bakhtin’s explication of dialogism in the novel relies entirely upon his familiarity with the time-

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<sup>86</sup> Caryl Emerson, ‘Word and Image in Dostoevsky’s Worlds: Robert Louis Jackson on Readings that Bakhtin Could Not Do’, in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, ed. by Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), pp. 245-65.

based sciences of the nineteenth century, his novelistic vision and techniques nevertheless echo some of the procedures being used in the medical laboratory. In both his fictional and non-fictional output he spoke of the need to penetrate beneath the surface uncover the hidden reality. But this act of penetration was not one of anatomy or autopsy, and Dostoevsky criticised his contemporaries, particularly Tolstoy, for describing the life of a bygone (deceased) era, and being out of touch with the fluctuating nervousness of the present generation. Dostoevsky did not intend to be complimentary when he labeled the author of *War and Peace* a historian of gentry types,<sup>87</sup> and he thought that Strakhov's praise of Tolstoy was excessive, given that writer's 'pure personality types' against which Dostoevsky presented 'his own more tangled view of the mutabilities and indeterminacies of human character' (in Joseph Frank's words).<sup>88</sup>

In uncovering, and at times predicting, the life of the underground, Dostoevsky, to employ a medical metaphor, vivisected rather than anatomised society. In France, his contemporary Émile Zola had been more explicit in his attempts to bring the techniques of the physiological laboratory to bear on his fictional worlds. In his writings on the experimental novel, highly inflected by his readings of Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, Zola eschewed the empirical method in favour of an experimental practice in which the writer intervened in his text, set up conditions, manipulated variables, and tested his characters in various environments, especially those 'not presented by nature'.<sup>89</sup> For Zola it was important to show how characters reacted under the determinist laws that he believed governed the universe, laws whose workings he magnified in his novels. Whether

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<sup>87</sup> See Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 167-68.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 383.

<sup>89</sup> Émile Zola, 'The Experimental Novel', in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. by Hazard Adams (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 647-59.

Zola's theory of the experimental novel can be taken as a manifesto of his craft is open to question in on at least three counts. Firstly, as David Baguley has noted, the use of scientific terminology by Zola and others was 'prompted by the need to elaborate a theoretical method' for a process they had long employed.<sup>90</sup> Secondly, experimental ideas, by Zola's definition, long predate his conception of the experimental novel.<sup>91</sup> Thirdly, the novel as a genre is difficult to make analogous with an experiment, not least because in a novel the novelist asks and answers his own questions: there is no external reaction to verify the author's hypothesis. In Russia, the geographer and publicist L. I. Mechnikov declared the genre of the experimental novel to be as oxymoronic as a transcendental cow.<sup>92</sup>

Dostoevsky was not especially enamoured of Zola's literary output, which he read on a visit to the waters of Bad Ems. In particular, he found Zola's impressionism too taxing on the reader, and he detected little sense of brotherhood in novels such as *Le ventre de Paris*.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, strong arguments have been made that Dostoevsky's final novel was written in response to some of the issues of Zola's work, particularly the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. The most convincing of these is Riccardo Nicolosi's exploration of the ways in which Zola and Dostoevsky approach issues of inheritance/heredity,<sup>94</sup> experimentation, and naturalism.<sup>95</sup> Nicolosi notes

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<sup>90</sup> David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 45.

<sup>91</sup> See Irina Paperno, 'La prose des années 1870-1890', in *Histoire de la littérature russe. Le temps du roman*, ed. by Efim Etkind (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp. 789-823.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Riccardo Nicolosi, 'Eksperimenty s eksperimentami: Emil' Zolia i russkii naturalizm ("Privalovskie milliony" D. N. Mamina-Sibiriaka)', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 134 (2005), 201-20. Nicolosi's article charts the reception of Zola in Russia, essentially stating that, as a social novelist, he was well-received (Russian critics tended to want novels that contributed something to society's well-being), but that his theory of the experimental novel did not find a particularly warm reception for the reasons I have outlined above. On Zola's Russian reception, see also Phillip A. Duncan, 'Echoes of Zola's Experimental Novel in Russia', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 18.1 (1974), 11-19.

<sup>93</sup> On Dostoevsky's reading of Zola, see Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 230-31.

<sup>94</sup> As Nicolosi notes, the word "heredity" in its biological sense dates back only to the 19th century. It was originally used to designate the bequest of estates and titles, then illnesses, and only finally to inherited characteristics ('Eksperimenty s eksperimentami', p. 216).

that Zola conceived of the novel as ‘a kind of laboratory’ in which he could conduct experiments and contribute to scientific practice.<sup>96</sup> He was particularly interested in the hereditary characteristics which combine or modify throughout generations to determine characters’ behaviour. Whilst Nicolosi concedes that Dostoevsky was not interested in incarnating scientific ideas into his novels, the Russian novelist’s *characters* are concerned with, or captivated by, ideas of determinism. In other words, the issue of determinism in *The Brothers Karamazov* is propelled, explicated, and questioned by the characters of that novel, not the author. Mitya, for example, questions the extent to which he is determined by his *milieu extérieur* and *milieu intérieur*, as he struggles to come to terms with his own heroic sentiment in an environment whose laws preclude individual agency (the underground man had faced a similar struggle two decades earlier). In the novel as a whole, however, Nicolosi argues that Dostoevsky is conducting an “anti-experiment” [*Gegenexperiment*], which aims to prove the possibility of free action and Christian regeneration in opposition to the fatalism of Zola. By giving the brothers a shared paternal heredity,<sup>97</sup> Dostoevsky sets up an experiment but concludes, antithetically to Zola, that individual choice allows for different outcomes and that, despite the features of *karamazovshchina* that each son inherits (much to Rakitin’s glee), disintegration is by no means a given.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Riccardo Nicolosi, ‘Das Blut der Karamazovs: Vererbung, Experiment und Naturalismus in Dostoevskijs letztem Roman’, in *Laien, Lektüren, Laboratorien: Künste und Wissenschaften in Russland, 1860-1960*, ed. by Matthias Schwartz, et al (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 147-80. Also illuminating is V. G. Reizov’s *Iz istorii evropeiskikh literatur* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo leningradskogo universtiteta, 1970). See also Jacob Meister, ‘The Causes and Detection of Crime in Zola and Dostoevsky’s Novels’ (unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Oxford, 2015).

<sup>96</sup> Nicolosi, ‘Das Blut der Karamazovs’, p. 147.

<sup>97</sup> Like Zola’s characters in *Rougon-Macquart*, the Karamazovs have different mothers. Nicolosi convincingly shows that their names are based on Zola’s matriarchs (pp. 162-63). Similar structural parallels are outlined in Reizov, *Iz istorii evropeiskikh literatur*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>98</sup> Although not quite as antithetical to Zola as Dostoevsky, Saltykov-Shchedrin also stops short of embracing the French writer’s fatalism in his *Golovyov Family*. Of this novel, Kate Holland writes that despite the fatalistic trajectory of the novel, there are ‘moment[s] of reprieve from [its] ... merciless fatalism’ (p. 23). See Kate Holland, ‘The Russian *Rougon-Macquart*: Degeneration and Biological Determinism in *The Golovyev Family*’, in *Russian Writers and the Fin de Siècle: The Twilight of*

Nicolosi claims that *The Brothers Karamazov* undulates between an awareness that heredity matters and an awareness that it is ultimately insufficient to account for human action—a view borne out in Mitya’s desire to, and decision not to, murder his father. If *The Brothers Karamazov* were a naturalist novel, Nicolosi writes, Mitya’s actions would be determined by the author,<sup>99</sup> and he would end up with Fyodor’s blood on his hands; his decision not to murder, which leads to his moral regeneration, contradicts this naturalist imperative.<sup>100</sup>

In his chapter, Nicolosi stresses both that environment and heredity are influential in Dostoevsky’s text, and that Dostoevsky does not elevate this influence to the level of determinism. To be sure, Dostoevsky had little patience for Taineian positivism that proclaimed that man was entirely determined by race, milieu, and moment.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, in novels such as *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky concedes that the causes of crime are ‘сложнее и разнообразнее, чем мы их всегда потом объясняем’ [8, 402]. In the *Diary*, he had explained Kornilova’s defenestration of her stepdaughter by recourse to both biological and environmental pressures, and even in his intercession on behalf of the abused Kronenberg girl Dostoevsky appeals to environmental factors to explain her behaviour: he argues that the girl’s upbringing in Switzerland led to some bad habits and that, as such, she was not in the least responsible for the actions that drove her father to his brutal excess [22, 68]. Additionally, in his analysis of the growth of the terrorist movement in Russia, Dostoevsky saw the young extremists as *products* of the historical course Russia had taken since Peter the Great, a process that ultimately served to sever Russia’s

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*Realism*, ed. by Katherine Bowers and Ani Kokobobo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 15-32.

<sup>99</sup> A nuanced account of the way in which Zola’s fiction incarnates these determinist theories is Valerie Minogue, ‘*Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 121-36.

<sup>100</sup> Nicolosi, ‘Das Blut der Karamazovs’, p. 175.

<sup>101</sup> On which see Meister, ‘The Causes and Detection of Crime’, pp. 8-9.

intelligentsia from the soil.<sup>102</sup> Whilst his writings of the early-mid 1860s (particularly *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *Notes from Underground*, but also *Crime and Punishment*) had defended man's immutable metaphysical freedom against all the obstacles that seek to quash it, his later works seem to accept that the complex web of relations, both biological and environmental, do limit—or at least delimit—the arena such freedom can command.

This more subtle understanding of the pressures on human freedom developed at the same time as Dostoevsky relocated his novelistic settings from the city to the provinces. As Robert Belknap has suggested, in *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky isolated the underground man in order to 'explore the psyche in pure action, undiluted by reaction', a gratuitous act that, in the language of Zola's essay on the experimental novel, allows him to 'experiment with pure chemicals and reveal the true nature of a given character's psyche'.<sup>103</sup> (The isolation of a character, apart from their social milieu, was the method employed by Zola in *Thérèse Raquin* to test his experimental hypotheses, a method at odds with practitioners such as Balzac, who insisted upon the influence of milieu upon character-formation.<sup>104</sup>) In the provincial setting, however, the anonymity that the city offers to characters such as the underground man or Raskolnikov is no longer available and if we are to suggest, as I do, that Dostoevsky's final novel utilises some of the techniques of laboratory medicine, physiology, and late-nineteenth-century science, then it clearly cannot be

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<sup>102</sup> See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, p. 481.

<sup>103</sup> Robert L. Belknap, *Plots* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 98. Irina Paperno likewise points to Dostoevsky's use of an experimental method to 'beat the positivists at their own game'. In her analysis of Dostoevsky's depiction of suicide she writes: 'Dostoevsky used the situation of a man condemned to death (whether by medicine, in accordance with the law of nature, or in a court of law) as an experimental investigation into the effects of man's awareness of his finitude. [...] By using an experimental model, Dostoevsky beat the positivists at their own game. He demonstrated that their project of removing God from human consciousness would result in the collapse of morality and, ultimately, in the annihilation of mankind through suicide and murder.' Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 129.

<sup>104</sup> See Bell, 'Thérèse Raquin', pp. 126ff.

the same kind of debt that Belknap correctly explicates in his analysis of *Notes from Underground*.

Whereas the isolation of individual characters might be likened to early nineteenth-century conceptions of disease, which medical scientists held could be understood in isolation from the rest of the organism, the relations that Dostoevsky conceives of in his provincial novels resemble more recent theories of the human constitution. In particular, cell theory, being developed by Virchow in Berlin in the late 1850s, provides a useful model through which to analyse Dostoevsky's treatment of character formation. The cell, much like the provincial town, functions as an organism in miniature (or microcosm); it is a concentrated environment which, when placed under the microscope, can reveal something about the larger organism of which it forms an intrinsic part. Both Dostoevsky, in his *Diary*, and Liza Nikolaevna in *The Devils*, make this belief the cornerstone of their publicistic enterprises, in which they hope to select individual cases and extrapolate from them the presentation of the whole spiritual, moral, and inner life of Russia.<sup>105</sup> Liza wants to publish a journal 'с мыслью, освещающею всё целое, всю совокупность' [10, 104]. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the "author" of the preface declares Alyosha to be a single specimen who contains within himself the heart of the whole.

The intractable connection of the individual to the whole was something Dostoevsky evidently wished to preserve. In his last novel, *Fathers Paisy and Zosima* express concern about the ways in which scientists 'разбирали по частям, а целое просмотрели' [14, 155], and in which modern man 'надеялся на себя одного и от целого отделился единицей' [14, 275]—an atomisation whose apotheosis comes in

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<sup>105</sup> On this, see Gary Saul Morson, 'Introductory Study', in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), pp. 1-117, especially pp. 7-8.

the form of suicide.<sup>106</sup> By acknowledging the shared interests of Dostoevsky with scientists such as Virchow, we may be able to qualify some of the apprehension towards scientific developments that Dostoevsky expressed in the 1860s, and which, according to Diane Thompson, remained with him to the end.<sup>107</sup> Harriet Murav has pointed out that Dostoevsky expressed skepticism of scientific jargon that was changing the way in which the human subject was understood: for example, in *The Devils* the narrator cannot understand why Varvara Petrovna refers to the holy-foolish Lebyadkina as a ‘несчастный организм’ [10, 152]<sup>108</sup>—clearly an attempt to ingratiate herself with the young group of radicals whose flag she raises but whose cause she does not fully understand. In the *Diary*, Dostoevsky criticises Spasovich for referring to the Kronenberg girl as an organism, a move which dehumanises her and serves to make her pain easier to justify [22, 67]. However, as is so often the case in Dostoevsky’s writing, the moral charge of a word depends much upon its speaker. In the notebooks for *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky himself uses the word in a jotting about the way in which the family unit can extend beyond blood relations and include alliances based on a shared spiritual bond: ‘семейство расширяется: вступают и неродные, заткалось начало нового *организма*’ [15, 249; my italics].<sup>109</sup> Clearly intended as a challenge to biological determinism, this comment nevertheless reveals that Dostoevsky’s attitude to the scientific discourse of his time was not uniformly hostile, and that it could be commandeered in the service of his own religious and ideological vision.

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<sup>106</sup> On suicide and cell theory in the nineteenth century, see Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution*, chapter 1.

<sup>107</sup> Diane Oenning Thompson, ‘Dostoevskii and Science’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. by W. J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 191-211.

<sup>108</sup> Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky’s Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Frank suggests that Dostoevsky was influenced at this time by the ideas of Feodorov, who held that humanity, both living and dead, would be reconciled in a perfect union. See Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 366-70.

Indeed, Dostoevsky's apprehension about western scientific developments seems to arise not from western science as such, but from its Russian perversions. At first sight, this may seem counter-intuitive, given that Mitya Karamazov, as he attempts to get to grips with his status as an individual under an environment which, he has been told, is governed by determinist laws, singles out the *western* scientist Claude Bernard as the author of the theory of nerves that causes him such existential angst:

Вообрази себе: это там в нервах, в голове, то есть там в мозгу эти нервы... (ну чорт их возьми!) есть такие этакie хвостики, у нервов этих хвостики, ну, и как только они там задрожат... то есть видишь, я посмотрю на что-нибудь глазами, вот так, и они задрожат, хвостики-то... а как задрожат, то и является образ, и не сейчас является, а там какое-то мгновение, секунда такая пройдет, и является такой будто бы момент, то есть не момент,—чорт его дери момент,—а образ, то есть предмет, али происшествие, ну там чорт дери—вот почему я и созерцаю, а потом мыслю... потому что хвостики, а вовсе не потому, что у меня душа и что я там какой-то образ и подобие, все это глупости. Это, брат, мне Михаил еще вчера объяснял, и меня точно обожгло. Великолепна, Алеша, эта наука! Новый человек пойдет, это-то я понимаю... А все-таки Бога жалко! [15, 28]

Mitya is in confusion about his ontological status as a free individual, and he implies that Bernard's determinist theories have overturned an understanding of humanity that goes back as far as Genesis 1.27, in which man's superiority above the material world is established by his reflection of God's image and likeness [*obraz i podobie*]. Further, nineteenth-century science seems to have turned two centuries of rationalism on its head: in the cogito, Descartes had insisted that man could be assured of his existence and status because he was a thinking being; in Mitya's summary of Bernard's position, thought is but a chemical reaction to an external stimulus: 'то и является образ [...] вот почему я и созерцаю, а потом мыслю' (with *obraz* in this instance denoting not the image of God but a phenomenal object that acts upon man's nervous system). Finally, Bernard's theories seem to be compromised by their

political association: in *What is to be Done?* Chernyshevsky hailed the French physiologist as the herald of a new scientific age and the idol of his “new people”, a barely veiled reference to which is made in the final paragraph of the extract quoted.

However, this analysis is at odds with Dostoevsky’s own extra-literary statements on Bernard. In Europe, he wrote to A. F. Gerasimova, ‘вы встретите и Гумбольдта, и Клод-Бернара, и прочих людей с универсальной мыслью, с огромным образованием и *знанием*, не по одной своей специальности. У нас же люди даже с огромными талантами, Сеченов, например, в сущности человек необразованный и вне своего предмета мало знающий’ [29.2, 143]. Moreover, as I have identified above, friends (and conservatives) such as Strakhov had defended Bernard precisely against the charges that Mitya (and subsequent critics) level against him. In the extract, Mitya feels sorry for God because theories such as the one he has expounded have made God redundant: it is no longer moral categories such as conscience that inform human behaviour, but biological ones. Bernard had no such truck for this kind of materialism, and Strakhov was explicit in his praise of Bernard’s dualism.

It is certainly true, as Virtanen has noted, that Dostoevsky uses Bernard only to attach a name to a tendency that he had long hated.<sup>110</sup> But the attack is on the tendency, not the science.<sup>111</sup> The theories that Mitya espouses have not been taken from the *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*; they are rather Rakitin’s perversions of that study. Dostoevsky’s unease with the findings of nineteenth-century physiology does not arise from his distrust of the European laboratory, but from his observations that the Russian inflections of European science tended to take

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<sup>110</sup> Virtanen, *Claude Bernard*, chapter 6. Cf. also Nicolosi: ‘The name Bernard stands for all the fallacious “new”, rationalistic men who wished to reduce the world to chemical components and reactions’ (‘Das Blut der Karamazovs’, p. 165; my translation).

<sup>111</sup> Iaroshevskii believes that the object of Dostoevsky’s attack is in any event more likely to be Sechenov than Bernard. See ‘Dostoevskii i ideino-filosofskie iskaniia’, p. 107.

a direction of their own. In fact, on the thirteen occasions on which Bernard's name is mentioned in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a full twelve refer not to the historical Claude Bernard at all. Two refer to "Carl" Bernard, and the remaining ten refer to "Bernards" ('Ух, Бернары' [15, 28]) or "a Bernard" ('Ракитин тоже Бернар' [15, 28]). Certainly, Rakitin's provincial perversions of metropolitan ideas, like Sechenov's application of European scientific concepts in *Reflexes of the Brain*, give rise to a popular and (therefore?) simplified understanding of scientific terms which has the potential to compromise scientific endeavour.<sup>112</sup> This is the same failing exemplified by Kolya Krasotkin who, as I argued at the end of chapter 2, "read" literary texts at several degrees of remove.

In *The Genesis of The Brothers Karamazov*, Robert Belknap suggests that 'in Dostoevsky's mind, philosophers of voluntarism, materialism, positivism [a group to which Bernard belongs], or utilitarianism tended to fall together in a group that might best be characterized as the enemy'.<sup>113</sup> What I am suggesting is that there is a fissure between the historical scientific method and findings of the laboratory medics of the nineteenth-century, exemplified by Bernard, and the way in which that method and those findings were applied in Russia, the province of Europe.<sup>114</sup> Dostoevsky, I suggest, did not associate Bernardian science, with its emphasis on hypothesis and the complex interplay of *milieu intérieur* and *milieu extérieur*, with 'the enemy'; but when Bernard's followers—the plural *Bernards*—took it upon themselves to apply

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<sup>112</sup> In the *Diary*, Dostoevsky had made a similar point about Darwin's reception in Russia: 'на западе Дарвинова теория—гипотеза, а у нас давно аксиома' [23, 8].

<sup>113</sup> Robert L. Belknap, *The Genesis of The Brothers Karamazov: The Aesthetics, Ideology and Psychology of Making a Text* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 34. His identification of Bernard as a positivist is on p. 140. On p. 146 he labels Bernard a 'materialist'—a designation which contemporary critics such as Strakhov, and modern ones such as Virtanen, would question.

<sup>114</sup> Anne Lounsbery argues: 'perhaps the reason the provinces came to represent a problem in [Russian literature in] the early nineteenth century was that the relationship between capital and province was seen to recapitulate the relationship between Europe and Russia'. In "'No, this is Not the Provinces!'" Provincialism, Authenticity, and Russianness in Gogol's Day', *The Russian Review*, 64.2 (2005), 259-80. Here, p. 266.

his theories to the political, moral, and social sphere, he took umbrage. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the evocation of Bernard calls attention to this fissure, and an assumption that Dostoevsky is attacking Bernard as, for example, a ‘враг всякой метафизики, конечных причин и религиозных понятий’,<sup>115</sup> does not sufficiently account for the fact that Mitya is not his creator’s mouthpiece. In Dostoevsky’s world, no character ever is.

Whereas Mitya fears a scientific worldview that purports to explain psychology in the language of physiology, George Eliot embraces such a worldview in order to account for, and mitigate, the actions of her characters. In chapter 68 of *Middlemarch*, as Bulstrode confronts Raffles, the narrator explains that:

Many of these misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring the end that we fix our mind on and desire. And it is only what we are vividly conscious of that we can vividly imagine to be seen by Omniscience. [MM, 686-87]

Physiological advances in the nineteenth century had made it possible to trace the subtle muscular movements of the biological body, and thinkers such as G. H. Lewes were interested in how these affected the mind. Arguing that physiology and psychology are not two discrete aspects of human life, but the objective and subjective presentations of the same phenomenon (“dual-aspect monism”), Lewes posited in *Problems of Life and Mind* that the locus of the nervous system was not the brain solely, but the mind.<sup>116</sup> The narrator of *Middlemarch* also emphasises the concert in which psychological and physiological processes work, by suggesting that Bulstrode’s physical responses (his muscular movements) work to attain that on

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<sup>115</sup> Reizov, *Iz istorii evropeiskikh literatur*, pp. 148-49

<sup>116</sup> See Menke, ‘Fiction as Vivisection’, pp. 623-24. The eighteenth-century assumption that the brain was the centre of the nervous system, and as such the body’s authoritative, unifying organ was also challenged by Marshall Hall, who suggested that the CNS has two main centres (the brain, which controlled voluntary actions, and the spine, which controlled non-conscious ones). On this, see Peter Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 166-71.

which we fix our mind. However much Eliot was attracted by the theories of determinism—there being ‘no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it’ [*MM*, 838]—her understanding of the complex workings of the *milieu intérieur* force her to retain a belief in individual agency in human activity. Physiology can help to unlock Bulstrode’s motivation, but it cannot explain his misdeeds without recourse to “non-scientific”, ethical categories, such as desire.

George Eliot and Fyodor Dostoevsky were prepared, respectively, to embrace and admit physiological mechanisms that contributed to human behaviour, whilst refusing to reduce human behaviour to physiological mechanisms. In addition, the complex web of relations, as it is woven in their novels, goes some way to explaining the limitations of their characters, and may account for the failure to realise heroic aspiration that I outlined in the previous chapter. It is not accidental that both writers focus on sibling relationships to explore the ways in which biological determinism operates upon, but does not entirely constrain, human endeavour. In this, they likely borrow from Darwin a belief that heredity, whilst governing the development of a species, does not follow fixed laws of reproduction that produce clones of previous generations. It is possible to overcome the Karamazov curse. Rakitin, using the Darwinian language race and selection, is only half right: ‘ты сам Карамазов, ты Карамазов вполне—стало быть, значит же что-нибудь порода и подбор’. Alyosha is a Karamazov, but not *vpolne*. In Eliot’s novels, Maggie and Dorothea cannot escape their family or social environment, but the novelist singles them out as protagonists by insisting that, in Maggie’s case, the Dodson genes have passed her by (‘there isn’t a bit of our family in her’ [*MF*, 215]); Dorothea, meanwhile, inherits her family’s puritanical streak, which is declared to be ‘in abeyance’ in Mr Brooke (and,

of course, in Celia) [*MM*, 8]. Unlike in the animal world, humans have a measure of agency that cannot be explained solely on the basis of their historical or biological circumstances. As the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* puts it when speaking about Philip Wakem: ‘the theory that unusual virtues spring by a direct consequence out of personal disadvantages, as animals get thicker wool in severe climates, is perhaps a little overstrained’ [*MF*, 331].<sup>117</sup> George Eliot employs the scientific concepts of her time, all the while insisting that such concepts cannot entirely account for, even as they contribute to, human behaviour. In her universe, humans both choose and are chosen.<sup>118</sup>

### **Professional and Literary Authority**

The sophisticated scientific conversation that Eliot and Dostoevsky employ in their writings tends to be inaccessible to, or only parodied by, the characters they depict. In general, their provincials, even those educated in the capital, eschew nuance in favour of certainty. It never occurs to their medical men, lawyers, or scientists, to Lydgate, or Rakitin, or Kolya Krasotkin, that their own scientific understanding—sometimes more, sometimes less sound—is in need of qualification. That Eliot and Dostoevsky are quite willing to disabuse their characters of the epistemological certainty provided by the clinical gaze does not necessarily entail a concomitant willingness to divest themselves, or their narrators, of the authority of the “novelist’s gaze” that can authoritatively organise, and pronounce upon, experience. The novelist’s exercise of authority in nineteenth-century fiction has been persuasively

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<sup>117</sup> It seems likely that in this sentence Eliot has Lamarck rather than Darwin in mind. Lamarck claimed that animals acquire characteristics in response to the needs they face in a given environment; Darwin that those animals who, by chance, possessed superior characteristics would better be able to survive, and reproduce, in that environment.

<sup>118</sup> Dorothea, we recall, ‘was chosen by the man whom her admiration had chosen’ [*MM*, 45].

charted by D. A. Miller, whose Foucauldian readings of Dickens, Trollope, and others suggest that ‘there is a radical entanglement between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police’.<sup>119</sup> “Police” for Miller includes a wide variety of disciplinary systems, not necessarily of a uniformed kind. Following Foucault, Miller accepts that discipline in the nineteenth-century was experienced not as despotism, but as a more subtle control, which, though beginning in disciplinary institutions (e.g. the prison) became enacted in other, less demonstrative ones (e.g. the school), and finally in the small details of private life. Discipline tended, towards the end of the eighteenth century, to focus on petty things, lying concealed under inconspicuous, sometimes bland intentions: education, cure, production, defence.<sup>120</sup> For Miller, the realist novel, far from being a subversive genre, conspires with the state to maintain the normative order. The pervasive presence of the police in Dickens, and the ways in which public opinion censures in lieu of law in Trollope, are evidence for this. The prerogative of narrators to ‘reveal the inner life of their characters’<sup>121</sup> (which, for Dorrit Cohn is the singular privilege of a literary author) is part and parcel of this disciplinary project, functioning as a type of surveillance that abets institutional hegemony. Lisa Rodensky is less pessimistic than Miller about the novelist’s privilege of seeing inside minds, arguing that, in exercising this power, novelists do not uniformly bolster the law’s conservatism. In fact, Rodensky is indifferent to the question of whether the novel is a ‘liberalizing force or [...] disciplinary technology’.<sup>122</sup> Rather, she suggests that Eliot is interested in complicating the judgements of the legal system, taking the

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<sup>119</sup> D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. In addition to Miller, Laura Engelstein also offers an excellent summary of Foucault’s position in “‘Combined Underdevelopment’”, especially pp. 338-39. Engelstein helpfully describes the time at which precapitalist society transitioned to capitalism one in which a shift was effected ‘from compulsion to discipline’ (p. 339).

<sup>121</sup> Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 4-6.

<sup>122</sup> Rodensky, *The Crime of the Mind*, p. 11.

novel ‘outside the law’s epistemological boundaries’ by charting the role of motive and intention in criminal acts (and omissions).<sup>123</sup> Hence Eliot is able, for example, to hold Bulstrode responsible for a murder which lies outside the realm of legal redress. For Rodensky, ‘Eliot emphasises the law’s limits in *Middlemarch*’<sup>124</sup>—limits the novelist must address.

Rodensky’s insightful study rests on an assumption that Eliot’s narrators function as a kind of extra-judicial arbiter with the power to reveal the truth behind events and, where necessary, punish those who have escaped the law’s grasp. Her narrators possesses an authority and omniscience to which the law can only aspire. Without denying these insights, I suggest that they do not sufficiently account for the legal strategy employed by Eliot. I posit rather that Eliot penetrates minds not so much to attain objective assessment of guilt, as to advocate on behalf of her characters, even when they are in the wrong. My own interpretation thus falls somewhere in the middle of Rodensky’s and Miller’s. I agree with Miller that George Eliot regrets the way in which the community of Middlemarch (to say nothing of St Ogg’s) convenes to discipline its members, to quash the heroic aspiration of its brightest lights (a lack of charity that Eliot exposed and challenged through her emplotment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan). However, I do not believe that George Eliot herself is complicit in this standardisation, since much of her ink is spilt defending the individual subjectivity of her characters against the hegemony of the “police”. In fact, I suggest that Eliot’s narrators challenge the disciplinary apparatus her communities so comprehensively employ. In setting herself against the petty provincialism of her small towns, Eliot, I believe, conceives of the novel as a ‘liberalizing force’—something which is more important than Rodensky allows.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

Nevertheless, I think that Rodensky is right to argue that it is precisely by getting inside characters' minds that Eliot is able to provide, if not an absolute authoritative gaze, then at least one that is superior to that of lawyers and doctors.

Eliot pits herself against her provincials by staging trials—or even lynchings—which her narrator is forced to mitigate. Whereas her townsfolk are able only to judge by appearances, the narrator's access to characters' mind enables the reader to see below the surface and into the otherwise hidden machinations of motivation. In *The Mill on the Floss*, for example, Eliot describes the process by which Maggie is censured: 'We judge others according to results; how else? — not knowing the process by which results are arrived at' [*MF*, 490]. In part 6, chapter 2 of that novel, the residents of St Ogg's act like a kangaroo court to condemn Maggie, deducing evidence of her malevolence from the consequences that ensued from her elopement with Stephen Guest (what I called in chapter two 'finalising from without'). Society is also able to distinguish between admissible and inadmissible evidence—Stephen's letter of vindication belonging to the latter category [*MF*, 491-92]. In so doing, society performs a punitive task that serves to 'purify St Ogg's from the taint of her presence' [*MF*, 492]. The reader, however, is able to sympathise with Maggie, not only because we have followed her through her torturous journey to Mudfleet, as she huddled pathetically on the Dutch steamer, but because the narrator has also laid bare her mental torment, which betrays a complex motivation that is not easily reduced to outward signs. Judging only by what they can see, the residents of St Ogg's force Maggie to 'suffer from the painful effect of false imputations', and 'will not believe in [her] struggle' [*MF*, 496]. The narrator, by entering into Maggie's mind, does not seek to vindicate her romance with Stephen, but at least attempts to engender a level of empathy that can cushion the censure of the town's legal

strictures. For Miller, Eliot presents the disciplinary function of society with ‘regret’.<sup>125</sup> This is true: but it is equally true to say that she does not let it go unchallenged.

Almost identical in this respect is the trial of Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*. By appending to chapter 85 an epigraph from the trial scene in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Eliot compares the condemnation of the town to a judicial procedure contaminated by the hypocrisy of people like Blindman, who ‘see[s] clearly that this man is a heretic’ [*MM*, 823]. (Bulstrode’s experience at the sanitary committee resonates even more clearly with a judicial procedure as prosecutors speak up against him, entering into evidence letters, medical judgement, and the like [*MM*, 720-30].) As with Maggie, Eliot does not intend the reader to approve of Bulstrode’s activity; if anything, she intellectually agrees with the judgement of the town. However, the ways in which the novel has presented the development of Bulstrode’s consciousness, revealing the subtle gradations of malign intent that are inaccessible to any outward lens, in addition to the pitiable picture she paints of Bulstrode in chapter 85, privately shrinking before the tribunal of his wife’s presence, lead us to conclude, with J. Hillis Miller, that Eliot’s ‘implacable judgement’ is tinged with sympathy.<sup>126</sup> Eliot provides Bulstrode with advocacy, but not acquittal.<sup>127</sup>

Not only does Eliot advocate for her characters against the community. She also uses the novelist’s ability to penetrate minds to defend characters before the

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<sup>125</sup> Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> The point is from J. Hillis Miller’s contribution to the article by Barbara Hardy, J. Hillis Miller, and Richard Poirier, ‘*Middlemarch*: Chapter 85: Three Commentaries’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35.3 (1980), 432-53. Here, p. 442.

<sup>127</sup> Writing on the limits of sympathy in George Eliot’s fiction, Suzy Anger argues that Eliot ‘urges that we try to sympathize even with actions and states of mind that we would not condone’, that ‘Eliot’s narrator urges readers to try to understand what motivates Rosamond’s selfishness, Bulstrode’s hypocrisy, and Casaubon’s egoism and to see that we too might have similar motives and act in similar ways. But we are not asked to approve of Rosamond’s desire for power nor Bulstrode’s [...] bad faith’. In other words, sympathy does not preclude moral judgement. See her *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 112.

reader. This strategy is exemplified when it comes to Casaubon, particularly in chapter 42 of *Middlemarch*. The chapter concerns Casaubon's decision to append a codicil to his will, disinheriting Dorothea in the event that she marries Ladislaw. Two justifications are provided for this action. The first is provided by the narrator, with the strong presence of free indirect speech. The second is in Mr Casaubon's own voice (presented as direct speech, although it is a transcription of his thoughts). A presentation of them side-by-side may aid the comparison:

[Mr Casaubon] was quite sure that Dorothea was the cause of Will's return from Rome, and his determination to settle in the neighbourhood; and he was penetrating enough to imagine that Dorothea had innocently encouraged this course. It was as clear as possible that she was ready to be attached to Will and to be pliant to his suggestions. [...] Dorothea's outpouring of her notions about money, in the darkness of the night, had done nothing but bring a mixture of more odious foreboding into her husband's mind.

And there was the shock lately given to his health always sadly with him. He was certainly much revived; he had recovered all his usual power of work: the illness might have been mere fatigue, and there might still be twenty years of achievement before him, which would justify thirty years of preparation. [...] Since [...] the prevision of his own unending bliss could not nullify the bitter savours of irritated jealousy and vindictiveness, it is the less surprising that the probability of a transient earthly bliss for other persons [...] had not a potently sweetening effect [...] and if one of those persons should be Will Ladislaw, Mr Casaubon objected so strongly that it seemed as if they annoyance would make part of his disembodied existence.

This is a very bare and therefore a

The way in which Mr Casaubon put this case was this:-

'She is ready prey to any man who knows how to play adroitly either on her affectionate ardour or her Quixotic enthusiasm [...] Even if I live I shall not be without uneasiness as to what he may attempt through indirect influence. This man has gained Dorothea's ear, [...] he has evidently tried to impress her mind with the notion that he has claims beyond anything I have done for him. If I die – and he is waiting here on the watch for that – he will persuade her to marry him. That would be a calamity for her and a success for him. [...] He thinks of an easy conquest and of entering into my nest. That I will hinder! Such a marriage would be fatal to Dorothea. Has he ever persisted in anything except from contradiction? In knowledge, he has always tried to be showy at small cost. [...] I utterly distrust his morals, and it is my duty to hinder the utmost fulfilment of his designs.' [MM, 420-21]

very incomplete way of putting the case. [MM, 419-20]

By 'putting the case' in two different voices, Eliot is able to exploit the narrator's ability to understand character's minds *not* for the purposes of establishing epistemological certainty (in terms of the "facts" there is little we learn from one account that we don't from the other), but sympathy, as the narrator presents Casaubon's case with greater persuasiveness—and attractiveness—than he (Casaubon) is able to. The Casaubon of the first passage is the object of sympathy, someone who has built up a prison of interpretation of Dorothea's complicity which he forces himself to inhabit. He is a pitiable creature, silently suffering the outpourings of Dorothea's lamentations 'in the darkness of night'. His life's work is sadly ironised ('twenty years of achievement' and 'thirty years of preparation'), and we know him to be tragically incapable of experiencing anything approximating bliss. He is also right ('penetrating' is the narrator's word) in his estimation that Dorothea has 'innocently encouraged this course'. The narrator's Casaubon is powerless to nullify the 'bitter savours of jealousy and vindictiveness', emotions over which he has little control. By contrast, the Casaubon of the second extract comes across as unhinged and paranoid—which, of course, he is. But the passage is shorn of the sympathetic overtone's of the narrator's voice, as Casaubon whips himself into a frenzy with his desire to hinder Ladislav's supposed designs. He seeks to malign Will as a predator (Dorothea being 'ready prey'), a bringer of calamity, a foreign warrior (making an 'easy conquest'), whose morals he 'utterly' mistrusts.<sup>128</sup>

The narrator ends the first extract with a laconic apology for the incomplete nature of the defence. What emerges from the juxtaposition of the two extracts,

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<sup>128</sup> An interesting counterpoint to Eliot here is Gustave Flaubert, who presents events entirely from Emma's perspective, never giving us access to Charles's mind. Eliot advocates for Casaubon in a way that Flaubert does not for Charles. On this see Farrant, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, p. 124.

however, is that the narrator is better placed than Casaubon to make a persuasive account of his motivation for the codicil. This does not imply that Casaubon's action is good, or right, but it challenges the reader's certainties about the matter by showing Casaubon's perspective in the strongest possible light. Left to his own devices, Casaubon would be able neither to articulate his angst, nor to elicit the reader's sympathy. The narrator's provision of this advocacy is, I suppose, a form of disciplinary control, since it calls into question the extent to which individuals are able, or should be able, to make their own, free intercession. But it is a disciplinary control that, paradoxically, releases characters from the prison of their own moral failings, or at least from the disciplinary consequence those failings should precipitate.

Since Eliot's strategy relies on free indirect speech, it would be inimical to Dostoevsky, in whose novelistic universe (to quote Bakhtin) 'characters must not only be objects of authorial discourse, but subjects of their own directly signifying discourse'.<sup>129</sup> Monologic authors, Bakhtin claims, prohibit the autonomous articulation of a character's ideas, which subjugate all utterances to 'the plane of [the novelist's] own discourse'.<sup>130</sup> By contrast, according to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky creates 'free people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him'.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, Dostoevsky does exhibit a remarkable tendency to renounce the privilege of the monologic author, even when it would serve his own ideological purpose to make use of it. For example, in the Kronenberg case, Dostoevsky refuses to psychologise the abuser, commenting that 'Я ничего не знаю лично о г-не Кронеберге, я не хочу и не могу вторгаться в душу

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<sup>129</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

и сердце его [...] потому что я могу сделать большую несправедливость' [22, 69]. In his novels, Dostoevsky remained consistently true to this procedure, at least according to Bakhtin, renouncing an authoritative epistemological vision of his heroes. Of Devushkin in *Poor Folk*, and Golyadkin in *The Double*, Bakhtin states: 'the author no longer illuminates the hero's reality but the hero's self-consciousness';<sup>132</sup> 'we see not who he is, but *how* he is conscious of himself'.<sup>133</sup>

In his novels, Dostoevsky and his narrators refuse to provide an authoritative account of human subjectivity. In *The Devils* the narrator provides an objective, almost naturalistic description of Kirillov's corpse: 'у окошка с отворенною форточкой, ногами в правый угол комнаты, лежал труп Кириллова. Выстрел был сделан в правый висок, и пуля вышла вверх с левой стороны, пробив череп. Виднелись брызги крови и мозга' [10, 476]. Whereas in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, descriptions of illness tended to be affixed to characters in a way that somehow correlated with their personality (Mme de Merteuil's smallpox being a fitting adornment of her characteristic nastiness in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for example),<sup>134</sup> Dostoevsky's mention of Kirillov's splattered brains offers no insights—or at least only misleading ones—into his character. It would be difficult to surmise from the naturalistic setting of Kirillov's suicide that he was a man who loved to play with children or had a heroic (if misguided) vision of freeing humanity from the shadow of fear. That we do know this is testament not to the narrator's ability to get inside his mind, but from Kirillov's own willingness to demonstrate these beliefs in behaviour or articulate them in dialogue.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's insistence on his characters' right

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> On this, see Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, p. 5. Peter Logan calls the late Georgian period 'the age of physiological psychology', so strong are the correspondences between social values and bodily health (or disease). See his *Nerves and Narratives*, pp. 2-7.

to speak for themselves is important for our ability to understand Mitya's personality, since his narrator in that novel is quite content to mislead the reader as to Mitya's complicity in the murder of old Fyodor.<sup>135</sup> In addition, since the legal procedure that condemns Mitya to exile does not afford him an adequate opportunity to testify in his own defence at the trial, Dostoevsky's polyphonic design allows Mitya to address the reader directly, in his own voice, revealing the broadness of his character, and enabling the reader to see beyond the surface of the empirical evidence that is presented at the trial. This seeing-beyond-the-surface is not achieved, as it is in Eliot, by the narrator getting inside Mitya's mind, but rather by Mitya's exposure of his own mind to the reader.

There is, however, an important qualification to make here. In my view, Bakhtin somewhat exaggerates the extent to which Dostoevsky's characters function as autonomous subjects. Certainly, the powerful case made against the injustice of God's world, followed by the magisterial "Grand Inquisitor", seem to carry the inflections of an artist at the height of his literary career, rather than those of an *ad hoc* composition by a twenty-three year old student of the natural sciences. In his letter to Lyubimov, Dostoevsky wrote:

это ведь *не я говорю* густыми красками, преувеличениями и гиперболами (хотя против действительности нет преувеличений), а лицо моего романа Иван Карамазов. Это *его* язык, *его* слог, *его* пафос, *а не мой*. Это мрачно-раздраженный и много молчавший человек. Ни за что бы он никогда и не заговорил, если бы не случайная, вдруг разгоревшаяся его симпатия к брату Алексею. Кроме того, это еще очень молодой человек. Как же он мог бы заговорить, о чем так долго молчал и на чем надсадил сердце, не прорвавшись, без *особ<енного>* увлечения, без пены у рта. Но я именно и хотел, чтобы выдалось лицо и чтобы читатель заметил именно эту страстность, этот наскок, этот литературный обрывистый подход [30.2, 45].

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<sup>135</sup> Susan Amert attributes this to the narrator's 'anti-Romantic bias' in her 'The Reader's Responsibility in *The Brothers Karamazov*: Ophelia, Chermashnya and the Palpable Obscure', in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature*, pp. 105-18. Here, p. 108.

Such a passage could have almost been written by Bakhtin, so clearly does it align with his ideas about the independence of heroic voices in the polyphonic novel. But before we take Dostoevsky at his word that the poem is in Ivan's idiom, and not that supplied by a semantically more capable author, let us pay closer attention to what Dostoevsky says in the final sentence.<sup>136</sup> Dostoevsky says he wanted "the reader" to notice Ivan's passion and his literary, impressive behaviour. The poem, insofar as Ivan composed it, is not destined for a reader at all, but for a listener. Ivan doesn't *have* a reader: he only has Alyosha. Moreover, he is a journalist, not a poet. As P. E. Fokin notes, it is noteworthy that Dostoevsky 'заставил своего героя сочинить именно «поэму», а не трактат, публицистическую книгу или статью'.<sup>137</sup> And finally, Dostoevsky reveals that he wanted Ivan's character, and his passion, to "stand out" in the Grand Inquisitor. But there is no suggestion in the text that Ivan wants to stand out to Alyosha: he is far too absorbed in a genuine emotional-ideological conflict to hope that his poem will attain to national literary significance. He speaks to Alyosha, as Dostoevsky correctly identified, out of a particular transport of feeling, not out of a desire to be impressive. Moreover, Dostoevsky implicitly acknowledges the difference between Ivan's "normal" voice, and his voice in the Grand Inquisitor: for Ivan to stand out, he must be doing something *different* with his voice when compared to his usual utterances. There is something different, and specifically something more literary (*literaturnyi*), about the Grand Inquisitor than compared to the rest of Ivan's speech.

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<sup>136</sup> We also note that Dostoevsky was mounting a pre-emptive defence against the publishing establishment which he had every reason to believe would censor the poem (and "Rebellion") due to their provocative content. This hurdle would be much easier to navigate if the writer could disavow all the ideas, and make Ivan shoulder them himself. On his battle with his editors concerning "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor", see Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 426-42.

<sup>137</sup> P. E. Fokin, 'Poema Ivana Karamazova "Velikii Inkvizitor" v ideinoi strukture romana F. M. Dostoevskogo "Brat'ia Karamazovy"', in *Roman F. M. Dostoevskogo "Brat'ia Karamazovy": Sovremennoe sostoianie izucheniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), pp. 115-36. Here, p. 116.

In having Ivan articulate a vision of anti-theism in Book 5 that dwarfs the rebuttals of Book 6 (and possibly the novel as a whole), Dostoevsky is able to do for Ivan what George Eliot was able to do for Casaubon: to make his case better than he could make it himself. In a sense, this clearly compromises the theory of polyphony. But just as I suggested that George Eliot's advocacy was a form of disciplinary control that acted in the best interests of her characters, so Dostoevsky's perfection of Ivan's discourse augments, rather than stifles, his voice. Dostoevsky—himself hounded by state surveillance and quite unwilling to be cast as a 'partisan of the police state'<sup>138</sup>—had no desire to control his characters with the disciplinary apparatus of tsarism, even in its more diffuse, Foucauldian expressions.

## Conclusion

For Eliot and Dostoevsky's great contemporary, Leo Tolstoy, medicine and science were essentially bourgeois enterprises that did little to answer the Russian people's most urgent question: how shall we live?<sup>139</sup> Eliot and Dostoevsky too point to the ways in which medical and legal practitioners fail to ameliorate the lives of those they purportedly serve. Their criticism falls heaviest on the epistemological certainty to which these professions lay claim, and they explore the ways in which the provincial milieu, with its interrelations and complexities, its alliances and rivalries, call into question the apparently omniscient gaze of the anatomist and lawyer. But rather than taking upon themselves, and fulfilling more competently, the function of anatomist and lawyer—that is, rather than providing a more acute form of pathological anatomy,

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<sup>138</sup> Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, p. 60.

<sup>139</sup> On Tolstoy's approach to medicine and science, see Hugh McLean, 'Claws on the Behind: Tolstoy and Darwin', *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 19 (2007), 15-32.

or pronouncing authoritatively on the behaviour of their characters—Dostoevsky and Eliot go beyond the professional discourse they dramatise through their characters. By emphasising the need for perspective, imagination, and feeling, by stressing the dynamic effects of time, as well as by perfecting the voices of their characters to make them more sympathetic (but not necessarily more “right”), these urban authors successfully perfect the provincial practice of law and medicine in the nineteenth century.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to provide a sustained analysis of Dostoevsky and Eliot's treatment of provincialism, arguing that provincial settings in their works constitute sociological spaces in which their common concerns crystallise into ethical instruction for their readers. There are, of course, other points of comparison between Dostoevsky and Eliot apart from the provincial—and, it might be said, the provinces enable Eliot and Dostoevsky to accent rather than exhaust their preoccupations. An expanded version of this thesis would encompass their treatment of the city, a space that also fascinated both writers, and which formed the setting for major works. In light of the arguments presented here, it would be relevant to track whether the ambivalence I identify in their treatment of provincial discourse is sustained, or sharpened, in the metropolis in which such discourse originates. Other mutual historico-poetic interests cluster around Jewish themes, the idea of the nation state, and modern systems of communication (the railways, the print media, and so on). Studies of Dostoevsky and Eliot's treatment of such issues—along with more strictly poetic ones, such as the role of the narrator—would no doubt provide a welcome contribution to scholarly literature on these authors, on the novel, and on Anglo-Russian literary relations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Alternatively, it would be productive to triangulate a study of these authors with contemporaries who set their works in the unglamorous world of the provinces. The potential subjects of such a study are essentially innumerable, and several have been hinted at throughout this thesis (obvious candidates would include Austen, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Flaubert).

But in this thesis, my project has been to delineate a specific set of affinities that Dostoevsky and Eliot shared as masters of the realist novel. For them it proved a

genre in which narrative and social history, art and phenomenal reality, could co-exist. The communities they depict are at once paradigmatic and real, as the writers both draw from and transcend the conventions, norms, and institutions of a provincial milieu which they hoped, through their writing, to instruct. For all the dissimilarities in their experimentation with the genre, it was their belief in the novel's pedagogic function that ultimately united them despite (to return to Lounsbury's formulation in the epigraph to my Introduction) the differences in their countries' respective political systems, class structures, economies, geographies, and ideologies. Indeed, it united them in spite of their own political, religious, social, philosophical, and ethical polarities. With the birth of modernism in both countries, this faith in the novel's instructive potential would be patronised as naïve—a charge that, despite (or because of) the didactic novel's somewhat questionable rehabilitation in traditions such as Socialist Realism, the genre has yet to live down.

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