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Moments of Realization:
Meditations in the Reality of Fiction

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

Jonathan Rey Lee

June 2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Moments of Realization:
Meditations in the Reality of Fiction

by

Jonathan Rey Lee

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, June 2013

Dr. Joseph Childers, Co-Chairperson

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This project explores the intersection between nineteenth-century British and Russian realist novels and philosophical accounts of how we realize the world through perception and cognition. Using an interdisciplinary methodology that combines Wittgensteinian philosophy with comparative reading practices, I argue that fiction is real insofar as it acts as a performative space that refracts the world through a purpose-driven interpretive and affective framework that allows readers to realize internal change. Treating readings as ‘moments of realization,’ which participate in, reflect upon, and transform lived realities, I advocate reading practices that deploy critical self-reflection to promote ethical self-development.

The first chapter argues that realism’s seemingly objective descriptive style is significant not for the accuracy of its mimetic picture, but rather for organizing the world into an intersocially available space conceived in Kantian terms. Moving from an objective to

subjective perspective, the second chapter explores the basis of psychological realism as a self-directed means for articulating one's position within society to oneself. The third chapter connects these outward and inward gazes to the development of becoming subjects who realize internal change in response to fiction. Finally, the fourth chapter raises ethical questions that arise as a result of this becoming-oriented approach. Woven through these reflections are extended dialogues with the historical and literary contexts of the realist movement designed to promote interdisciplinary discussion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Except when indicated by the context, when citing multiple works from the same author, the in-text citation contains an italicized abbreviation of that work's title (as follows). For works which use other systems of numbering instead of or in addition to page numbers, I have used that numbering.

Bakhtin

PDP *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*
DI *The Dialogic Imagination*

Iser

TRP "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach"
ROF "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature"

Kant

CPR *The Critique of Pure Reason*
CPJ *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*

Wittgenstein

CV *Culture and Value*
LC *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*
OC *On Certainty*
PI *Philosophical Investigations*
RF *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*
RFM *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*
RPP1 *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology vol. 1*
BB *The Blue and Brown Books*
TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Opening Remarks

A confession has to be a part of your new life.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein (*CV* 18)

Perhaps “it is so difficult to find the beginning”¹ because our first words are always borrowed. “Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning,” to dive into ongoing processes of experience and articulation—the complex dance we call life—that both precede us and proceed without us. We are rightly wary of stepping into such an inexorable flow of words and ideas because we always risk being carried away by their force, no matter how hard we struggle to begin at the beginning “And not try to go further back.” We are always already underway. The difficulty is initiating an undertaking that begets new life, rather than an undertaking that merely embalms the past/passed. To make a beginning is to act with purpose, to actively respond to the whirl of ongoing activities that surround and constitute a life. The purpose of this textual endeavor, which does and does not begin here, is meditative: I strive towards moments of realization, philosophical reflections that arise from active participation in fictional experience. Like many others, my life is surrounded and penetrated with a web of texts and fictions without which I would not quite be myself. This project is about the reality of fiction, the potential of essentially unreal stories to have a real impact on real lives. I call this potential *realization*, indicating both the sudden understanding of our relation to the

¹ The three quotes integrated into this opening are consecutive sentences from a passage in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* (*OC* §471).

world and the immanent possibility of realizing change in ourselves through such understanding. These meditations therefore explore how to *do* things with words,² precisely because we already do things with words, and they already do things to/for us. Beginning in a reality full of fictions, these meditations explore how we actively and performatively realize fictions in two related ways: firstly making the static words that constitute a material text come alive as a lived fictional experience and secondly using our always already inadequate articulations of fictional experience as a philosophical moment that transforms the aforementioned engagement with text. As beginnings, these meditations will always be fragmentary, arbitrary, and incomplete. I can do no more than attempt to make a way into fiction, or rather to reflect upon the ways we already take to fiction.

I do not, in general, subscribe to a correspondence or mimetic theory of the reality of fiction, one that states that fiction is real insofar as it accurately describes what is real. Although this ideal of mimesis does underlie much of realist literature, I consider it as enhancing rather than anchoring the reality of fiction. Instead, I consider the reality of fiction to be experiential, a performative process of realizing fiction by incorporating the experience of entering into and interacting with stories into our lives. This is something we all do. Engaging in a story necessarily entails connecting the fictional narrative to a host of ideas, feelings, and significances that permeate our everyday lives. At the same

² Cf. J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*, in which he establishes and explores the philosophical conception of performativity, that words can do as well as say. Austin's views form a foundation that underlies this text, but I take performativity in a different direction. Whereas Austin focused primarily on linguistic utterances, moments in which saying something is better understood as an intersocial action than an expression of descriptive meaning, I focus on the aesthetic and philosophical performativity of fiction, moments in which the experience of immersing oneself in a fictional work becomes a transformative encounter.

time, the kind of critical self-reflection I advocate—a delving into the intuitive engagements we already have with literature in order to challenge and reorient our responses—requires some degree of effort and intention. The purpose of these meditations, these dwellings in the performative contexts of literature and philosophy, is to explore the difficulties and possibilities of responding to the reality of fiction as readers. This project will struggle to articulate our intuitive engagements with fiction as performative spaces of self-development through the use of self-reflective philosophical methodologies, in the hopes that the process of complicating what we say about literature will enhance our ability to do things with literature. At the heart of this project is an article of faith—that anyone *can* become better through a performative, philosophical engagement with fictional reality—and one of skepticism—that this becoming is neither natural nor automatic for either text or reader. As with performativity generally, we must be wary of the guises we take on, the parts we play. These meditations are designed to defamiliarize the comfortable space of realist literature, so that we can revolutionize our intuitive encounters in the lived reality of fiction and thereby revolutionize ourselves.³

I therefore borrow this Wittgensteinian beginning to express the common ground which precedes my beginning: “We talk and act. That is already presupposed in everything that I am saying” (*RFM* 6.17). Despite the seeming triviality this presupposition, the point is essential—anything as complex as textual analysis necessarily involves the totality of our experience, beliefs, and language. Furthermore,

³ Rather than argue for any particular political or social activism, I advocate a philosophical transformation in line with the ethics of Wittgenstein, who writes: “The man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself” (*CV* 45).

the significance of text can never be too far removed from the intuitive, ordinary, lived experiences of talking and acting. When Wittgenstein writes that “Our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings” (*OC* §229), he further suggests that experience itself underwrites and transcends any ability to articulate it. For Wittgenstein, even the most abstract, internally-consistent language we have—mathematics—has its foundation in how the regularities of our experience enable us to act purposively. We could not, that is, have a sensible language of mathematics if our relation to external objects was not conducive to counting, combining, distributing, etc. Likewise, this project is about articulation, about how our profoundly intuitive experience of reading can be discussed, analyzed, and named. Yet, although experience is necessarily prior to articulation, experience presents itself to us as sensible (making sense), through always already active processes of interpretation that couch experience in linguistic (conceptual) terms.⁴ That is, while “Our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings,” the rest of our proceedings also get their meaning through our talk. Our practices of articulation, definition, and categorization structure the significance (via the signification) of what we do. Thus, while this project attempts to articulate the intuitive experience of reading and will hopefully say no more than we already know, it does so fully aware that capturing the essential or universal nature of realization is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, this project pursues articulation because it recognizes that the significance of fictional experience is necessarily intertwined with how we perceive that significance and articulate it to ourselves and others. If our reading experiences matter to us, and I suggest

⁴ This Kantian notion is propounded primarily in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

that they do and should, then we ought seek articulations that enhance our reading experiences while warily avoiding the implicit misrepresentations present in all attempts to articulate experience, which is always broader than language alone.

Rather than define or argue for the reality of fiction as any particular theoretical construct, therefore, I begin first with the presupposition that we experience fiction in real ways. Our experiences in fictional world dialogues with our experiences in the so-called 'real' world, and the parallels and contrasts between these worlds are laden with significance. Thus, this project focuses on the process of realization, the dialogic and comparative experience of mediating between fictional and lived realities as a transformative intervention into the system of significations and significances that tie the ever-changing self to the ever-changing world. As a capacity and practice, this broad notion of realization is immanent in a great deal of human experience, not only fiction. When one describes anything at all (from personal feelings to mathematics), perceives the world as a collection of distinctively interact-able objects, or imagines alternate pasts and futures, one engages in a general form of realization, weaving fiction and reality together in a transformative understanding that shapes one's agency. This notion, however, is too broad and variable to be adequately condensed into a single study. In this project, therefore, I shall focus my meditations on the interplay between literary fictions and lived experience that reveals and refines the reader's words, thoughts, and actions as expressed in the ethical and agential unfolding of everyday life.

This project, therefore, presumes a great deal about the possibility of fiction to play a significant role in people's lives. Yet, fiction will certainly have a somewhat

different role in each reader's life. In talking about the reality of fiction, I speak neither to a single objective truth nor the infinite plurality of subjective experiences. Fiction, I believe, lies somewhere in between, facilitating experiences that are at once deeply personal and shared. Like culture, language, or the environment itself, fiction provides a common site of interaction. Within this space of sharing, this work is but a single move. I consider this introduction a 'confession' and the main work a series of 'meditations' because I begin always in the experience of fiction as I know it—from my own life. I do not claim that the way of engaging fiction outlined in this project is either the only or the best way. In fact, I would consider fiction somewhat impoverished if a single scholar in a single text could capture its single essence. On the other hand, I do claim that the way into fiction I propose is both viable and valuable, not necessarily relative to alternative ways, but in its own right. Because fiction connects the personal to the common, I believe the reality of fiction is found in its direct connection to the very condition of agency. Experiencing fiction is a form of living, in particular a form of living that reflects upon other forms of living. To read is to exercise the form of agency itself and it therefore reveals, interrogates, and sometimes transforms how we relate to the world at large. This potential is at once philosophical—in that fiction provides an ethical reflective space for questioning an agent's relation to the world—and not—in that whereas philosophy typically assumes a critical distance, fiction relies heavily on affective immersion. Here again, fiction lies between the personal and the shared, facilitating deeply individual affective responses and simultaneously contextualizing them within its shared representational project.

While this sounds very pleasant and egalitarian, unfortunately the space of literature is not in fact equally shared. Access to literature, literacy, and even the free time to engage in literary endeavors are sadly not to be taken for granted. I consider myself incredibly blessed both to have had a life saturated with literature and the opportunity to produce this project, activities which required a great deal of time, money, education, and support. While this project is not able to directly address the fundamental social inequalities this raises, I hope that if we find anything valuable in this pursuit, we will be driven to promote much more universal access to literature. Moreover, even within literature, it may be the case that readers of different cultures, genders, or classes are marginalized by the construction of the text. Literature, which produces commonality always with reference to shared experiences in the world, always risks replicating the fundamental inequalities that structure the world outside the fiction. This is, alas, a peril of modern scholarship, which I can find no way around save the small honesty of pointing it out. I firmly believe that literature *can* be a powerful tool for challenging these basic inequalities, firstly by transforming one's personal relations to others and secondly by pointing out what areas of society need intervention. At the same time, literature is too much of the world to be devoid of the problems in the world. In the end we are, for better or worse, in the world and can do nothing but our best. Literature itself is neither ethical nor unethical, but it can be a site of striving and that is sufficient reason to give it very serious attention.

The majority of this project consists of four moments of realization, meditations in and on the realizing experience of fiction. In "Describing Reality: Generic Space and

Time in *Sketches by Boz*,” I begin the analysis of realization by looking at how realism presents the ‘real world’ through description. Challenging the notion that language merely presents a mimetic image of an existing world, I show how the seemingly objective descriptions paint a world in *generic* space and time that, like Kant’s notion of space and time, organizes the world for the purposes of intersocial action. Turning from the objective to the subjective aspects of realism, “A Matter of Mind: Dostoevsky’s Psychological Realism” challenges the assumption that subjective experience is autonomous or hermetically sealed. In showing how Raskolnikov and the Underground Man’s antisocial tendencies and private musings are always in response to society, I argue that the discourses of psychology and psychological realism that influence literary understanding are fundamentally based on an intersocial basis for activity (Wittgenstein’s language games are within a form of life). After problematizing the subjective/objective dialectic in the first two chapters, the third chapter, “The ‘I’ of Bildung: Narrating the Self in *Jane Eyre*,” seeks synthesis through the notions of bildung and becoming. This chapter uses a Spinozist framework to show how Jane’s self-narration participates in the development it describes. In the end, I conclude that the solipsism of first person becoming is offset by the encounter with otherness implicit in immersive literary experience. This last body chapter, “Performative Ethics: The Reader-as-Narrator in *A Hero of Our Time*,” asks ethical questions about realization pertaining to the argument that realist fiction participates in becoming. Arguing against a moralist interpretation of realism, I show how the reader’s role in self-directed becoming reveals literature’s performativity. In Lermontov’s novel, ethical questions are centralized through a series

of interpretive viewpoints which are closer to readings than tellings. In short, the novel teaches the reader how to read ethically, but does not present a reading itself. This is, I argue, how realist literature works.

Holding together these parallel and overlapping meditations are five scholia, critical commentaries which provide contextual analyses that anchor the meditative discursions in the historical, cultural, and discursive factors which structure and enable the reading experience. These abbreviated analyses are intended to provide background and structure for the main body of this project and should not be taken as comprehensive or definitive investigations into their respective topics. In them, I turn to *Anna Karenina* to develop these notions of realism, never as a final arbiter of realism, but as a rich comparative text which engages and expresses many aspects of the literary performativity. The first scholium addresses several historical and cultural factors implicit in the rise of the British realist novel. The second investigates the ‘realist gaze,’ the conventional interpretive lens typical of nineteenth-century realism. The third looks at reader-response criticism to outline the role of the reader in the production of literary meaning. The fourth explores how realist literature is fundamentally contrastive in how it encourages performative synthesis of explicit and implied distinctions and dialogues. Finally, the fifth scholium examines the connection between everyday language and ordinary life, both of which are constitutive of the realist emphasis. Furthermore, this Wittgensteinian theme is a point of connection between the literature and philosophy of this project—both use ordinary language to initiate self-reflection within everyday life.

The juxtaposition of the meditations, which combine the lived activity and experience of the reader with the significances present in literary texts, and scholia, which explore the real historical, social, and discursive conditions within which realist literature has been produced, is designed to draw out the intersection between the act of realization and the characteristics of *realism*, a set of literary conventions particularly evident in nineteenth-century Western⁵ novels. Realization and realism are of course not identical, as the former is a practice, an approach to making texts real, and the latter is a collection of formal, thematic, and purposive attributes used to characterize texts. However, realization is not an austere, primitive human capacity disconnected from its expression in our activities. How I understand and practice realization is intimately connected with how I understand and respond to texts designed to elicit it. So, while realization transcends the conventions of realism, it also responds to and articulates itself in the language of realism. By tracing some of the history, conventions, and concerns of realism, I hope to draw out some of the situated significances within which realization becomes an important practice. Both this work as a whole and this introduction in particular consist in a series of beginnings, not because the practice of realization has one or several origins, but because realization has many ongoing influences, forms, and strategies. To uncover and unleash the possibilities of realization—what we can do by

⁵ It is certainly not the case the realism and realization only apply to Western literature. Nor is it the case that Western literature arose without any intersections with world culture and literature. In focusing on one particular tradition, I do not suggest that this tradition is primary or superior. However, since a major purpose of this text is to promote philosophical reflection from within my own situatedness, I emphasize the literatures most formative for the discourse of realism that dominates the American academy. My particular strategy here is to use philosophical methodologies to deconstruct these discourses from within, a particularly Wittgensteinian textual strategy, but it is equally important to simultaneously deconstruct these discourses from without, through comparisons with differing yet similar traditions.

reading—requires attending to the contexts in which we read, the linguistic, cultural, and textual environments that shape how we (can) experience fiction.

Scholium I

The Rise of Realism

In a certain sense, literature is ahistorical. After all, we can experience stories from dramatically different contexts as absolutely and profoundly relevant. Moreover, we often feel a strong sense of connectedness or kinship with fictional characters or imagined readers from cultural and historical positions very different from our own. Yet, the linguistic and cultural codes within which we realize literature are essentially historical. Realism, conceived either as a literary period or as a set of literary conventions and interests, is about and of history. The history of realism is also the history of art, language, and culture, that is, the history of humankind. Moreover, the stakes of realism—how we represent the world—are centrally relevant to the telling of history itself, meaning that attempting to provide the origins of realism necessarily raises the questions of realism. Realization, on the other hand, is an individual, active process that is not itself the stuff of history. However, this process necessarily responds to the social and linguistic conditions that *are* the stuff of history. More precisely, realization focalizes history in the operative contexts and performative possibilities of individual readers responding to individual literary texts.

The notion that the internal activity of realization requires historically-situated and socially operative systems of signification beyond the individual's control is shared

by Wittgenstein, who argues against the possibility of a private language on exactly these grounds, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who writes:

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*⁶ (276-7)

This sense of history, as the continually changing social, cultural, and ideological conditions into which and with respect to all individuals come to understanding, underwrites our very capacity for realization. We can realize literature only as an extension—albeit an inextricably connected one—of our holistic relations to the world, which are always developed from within particular historical circumstances. Gadamer characterizes the experience of understanding as a ‘fusion of horizons’ in which the (historical) standpoints of text and reader combine, blend, and interact in complex generative ways. As he writes, “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*” (306). Furthermore, he characterizes this productive interaction between individual and history as present in the word—especially the literary word—itself, writing that “*the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*” (378). While I consider Gadamer’s ethical imperative to read according to the ‘hermeneutic method’ to be merely one valid approach among many, describing fiction as an achievement of language aptly characterizes how literature is inextricable from cultural, historical, and discursive forces

⁶ Throughout this text, emphases in quoted passages are present in the original.

that organize and influence lived reality itself. Thus, while my method of philosophizing realization draws much more from Wittgenstein than Gadamer, recognizing the context-dependency of the philosophical and literary moment entails recognizing that understanding literature requires engagement with these historical forces. As we shall see, the notion of fusion is important for literary experience, because the drawing together of self and other is crucial to the development of the reading subject within the self-other relations that structure both literary and real-world experience. For now, however, I shall focus on the horizons, the historically-situated perspectives within which realization occurs. Since both realism and realization are dependent upon and intertwined with history, I shall turn to literary history to broadly contextualize the horizons particularly relevant to the following meditations. Focusing on the developments that influenced the rise of the British novel⁷ that led up to the nineteenth-century realism, I shall briefly sketch some of the economic, religious, and social factors that encouraged realist depictions of ordinary individuals.

Confronted with the impossibility of tracing a history of realism or realization from any single origin, one must arbitrarily begin by constructing a narrative that exposes

⁷ While I am focusing on Britain, the realist tradition in France is perhaps more formally coherent. A brief summary of the historical factors involved in this tradition, which closely parallels the factors in the British tradition, is presented by Margaret Cohen, who writes: "The heyday of realism in France was a state-of-the-art visual and textual practice and the site of polemical debate during the half century that saw the explosion of industrial production and the industrial metropolis; the institutionalization of the bourgeois nation-state; the displacement of aristocratic class power and the creation of the proletariat; the invention of technologies of the spectacle, mechanical reproduction, notably photography, and mass media, notably the mass press; the height of France's imperial project; the consolidation of modern experimental science; the creation of the first modern socialisms as well as the first modern feminist movements; and a period characterized by the preeminence of gender as a system of differentiation central to hegemonic political and social organization and hence to this organization's contestation as well" (x).

itself as a presently situated stance towards an indefinable past.⁸ I begin relatively late in the history of literature with the development of the Western novel form described in Ian Watt's seminal treatise *The Rise of the Novel*. Although Watt notes that literary historians see realism "as the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction" (10), he also notes that term itself is somewhat retrospective, as it did not stand for an artistic movement until the following century:⁹

The main critical associations of the term 'realism' are with the French school of Realists. 'Réalisme' was apparently first used as an aesthetic description in 1835 to denote the 'vérité humaine' of Rembrandt as opposed to the 'idéalité poétique' of neo-classical painting;¹⁰ it was later consecrated as a specifically literary term by the foundation in 1856 of *Réalisme*, a journal edited by Duranty. (10)

From this, it is already clear that any attempt to pinpoint the 'true' beginning of this movement is to arbitrarily emphasize a stage in a complicated process of development.¹¹ Yet, Watt provides compelling reasons for beginning here, arguing that a number of social changes in how people related to the world expressed themselves in the development of a new form of artistic representation. Even though there is no absolute

⁸ The impossibility of reconstructing the origin is a major tenet of post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault. It is also revealed as impossible by the historicist stance of thinkers like Gadamer, who writes that "Reconstructing the original circumstances, like all restoration, is a futile undertaking in view of the historicity of our being. What is reconstructed, a life brought back from the lost past, is not the original. In its continuance in an estranged state it acquires only a derivative, cultural existence" (167).

⁹ Yet, realism continues to develop and its current form imposes retroactive continuity on a past that would not have articulated it as we do, as Christopher Prendergast argues, writing: "if the nineteenth century is the age of the flowering of realism as a set of literary and pictorial practices, it is not the age of its sophisticated conceptual articulation (famously, the nineteenth century, whether in terms of defense or attack, theorized the idea of realism in exceptionally naive terms). As developed concept, "realism" belongs rather to the twentieth century, in the form of the abiding, even obsessive, returns we have noted" (Cohen 2).

¹⁰ I shall discuss realist art very briefly in Chapter 1, but despite many important parallels between realist art and literature, this project will almost entirely restrict itself to literary realization.

¹¹ In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach convincingly traces realism through over two millennia of history. Although the whole of this history informs this project, restricting the scope of the analysis is unfortunately necessary.

moment of breakage that inaugurates a completely new era, he does demonstrate how an increased valuation and attention to individualism was present both in societal values and their expression in art.

In essence, Watt describes the rise of the novel as participating in a historical rise in attention paid to the individual. According to Watt, the novel arises because it is ideally suited to depicting the inner life and outer relations of individuals. This is present in the narrative form of the novel, whose causal, linear temporality reflects the progression of an individual over time:

The novel's plot is also distinguished from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences, and this tends to give the novel a much more cohesive structure. Even more important, perhaps, is the effect upon characterization of the novel's insistence on the time process. (22)

The novel, according to this view, is realistic not merely in description, but also in form. Novels embrace the narrative temporality that describes the unfolding life of individuals. We describe ourselves and others in terms of stories that rely heavily on the causal temporal narratives characteristic of novelistic prose. The question of whether narratives—whether fictional or not—are *real* depends heavily on one's purposes and definitions, as our notions of reality themselves have a history, as do each and every practice of representing such realities. Reality is tied to social and cultural practices, influencing and being influenced by purposive actions. Yet, however real narratives are, it is clear that they play an enormous role in both characterizing and performing everyday life in a way that particularly emphasizes the individuals who navigate these lives. How and why the artistic gaze is directed towards the individual is a complex subject, tied to

the totality of relations, purposes, and contexts from which history is woven. As one might imagine, painting such a history can only be done in very broad strokes. The strokes will be especially broad here because this project is less about the history of realism than the practice of realization. Roughly, I shall look at three major factors in the rise of individualism: firstly, a growth of industrial capitalism that placed increased significance upon the striving of the self-motivated individual as the backbone of the modern economy; secondly, a Protestant ethic¹² that featured a moral code and system of individual virtues; and thirdly, domestic relations that synthesize the masculinized realm of capital with the feminized realm of social virtue.

It is no accident that the rise of individualism paralleled the rise of industrial capitalism, for capitalism is fundamentally individualist. In particular, capitalism relies on the assumption that a proper (productive, profitable, ethical¹³) economy is regulated by the interactions between self-interested individuals. Pure capitalism proposes that supply and demand, production and consumption, and the division of labor will naturally achieve optimal equilibrium, that is, through the relatively unregulated behaviors of individuals brought together in an economy at once competitive and collaborative.

Capitalism is not only intrinsically individualist, it is heavily symbolic. The monetary

¹² This term is from Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

¹³ The ethics of capitalism have been critiqued for as long as capitalism has existed—both before and after Marx's revolutionary interpretation of the economy. These critiques, however, do not demonstrate that capitalism has *no* ethics, but rather that its ethics is intrinsically inequitable. Capitalist ethics does have a notion of fairness, namely, the equality of opportunity, but it absolutely relies on the fact that unequal relations will develop out of the competitive relations in which everyone can participate equally. Of course, a secondary critique of capitalism is that it fails its own ethics, in that the passing on of actual and cultural capital to individuals who have not earned them creates an uneven playing field from the start. Whereas these critiques—both theoretical and pragmatic—of capitalist ethics have a great deal of validity, in looking historically at the rise of individualism, we must recognize that for better or worse our culture is the direct inheritor of an ethical system implicit in capitalist economy.

system itself is a signifying system, in which valueless paper (or even virtual information) accrues real power, as Jeff Nunokawa succinctly states: “Capital is a sign, not a substance” (47). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that history of literature both reveals and participates in the rise of capitalist individualism. Whereas realist literature always struggles with the essential difference between the medium and message in the case of physical reality (text vs. object), in representing the symbolic system of capitalism medium and message are thoroughly intertwined (text and symbol). Furthermore, not only is capitalism fundamentally textual, texts themselves are commodities. As industrialization transformed economic relationships around the world, at the centers of industrial economy and imperialism art and literature were increasingly commodified and brought into the sphere of mass production.¹⁴ Nunokawa writes, “If the work of fiction is a reflection, evasion, or imaginary resolution of a discrete economy, it is also an economic form itself” (14-5).

As a literary form particularly concerned with the social and material reality of the world, realism is particularly suited to represent the heart of capitalist society—the circulation of commodities, wealth, and influence with all its public and private consequences. This creates an ambivalent space in which the realist novel opens up the very capitalist relations it depends upon. The realist gaze reveals both the successes and failures of capitalism, bringing its ideological structure to the surface and revealing that the reality of capitalism is in fact the reality of a fiction. This sense of ambivalence is characteristic of the methodology of realization, or working from within existing and

¹⁴ Cf. Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

ordinary conditions. Andrew Miller nicely describes this paradox by showing the dual valence of representing (an objectifying move) the very position one occupies:

Adopting a moral stance against the commodification of the world, novelists simultaneously understood that literary work itself was increasingly commodified; they were, as a result, required to negotiate between their moral condemnation and their implication in what they opposed (7).

In this tension, which is both ethically and economically charged, we find the tension of the modern individual, who is at once individual and social, public and private. The capitalist ethic proposes, somewhat counterintuitively, that pursuing one's individual good is precisely how one contributes to the social good. The individualism which permeates the ideologies of capitalism and realism alike thus privileges the effort and freedom of the individual while simultaneously employing pervasive institutions of social control to direct how individuals exert their lauded freedom. Thus, although the reader has the agency of interpretation and the consumer the agency of choice, both are interpellated¹⁵ into a network of social norms that always influence this agency. Echoing the sentiments of the ideological turn in literary and historical criticism, Miller thus describes how the taxonomies through which the world is conceptualized influence individual relations, writing "The ordering of objects, the rationalized classification of the extraordinary material wealth of the nation, its colonies, and the world's countries, simultaneously ordered the viewers who perceived them" (83). In essence, no matter how thoroughly individualism emphasizes the agency of particular persons, that agency is connected to the totality of its context, from the particularities of current market forces to

¹⁵ This term is from Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

the conceptual structures through which we order perceptions.¹⁶ Thus, if realism is literature of the individual and realization is the response of the individual to realism, both are intimately connected to the ideological content of the historical, social, and linguistic contexts operative in the circulation of texts and textual meanings.

As a symbolic representational system and an influential cultural product, realist literature quickly transcends the base market forces of industrial publishing and comes to embody (and thereby expose) capitalist ideology. Yet, the ideology associated with capitalism is not necessarily capitalist exclusively. In the enormous economic and ideological upheaval of the industrial revolution, capitalist ideology grew through intimate connections to a changing religious discourse. In fact, Watt links these two forces as central to the rise of the novel:

The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seem to depend upon two important general conditions for the existence of the novel obtained very widely until fairly recently, because they both depend upon the rise of a society characterized by that vast complex of interdependent factors denoted by the term 'individualism' . . . the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism,¹⁷ especially in its Calvinist or Puritan forms (60).

In this close partnership, it was not simply that one ideology was the origin for the other. Rather, religious values were secularized to form a new economic ideal while capitalism acquired much of the mystique and force of a religion. Thus, while the ethic that influenced capitalism can be called Protestant, it is not quite religious in that it provides

¹⁶ The latter theme will recur at several points throughout this text, especially those focused on description and Kant's theory of perception in Chapter 1.

¹⁷ The Protestant Reformation, which precedes and provides the dominant religious paradigm for most of the writers I consider, is essentially a shift in the emphasis from Christian religious practices being primarily structured by Catholic religious authorities to a less centralized religion which placed more emphasis on individualism.

the articles for economic and domestic ethics rather than religious faith, as Watt writes: “the novel requires a world view which is centered on the social relationships between individual persons; and this involves secularization as well as individualism” (84). Similarly, J. Hillis Miller writes “the battle among various forms of belief and unbelief was fought within each individual mind, or, more precisely, within each individual text” (281), a move that clearly separates the central premise of religion—its claim to truly reflect the hidden cosmology of the universe and transform lives through the revelation of such truth as lived in the faithful—from the very earthly concerns of individual choice. While at no point in the last two millennia have religious and economic beliefs been wholly disconnected, the rhetoric of the ‘separation of Church and State’ reflects a popular notion that religious belief ought be confined exclusively to the private sphere.¹⁸ Thus, while the Protestant ethic of hard work, individualism, striving, etc. made a virtue of the individuals’ commitment to social improvement through personal improvement, the operative ideology that primarily motivates the capitalist side of realism is predominantly secular. At the same time, four of the five novelists¹⁹ given primacy in this work—Tolstoy, Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Brontë—write with explicitly Christian themes and thereby complicate this picture of secularization. While these authors far from represent a singular, unified notion of religious doctrine, the individual differences

¹⁸ Much like the religious attitude of contemporary America, the Christianity of nineteenth-century Britain was as much or more of a cultural Christianity than a religious Christianity, as demonstrated by a survey taking in the year of the Great Exhibition: “On the last Sunday of March 1851, the Church of England conducted a national survey to see how many people actually attended church that day. The results were a shock. More than half the people of England and Wales had not gone to church at all, and only 20 percent had gone to an Anglican service” (Bryson 20).

¹⁹ The three major philosophers of this project—Wittgenstein, Kant, and Spinoza—all have incredibly complex relationships to Christianity. While all three wrote positively about religious belief and Christianity, they did so in such a way that there are still major debates about whether their views are radically religious or radically atheist.

in their treatments of religion demonstrate that since realism expresses the lives of individuals, it also expresses the spiritual concerns of the individual. Because of the extremely variable treatments of this rich topic in realist fiction, I will not spend much time in what follows investigating the religious themes of the literature. However, I do believe that responding to the spiritual components of fiction is a vital component of realization, a holistic enterprise which cannot discount the holy. As we shall see, the presence of faith and love in realist fiction produces a transcendent quality that pushes past the historically constructed subjects of individualism towards real relations with real people. This is especially relevant in the third major historical factor that provided the context for realist fiction, that of the separation of public and private and the newfound attention to the domestic sphere. Faith, love, and domesticity are hallmarks of realist fiction at the moment when literature is considered for the first time as an art by and for women, whose value to men is that men too require feminine domesticity as a counterpoint to capitalist enterprise.

The domestic ideology that developed alongside and through nineteenth-century realism is almost an ideological counterpart to the rising division of labor of the Industrial Era. The primary characteristic of this domestic ideology is clearly demarcated differences and roles between men and women, as Mary Poovey notes: “This is only one formulation of what I take to be the characteristic feature of the mid-Victorian symbolic economy: the articulation of difference upon sex and in the form of a binary opposition rather than a hierarchically ordered range of similarities” (6). While sexual difference is present to some extent in every culture, one might say that the nineteenth-century

Western culture was not merely a place in which sexual differences were prevalent, but was predicated upon gender²⁰ difference. This binary opposition carried so much ideological, cultural, and moral significance that virtue itself became a gendered notion, as Poovey describes:

Instead of being articulated upon inherited class position in the form of noblesse oblige, virtue was increasingly articulated upon gender in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the liberal discourse of rights and contracts began to dominate representations of social, economic and political relations, in other words, virtue was depoliticized, moralized, and associated with the domestic sphere, which was being abstracted at the same time—both rhetorically and, to a certain extent, materially—from the so-called public sphere of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression. As superintendents of the domestic sphere, (middle-class) women were represented as protecting and, increasingly, incarnating virtue. Despite the fact that women contributed materially to the consolidation of bourgeois wealth and political power, their economic support tended to be translated into a language of morality and affection; their most important work was increasingly represented as the emotional labor motivated (and guaranteed) by maternal instinct. (10)

By separating fundamental notions like virtue and labor along gender lines, this ideology suggested that at their deepest essence humans fall into two distinct classes.²¹ Gender became implicated in answering even the most basic philosophical questions about what humans are, what good is, or what one ought do. The pervasiveness of this ideology is far too extensive to trace here, but its importance cannot be understated, as it continues to shape the modern world, as Nancy Armstrong describes:

My point is that language, which once represented the history of the individual as well as the history of the state in terms of kinship relations, was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that

²⁰ Following Judith Butler's formulation in *Gender Trouble*, I use 'sex' to describe the biological differences between the men and women and 'gender' to describe differences in the socially-ascribed roles of men and women.

²¹ The notion of racial difference is also important here, as the Western notion of the human, gender differences ad all, was also contrastive relative to 'other' cultures (Cf. Edward Said's *Orientalism*).

characterize modern culture. I want to show that a modern, gendered form of subjectivity developed first as a feminine discourse in certain literature for women before it provided the semiotic of nineteenth century poetry and psychological theory. It was through this gendered discourse, more surely than by means of the epistemological debate of the eighteenth century, that the discourse of sexuality made its way into common sense and determined how people understood themselves and what they desired in others. The gendering of human identity provided the metaphysical girders of modern culture—its reigning mythology. (14)

The fact that this form of gender difference is metaphysical, mythological, and ideological makes it a product more of language and literature than of biology. Realism, which purports to describe social reality, therefore participates directly in the conceptual and discursive concepts that make up such reality. Thus, in order to understand realism, we must understand how descriptions can do things. This is the notion of performativity that Judith Butler draws from Austin and applies to gender, namely that describing human identity in a particular way is not merely descriptive, but actively shapes real relationships with others.

In particular, what the ‘gendering of human identity’ did in the age of realism was to complicate the very notion of individualism that it simultaneously advocated. In one sense, the workings of gender difference are tied to the specific character of the individual. While the ethics and norms applied to each gender were different, they both focused on the attitude, effort, and character of individuals. On the other hand, the fundamental unit of society could not be a single individual, as a singular person of either gender was incapable of spanning the whole of social relations. Instead, the fundamental unit became the family, the interaction of two gendered individuals with complementary roles, as Nancy Armstrong describes:

As such, the writing of female subjectivity opened a magical space in the culture where ordinary work could find its proper gratification and where the very objects that set men against one another in the competitive marketplace served to bind them together in a community of common domestic values. If the marketplace driven by male labor came to be imagined as a centrifugal force that broke up the vertical chains organizing an earlier notion of society and that scattered individuals willy-nilly across the English landscape, then the household's dynamic was conceived as a centripetal one. The household simultaneously recentered the scattered community at myriad points to form the nuclear family, a social organization with a mother rather than a father as its center. (95)

Here, the individual is contextualized primarily within a balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces centered on the household. The masculine role pushes the household into the larger social world, engaging in productive relationships with the rest of society through capitalist labor, politics, etc. The feminine role, conversely, pulls the household back to its domestic center, exemplifying the protestant virtues of docility, care, and humility that relegated women to the affective labors²² of childcare, education, and nursing. Of course, these spheres were not entirely separate, as they were supposed to literally and figuratively support one another. In a purely practical sense, the masculine role was to secure income for the support of the household while the feminine role was to preside over domestic economy. One might say that in this economy, men were providers and women were consumers. In a moral sense, the masculine role was to provide lead, protect, and admire the woman, whose role was to provide support, love, and moral grounding. Thus, despite the increased attention on individualism, aloneness and full autonomy are generally represented as negative in realist literature. The

²² Cf. Michael Hardt's "Affective Labor."

individual²³ is viewed as most complete in the romantic dyad, a family unit which in turn is most complete when participating in larger social relations.

Of course, to summarize the cultural practices and beliefs of any century is necessarily an oversimplification of social relations that were far more complex and muddled. Yet, as we proceed to investigate the much more localized acts of realization, it is vital to understand that realism was made possible within a historical context in which representing ordinary individuals living their lives was a crucial component in actually living lives outside the texts. Realist literature, which is constructed of ideologically-laden linguistic content, participates in the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values that structured society. Thus, Armstrong writes that “I regard fiction, in other words, both as the document and as the agency of cultural history” (23). Realism, therefore, embodies both horizons in Gadamer’s fusion by thoroughly implicating itself in its social and cultural contexts. Realism never gives ‘just’ a story, but always already contains, explores, and critiques social life. Realization, on the other hand, may have various relations to the horizon present in the text. The reader may be more or less attuned to the presence and nature of the ideologies immanent throughout the text. Likewise, the reader may be inclined more or less positively to the horizon of the text, filtering the ethical valances of the story through his or her own horizon. The strange anonymity of the reader, who is invisible to the narrative, obscures (sometimes dangerously) the usually

²³ Poovey alludes to the problems of reconciling individualism with gender difference when she writes that “This brings me to one of the most problematic aspects of my study: the problem of the individual. The concept of the individual is problematic for me in ways that it was not for the nineteenth-century writers I examine. In fact, for most of the writers whose works I analyze, individualism was a solution, not a problem. But one of my underlying points here is that the ego-centered subject is a historical construct, and I devote considerable attention in the following chapters to the ways in which this ideological image was produced, maintained, and deployed as a symbolic solution to problems it could not actually solve” (20).

blatant markers of race, gender, and class that mark us in everyday life. That is, while the situated perspective of the reader's identity politics are necessarily present in the act of realization, there is simultaneously a sense that the reader to some extent suspends his or her singular identity by immersing in a story world that presumes the reader only as a hypothetical entity. Thus, the relationship between the individual and the power of language is not so clean cut as it may appear, a notion which destabilizes the one-way relationship of text onto reader implied by Armstrong when she writes:

If my study of the novel clarifies only one point, then, I would like it to demonstrate the degree to which modern culture depends on a form of power that works through language—and particularly the printed word—to constitute subjectivity. According to this premise, as purveyors of a specialized form of literacy, we invariably perpetuate the hegemony I have been describing. (25)

In emphasizing both text and cultural history throughout her study, Armstrong leaves an opening for a more subversive reading of realization. While she cogently expresses the power of language to constitute subjectivity, a power which is subtly operative in all aspects of modern life, we need to complicate the notion of realization to show that our responses to fiction do not 'inevitably perpetuate the hegemony.' I do not wish to propose a utopian vision of fiction as the site of inevitable social change or subversiveness, however. I do not believe we have complete control over the process of realization, and I agree with Armstrong that some reinscription is inevitable—in fact, the very possibility of responding to fiction presupposes some continuity between the text and reader's perspective. On the other hand, in treating realization as a philosophical rather than a historical moment, I think the experience of fiction can transcend the two major horizons present in the text—we can transcend the text's ideology just as we can

transcend our own, through the self-reflective meditations engendered by the presentation of dialogically interacting horizons.

So, while I find the historical factors described in this section particularly relevant to understanding the realist movement, this rough sketch is intended only to provide background for the particular texts that follow. Due to the nature of this project, the following meditations themselves will not be primarily historical or cultural. Certainly, the act of realization is conducted from a particular situated perspective and within a particular cultural context, and it certainly behooves us to understand the effects of this historical specificity, but the possibility of the act itself to deconstruct and transform any particular perspective is the primary concern here. Asking what fiction does is a question that is itself reductive because it presupposes firstly that fiction acts upon us as passive receptacles and secondly that it acts in a singular way. While it is important to recognize that fiction may have a dominant thrust that encourages the readers in particular directions, the deeper question to ask is “What can we do in fiction?” Yet, this question is not enough, because realization is not a purely private, isolated endeavor. We must, therefore, also ask, “How can what we say about fiction influence what we can do in fiction?” Just as fiction itself embodies social change by directly participating in linguistic relations which structure real relations, how we talk about fiction influences how we occupy, engage, and respond to it.

Chapter 1

Describing Reality:

Generic Space and Time in *Sketches by Boz*

A picture is a model of reality.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein (*TLP* 2.12)

ALL THAT IS THE CASE

To call someone ‘unrealistic’ is to accuse him or her of self-delusion, of misinterpreting reality according to his or her own paradigms rather than following the paradigms generated by the objective world. On the other hand, a ‘realistic’ attitude is one that tempers utopian and dystopian excesses by grounding one’s paradigms in the probabilistic reality of all that is (or might be) the case. Similarly, realist art aims at appropriately recognizing what Heidegger calls *thrownness*, the way in which we are always already situated in relation to an existing reality that precedes and conditions us. Certainly, turning a blind eye to our thrownness into a preexisting state of affairs is to misinterpret our relation to the conditions of our own existence and agency, a mistake which in fact threatens the flourishing of such existence and agency. The problem, of course, is how to properly interpret the reality of one’s own thrownness without being unduly influenced by the particular perspective into which one is thrown. While realist fiction rightly advocates an honest look at thrownness, for example, critically distanced

modern readers often accuse purportedly realist fiction of failing to meet its own standards of truth. One possible solution, advocated both then and now, is the assumption of an *objective*—literally ‘thrown against’²⁴—viewpoint that would eliminate or at least reduce bias by emphasizing the elements of reality that are accessible from multiple perspectives. Once this perspective (the eponymous topic of Scholium 2, “The Realist Gaze”) has been achieved, the argument goes, one is able to see things for what they really are and can subsequently relate this vision in objective language. While I do believe this method can be an effective antidote for particular self-deceiving illusions, the characterization of the realist gaze as connected to an objective truth is highly problematic. It is impossible to completely sever the gazer from the gaze, a particular thrownness from thrownness itself. The objective stance of realism, therefore, has both a *value*, insofar as it moves us towards a deeper recognition of our thrownness, and a *danger*, insofar as it presents our understanding of thrownness as a true picture of a static state of affairs. In this chapter, therefore, I will attempt to articulate in what sense the reality of fiction is objective, namely that it *shows* (not says) the intersubjective conditions of experience present in the real world.

If the possibility of striving for an objective conceptual stance that will challenge personal bias comes from the very fact of our thrownness into a reality that always precedes and conditions our agency, what *is* this reality into which we are thrown? “The world is everything that is the case” (*TLP* 1), writes Wittgenstein in the opening lines of

²⁴ The modern sense of an object as a “tangible thing, something perceived or presented to the senses” only arises in the late fourteenth century, whereas the sense of ‘thrown against’ goes back to the Latin roots *ob-* and *iacere* (Online Etymology Dictionary).

the *Tractatus*. Lest we take this to mean that the world into which we are thrown is nothing more than a physical environment, Wittgenstein continues: “The world is the totality of facts, not of things” (*TLP* 1.1).²⁵ Together, these statements characterize reality as the complete set of real (actual, true) relations. At the same time, these relations are not absolute or fixed in a way that would preclude agency by subordinating it to a deterministic truth. Instead, the relational picture allows us to understand thrownness as the situating of an agent within a network of preexisting relations, possibilities for interaction which condition our agency even while they make agency possible. Action would be impossible without the possibility of interaction, a world to act in, with, and upon. Thus, the world as Wittgenstein defines it in the *Tractatus* is not merely the set of all existing relations, but is also the very relationality of relations that holds the various things that are the case into a single state of affairs with the ever-present possibility of reconfiguration into a new set of particular relations. In this vein, Wittgenstein argues that the possibility of conceiving things depends on the possibility of understanding how they receive their significance through their thrownness into this web of relations:

Just as we cannot think of spatial objects at all apart from space, or temporal objects apart from time, so we cannot think of *any* object apart from the possibility of its connexion with other things. (*TLP* 2.0121)

Here, Wittgenstein grounds his relational theory of the world in that of Kant’s relational notions of space and time as the organizing principles through which agents situate themselves with respect to the world into which they are thrown. These relational

²⁵ The totality of things, on the other hand, would include not only the world but all other possible worlds because, as Wittgenstein argues, “Objects contain the possibility of all states of affairs” (*TLP* 2.014).

definitions of the world challenge any notion of objectivity as breaking free from individual relations—a non-relational (objective) perspective on a fundamentally relational world could generate only nonsense. At the same time, neither Kant nor Wittgenstein wants to do away with the move towards objectivity. In fact, both promote a form objectivity that looks at the world from the standpoint of its constituent relations in order to better understand the situatedness of our agency, that is, they advocate a realistic perspective.

The (ethical) value of this form of philosophical reflection, set against the danger of self-deception, is not merely in *being* thrown, but in *understanding* and subsequently acting out of our thrownness. Thus, our practices of representation, characterization, and description are a form of grappling with the reality into which we are thrown in which articulating the reality into which we are thrown is itself a form of interacting with the world. That is, the reality that can be shown but not said can still be glimpsed in what is said. In this way “A picture is a model of reality” (*TLP 2.12*). This view is suggested by the term ‘realism’ itself, and is certainly applicable to the early French artists who first bore the title and whose “aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life” (Nochlin 13). The question here, however, is how to interpret such showing. Against the notion of ‘photographic’ realism,²⁶ I argue that, whether visual or linguistic, picturing

²⁶ Even photography, the paradigm of visual realism in that its apparatus necessitates a correspondence between the physical subject and its imagistic reproduction, produces mediated rather than direct representations of reality. While visual reproductions—photographs, canvases, books, etc.—are themselves part of lived reality, the way in which they point to other elements of lived reality (their realism) is necessarily conventional. While photography’s causal mechanism and the painter’s mimetic eye have the advantage of producing representations that physically resemble the reality they depict, they are

does not *say* reality—articulate it clearly, the way Wittgenstein, drawing on the ideal of logical clarity expressed by Frege and Russell, believes it is always possible to do for certain propositional truths—instead, it *shows* reality by modeling it. To model is not merely to say or relate; to model is to show or reflect. Thus, Wittgenstein argues that pictures necessarily have something in common with what they represent, that is, they have more than an arbitrarily assigned content that indicates what they represent. He writes “What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner—rightly or falsely—is its form of representation” (*TLP* 2.17). Whereas it is natural to assume that a picture and what it represents must have some similarity in content—the meaning (content) of the word ‘apple’ has some similarity to the physical attributes (content) of the thing apple—Wittgenstein argues that the similarity necessary for showing is one of form. This similarity, I believe, is in the shared and paralleled relational natures of the world and its representations, as Wittgenstein writes:

Propositions cannot represent the logical form: this mirrors itself in the propositions.
That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent.
That which *expresses* itself in language, *we* cannot express by language.
The propositions *show* the logical form of reality.
They exhibit it. (*TLP* 4.121)

still communicative apparatuses, subject to the complexities of signification. This is complicated still further in the linguistic arts emphasized in this project, which do not even communicate through resemblance. The linguistic sign, as Saussure noted, is fundamentally arbitrary (conventional). This means that we cannot hold literary realism to the same standards as fundamentally visual arts, despite the fact that scholars such as Peter Brooks have demonstrated the importance of visuality to realism. As a textual art form, everything is mediated through linguistic description, making literary representations different in kind from the world they attempt to represent. Moreover, by its very nature fiction is distanced from reality by the fact that it does not point to any actual or particular lived reality. Whereas a photograph or historical narrative ostensibly points to a reality that actually happened, the most we can say of fiction is that it constructs a non-actual reality that is *analogous* to the general conditions of lived reality.

Propositions can explicitly express certain facts about the particular relations in the world, but they cannot express the relational nature itself. Yet, as language is itself relational, it provides a performative picture of the relational nature of the world. Just as the relational nature of the world can only be truly understood by living in it, engaging in the myriad interactions of our particular thrownness, the relational nature of language can only be understood by using it: “What does not get expressed in the sign is shown by its application. What the signs conceal, their application declares” (*TLP* 3.262). This parallelism is more than an eerie similarity between the disconnected realms of the world and language (the way Spinoza argues that thought and extension parallel one another), but demonstrates a fundamental interpenetration of world and language, of represented and representation. Part of thrownness, at least from a Heideggerian phenomenological perspective, is that the world and self are co-constitutive. We are who we because of the world and the world is what it is because of us. Thus, the connection between world and language is not really a parallelism at all; it is a point of contact. The thoughts through which we come to understand the world are in fact part of our grappling with our own thrownness and have real effects on the world. For Heidegger, therefore, our ability to project possible realities onto the existing reality is part of our understanding of and interacting with thrownness. Similarly, for Wittgenstein, “We use the sensibly perceptible sign (sound or written sign, etc.) of the proposition as a projection of the possible state of affairs” (*TLP* 3.11). He clarifies this further, writing “And the proposition is the propositional sign in its projective relation to the world” (*TLP* 3.12). This ‘projective relation’ is the conceptual point of contact between agent and world, the

moment where grappling with articulation simply is grappling with the world, discovering our relational thrownness by interacting with the relations into which we are thrown.²⁷ To care about being in the world is, therefore, also to engage in representational practices that both explore and construct the world.

For both Heidegger and Wittgenstein, this relational significance is implicit in language itself, an implicitness that requires a focused philosophical analysis to uncover. In the reality of fiction, on the other hand, the relational significance is on the surface of the social activity of reading. The rhetoric of realism as a mirror of reality may be false from the perspective of objective truth as describing a non-relational stance on all that is the case, but is clearly applicable to depicting the kind of objective relational principles described by Kant, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. That is, fiction may be ill-suited to portraying these former truths, those particular facts about the world that discourses like science or history express nicely, but it is extremely well-suited to showing the relations of the relational world, like ethics and aesthetics, which can be shown but not said. Furthermore, literary descriptions shape rather than reflect reality, or more precisely they shape reality *by* reflecting it. That is, in showing the relational truths, fiction also relates to the relational nature of the world. Literature, therefore, does not merely articulate all that is the case, but rather takes a stance towards what is the case, an agential stance which transforms what is the case by influencing our perspectives and the actions based on those perspectives. In fiction, saying is showing and showing is doing. Thus, doing away with the notion that literary descriptions should be judged according to the factual

²⁷ Similarly, Spinoza believes that we come to understand the true nature of reality by engaging in and reflecting upon the particular relations within which we find ourselves.

accuracy of their descriptive content, we see that they have value according to their ability to present a performative picture of the relational nature of the world through their very form. In this chapter, therefore, I will argue that this strong notion of fictional reality is misleading because it presupposes that ‘the way things are’ is accessible and describable. Instead, I will employ a Kantian analysis of how we realize the world in space and time to argue that what objectivity comes to is not the independent nature of things-in-themselves, but rather an intersubjective basis for coordinating agency and comprehension. This chapter will unfold this notion by unpacking the realist descriptions in Charles Dickens’ *Sketches by Boz*, which ostensibly provide a journalistic walkthrough of the reality of London’s infrastructure and society but in fact construct a fictional world that generalizes the London experience in order to reveal its constructedness. While this fiction is genuinely analogous to aspects of reality, the reality it relates to does not consist in independent objects, but is rather a lived reality consisting in what I term *generic* space and time, the discursive preconditions of shared experience. There is, therefore, a sense in which fiction can properly be called ‘real,’ namely that it reading fiction is itself a (real) lived experience that evokes the (real) relations that connect the individual to others in a world of intersubjective agency.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL ILLUSION

If, as I have argued, literary and linguistic description connects our representational practices to the relational nature of the world, it matters how these descriptions are interpreted. Part of the parallelism between language and reality is a

parallel between words and objects built into the grammatical structure of many languages that employ nouns. This leads to the ever-present possibility of an interpretation of words that reifies the world into things (the definition of the world Wittgenstein explicitly resisted) rather than relations. This interpretive mistake is to think of the objectivity of language as reflecting a fundamental objectivity of the world, the all that is the case, as a physical environment consisting in spaces and objects. Certainly, fiction can be read this way, as spaces and objects are ubiquitous themes for the novelistic form. An important component of the rise of the novel in eighteenth century England was the detailed description of spaces and objects. The lengthy descriptions of the material labor of Robinson Crusoe's colonial world-building or Pamela's domestic economy are part of the realist tradition because they are designed to provide insight into the material fabric of the 'thrown against' world rather than using objects as symbolic, allegorical, or affective literary devices. Even when Jane Austen uses household spaces and grounds as indicative of the inner nature of those who tend (literally husband) them,²⁸ the material labor of the husbandry provides a direct, causal link between character and space that makes these descriptions more than symbolic. This employment of objectivity is a recurring feature in realist art. The early movement of realism in art was never purely about symbolism, aesthetics, or even truth. Instead, the intense focus on accurate representation combined with an interest in the materiality of the everyday, which asserted realism as against the aesthetics of upper-class art. In so doing, realist art and literature expressed what Brooks calls 'realist vision,' looking at the

²⁸ An observation I owe to Helena Michie,

world as objective by looking at the world as objects. This allows a reading, which I believe to be mistaken and pernicious, of reading the reality of fiction as simply saying or describing the way things are. In this section, I wish to clarify this misunderstanding as what Kant calls a ‘transcendental illusion,’ to show both the value and the danger of this view.

In the context of the conventions of realist literature, the transcendental illusion occurs when ‘real’ and ‘realistic’ became commendations applied to the material accuracy of representation of spaces and objects. This is a historically recorded phenomenon as demonstrated, by the immediate success and reception of the *Sketches* as a journalistic-fictional hybrid picture of London. At the time, the *Sketches* were characterized and lauded by a language of the real that valued them as a re-presentation of an objective reality, as Victorianist Amanpal Garcha notes:

Even though *Sketches by Boz* sold well, most of Dickens’ sketches did not fit unambiguously into the category of new “fiction” or “literature,” which had come to be the most popular type of text in the market: when he published many of his descriptive urban sketches in periodicals, he sold them as essays or examples of factual reporting, not as literary works. And, as indicated by the *Sketches*’ contemporary criticism emphasizing Dickens’ accuracy, detail, and “realism” in his urban scenes, readers saw in his sketches qualities of reportage as much as of creativity. (145)

Readers, therefore, while recognizing the fictional elements of the *Sketches*, also considered them to be factual and true, that is, *real*. Moreover, this was not an accidental response, but one that Dickens strove to cultivate. This can be seen in an anecdote told by John Forster, Dickens’ close friend and biographer, in which Forster tells of how his initial commentary on a draft of *Oliver Twist* so pleased Dickens that he would have

Forster subsequently read all of his work before it was published. Dickens' response was as follows:

How can I thank you? Can I do better than by saying that the sense of poor Oliver's reality, which I know you have had from the first, has been the highest of all praise to me. None that has been lavished upon me have I felt half so much as that appreciation of my intent and meaning. You know I have ever done so, for it was your feeling for me and mine for you that first brought us together, and I hope will keep us so, till death do us part. Your notices make me grateful but very proud; so have a care of them.
(Forster 105)

This perfect accord in opinion between reader and writer, and the warm affection in which it is expressed, indicates the degree to which Dickens valued the reality of his realism. Similarly, in his first preface to the *Sketches*, subtitled "Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People," Dickens says of himself that "his object has been to present little pictures of life and manners as they really are" (*SB* 7). Yet, while this language of reality and truth is prevalent throughout Dickens' reception²⁹ (and in much of discourse on fiction from the nineteenth-century to today), these ubiquitous yet vague statements rely on an overly simplistic picture of reality that falls prey to the transcendental illusion. Thus, I shall return to Kant to explore in what sense a description of reality is real and in what sense the surface interpretation of these statements misrepresents this reality.

As a vocabulary of approbation that expresses our intuitive sense that some fiction is more real *to us* than others, this talk of realism is extremely useful. Although in many ordinary contexts the description 'real'—as opposed to 'fake' or 'false'—is perfectly clear, the language of the real has an aura of philosophical depth that may make it seem

²⁹ Of *Oliver Twist*, he is even so offended by challenges to its reality that in his introduction to the Third Edition, he writes emphatically that "It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE" (*OT* 460).

to say more than it ought. Only by first sorting out the philosophical complexity of the notion of objective reality can we sufficiently clarify our discourse of the objective reality of fiction to ensure we say what we mean and no more. Kant's central thesis throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that human perception, cognition, and agency fundamentally rely upon our shared ability to locate individual subjective perceptions within a general systematic unity that organizes and makes sense of these individual perceptions.³⁰ For example, Kant's statement that "If every individual representation were entirely foreign to the other, as it were isolated and separated from it, then there would never arise anything like cognition, which is a whole of compared and connected representations" (227-8) points to the necessity of an intersubjectively available reality to ground individual representations. As representations are necessarily tied to assumption of a systematic representational framework, all interpretive acts, such as understanding this passage, and agential actions, including the physical act of locating the passage, require situating a particular perspective with respect to other possible perspectives, that is, with respect to the possibility of perspective itself.

It is vital to Kant's theory that while this notion of objectivity abstracts from a particular subjective standpoint to an intersubjectively available standpoint, it does not abstract from (human) standpoint altogether. Kant stringently maintains that this unification or organization of the world comes from our perceptual, cognitive, and agential interactions and is thereby a product of our own interventions into an external reality, which we can know nothing about independently of our relations to it. To

³⁰ The second and third Critiques make similar arguments relative to moral and aesthetic judgments.

attribute absolute reality to the systematic framework that comes alive in our relational activity is to reify its fundamentally relational character. Just as he argues that looking for things-in-themselves that underlie our experience of objects moves towards an unreachable abstraction that draws our attention away from what really matters (a view he shares with Wittgenstein and Heidegger), Kant believes that seeking relationality qua relationality moves us away from what matters, namely our situatedness within the relational framework. Thus, this is not an academic metaphysical thesis for Kant, who thinks that if we attribute intrinsic significance and agency to objects of the world independent of us, especially essences and causes, we de-mean our own significance-generating and agential potential. Kant calls this the ‘transcendental illusion,’ because the illusion is one of a transcendent reality that exists independently of our immanent experiences. While Kant thinks it’s natural or even necessary to approach the world as fitted to and anchoring how we related to it, he believes it needs to be properly contextualized by philosophical critique. Properly situating the systematic unities that underlie our experience of the world within the experience itself—a perspective similar to later phenomenology—entails something like a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ in which one renounces the claim to absolute reality and instead embraces the persistent reality of our own existence and experience. In this conceptual move, Kant transforms an otherwise philosophical thesis into a fictional narrative, showing our orientation with respect to the world to be a fundamentally interpretive move in which agent and world develop together relationally. One might say that, for Kant, we live stories that are real to

us because they realize our relation to the world, regardless of whether they are ‘real’ in some deeper metaphysical sense.

Thus, while these philosophical claims do not bear on fictional reality directly, they do speak to the importance of analyzing our forms of expression as narratives which may derive from perfectly acceptable ways of relating to the world, but which are capable of misleading us as to the nature of these relations. For Kant, seeing the world as giving us all its relations deprives our agency of sense. For Wittgenstein, seeing words as containing clear meanings deprives our language ability of its purposive and contextual uses. Similarly, seeing humans as the product of biological (gender) or social (culture, class) essences places stereotypical traits over individual subjectivity and thereby promotes essentialist thinking and violence. These variants of the transcendental illusion all present our immediate, dynamic agential interactions as the result of a reified objectivity that has no place for our subjective interventions, and thereby all these views detrimentally effect our ability to talk, think, and act (ethically). Paralleling these arguments, I suggest that treating the objective reality of fiction as a direct, mimetic representation of the external world imposes an unnecessary fixity on literary description by making the social reality it describes into an object. If all fiction does is tell us the way things are, then it is necessarily socially conservative or even fatalistic in the way that the idiom “that’s just how it is” expresses resignation to a reality or fate one can do nothing about. Instead, recognizing that literature participates in rather than simply describes the intersubjective understanding of the world reveals possibilities for agential intervention.

As the transcendental illusion is one way of interpreting reality, it is always a possible reading. Similarly, we can see how reading according to the absolute reality of literary description is in fact enabled by the *Sketches*, whose very title indicates the aura of photographic realism that the transcendental illusion attributes to realism. Applying this interpretive stance to his sketch “The Prisoner’s Van,” an account of two young girls being taken to prison, one could argue that although the description of the particular girls may be fictional, the sketch it represents the real condition of the world, namely the historical condition of ‘fallen’ women. Dickens himself enables this social generalization, portraying the scene as an instance of underlying relations of social interchangeability: “What the younger girl was then, the elder had been once; and what the elder then was, she must soon become. A melancholy prospect, but how surely to be realized: a tragic drama, but how often acted!” (317) The finality of the progression from generalized younger to generalized elder can be read as a purely objective description of social reality. In this sense, the passage portrays the fatalism of the transcendental illusion by portraying the way things are in the social order as monolithic. Thus exaggerating the objectivity of the depicted reality disguises the arbitrariness of the described social structures, making the ethical ramifications of the social order appear outside the realm of human responsibility. In fact, this passage unravels this reading through its clearly situated interpretive perspective. The tone of this passage is both censoring and resigned as it bemoans the inevitability of the social forces that enforce such a narrative. Through this interpretive moment, when Dickens likens the social order to a manmade theatrical production, Dickens reveals the contingency of the system,

showing that the inevitability is of a kind with habit and ritual rather than essence—he implies that the girls were not so much fallen as pushed. In this way, while he portrays social reality as somewhat inexorable, he shows that this inexorability is not a feature of the world as it necessarily is, but of us as we choose to be. That is, just as the fact that the inertial resistances of physical matter constrict our agency provides us with something weighty to push against and manipulate, even the most fatalistic description of the inevitability of social reality presents a system within and against which interpretation, criticism, and agency are possible.

Although Dickens repeatedly describes a world that seems to mirror reality, to represent a fully external objective reality which we can all equally relate to, he simultaneously stresses the fact that the reality he describes is *not* equally accessible, thus undermining the very notion of an pure objective reality altogether. In the aforementioned depiction of the two young girls being taken to prison in “The Prisoner’s Van,” Dickens employs extremely particularized description to emphasize the humanity of the girls and thereby generate sympathy. Although the girls are characterized as members of a particular ‘class,’ they are not evaluated merely as abstract representatives of the class, but also as unique individuals who deserve compassion. This is emphasized by the narration, which clearly indicates that their degree of inhumanity is not something essential, but is forced upon them by social forces which they cannot control. Thus, although reality initially appears to be an objective ground upon which individuals can engage in productive reciprocal relations to others, Dickens’ narration clearly demonstrates that this reality is always mediated by ideologies which can be wielded by

social powers to force particular individuals into social roles that reduce them to mere social functions. If the *Sketches* mirror reality, then, they reflect more than the abstract physicality of the material world, but also this socio-political mediation that regulates access to the world.³¹

The social consciousness of a Dickens or a Tolstoy is therefore much more than a personal choice to combat misuses of realism by directly indicating the epistemic violence of thinking of their descriptions as indicative of external reality. Narration itself, never unmediated and objective, assaults the transcendental illusion by its very nature. In the realist novel, pure description is simply not possible, even if an individual author or reader maintains it as an ideal. The literary qualities of description and the built-in subjectivity of all narration thus reveal the illusory nature of the transcendental illusion. Thus, if we are to turn realism from complicity with hegemonic ideology to active critical engagement that enables productive and ethical thought, we need to investigate the role of subjectivity or agency in narrative. Those who employ the transcendental illusion to maintain social power will often (implicitly or explicitly) rely upon a notion of *objectivity*, in which their particular viewpoint is considered to be justified according to independent and absolute criteria. Thus, they deny that their particular (privileged) role within the system depends upon personal inclination, believing instead in the absolute validity of the system that enables their privilege.

³¹ Thus, the material conditions of the poor are for Dickens—as they are for Marx—the pressing political problem. The social reality under capitalism is that material goods are not equally accessible. Even basic resources like food, clothing, and shelter can become incredibly difficult to procure for the have-nots, a deprivation which assaults the body's own material reality.

The myth that there is an objective standpoint is fractured by the inherent subjectivity of narrative perspective. For fictional reality to have absolute objectivity would require an unmediated standpoint wholly unconditioned by subjectivity. Not only is the existence of such a standpoint theoretically dubious, it is certainly not literary, as the personal and unique voices of all narrative attests.³² Furthermore, the immense success and influence of individual authors demonstrates that readers appreciate the subjectivity of narration. The *Sketches* are infused with the subjectivity of Boz's peculiar narrative voice, necessarily presenting an *interpretation* or *reading* of what they describe. For example, Boz enthusiastically exclaims "What inexhaustible food for speculation, do the streets of London afford!" (80), exalting in his interpretive ability. Similarly, he remarks that "We saw the prison, and saw the prisoners; and what we did see, and what we thought, we will tell at once in our own way" (235). In this passage, Boz smoothly transitions from describing a straightforward descriptive account of reality ("We saw the prison, and saw the prisoners") to his increasingly personal experience of it (from seeing to thinking to telling "in our own way"). This explicit revelation that his descriptions produce the world of the narrative also implicitly permeates his 'purely' descriptive moments. Take the following passage from the opening of "The Streets – Night":

But the streets of London, to be beheld in the very height of their glory, should be seen on a dark, dull, murky winter's night, when there is just enough damp gently stealing down to make the pavement greasy, without cleansing it of any of its impurities; and when the heavy lazy mist, which hangs over every object, makes the gas-lamps look brighter, and the brilliantly-lighted shops more splendid, from the contrast they present to the darkness around. All the people who are at home on such a night as

³² This is also reflected in theoretical or critical concepts that influence the reception of art, such as *aura* and *genius*.

this, seem disposed to make themselves as snug and comfortable as possible; and the passengers in the streets have excellent reason to envy the fortunate individuals who are seated by their firesides. (74-5)

What appears at first glance to be an objectively sensory description is in fact nothing of the kind. The normativity of 'should be seen' in the first line turns this passage into an imaginative act—Dickens paints rather than 'sees' the narrated picture. Furthermore, the ironic tone of this passage, with its exaggerated praise and elevated style, indicate that the picture is not as beautiful as it purports. The streets of London "in the very height of their glory" are described such that one would "envy the fortunate individuals who are seated by their firesides"—the beauty of the descriptive prose mocks rather than relates its subject.

Thus, despite the crystalline purity and physical vividness of Dickens' descriptions, the *Sketches* do not cohere into a fully objective reality, either material or social, and they actively resist the transcendental illusion. Literature is too essentially subjective to be appropriately characterized as an informational translation of the world. This enables Dickens to demonstrate rather than argue his social criticism through narrative unfolding. The passion of the *Sketches*, which simultaneously directs a critical glare at social institutions that promote poverty and a kindly look towards their victims, operates in the double-bind of realist description. This observation accords with Garcha's recognition that Dickens' employment of narrative time is connected with the division of social classes. Arguing that Boz, the middle-class traveling narrator, is freed by his position within capitalist economy, industrialization, and modernism whereas the lower-class characters are represented in narrative stasis, excluded from this modern turn,

Garcha reveals how Dickens' class-consciousness manifests itself in the form of the *Sketches* and is a constant concern. Thus, although rhetoric of the reality of fiction can imply that descriptions are *always neutral*, that they simply truly or falsely depict reality, descriptions are *never neutral*. Realist descriptions always engage the constructedness of society, and the complex interrelations between society and its individuals are never neutral—lives are always at stake. Yet, realism in itself is therefore never definitively positive or negative, never absolutely moral or immoral. Since the necessity of the transcendental contains the danger of the transcendental illusion and the necessity of society contains the possibility of social violence, we cannot disentangle the good from the bad, even if we had clear knowledge of these notions. Likewise, realism is a literary mode which has incredible significance through its intimate connection with social realities, and will always have consequences both good and ill. Although these consequences cannot be completely separated, actively reading realist literature with an eye towards avoiding the transcendental illusion does allow us to participate in the unfolding of textual significance.

In this non-neutrality, narrative always already presents a fundamentally intuitive, subjective, and literary response that aligns the interpretive ground of description with personal ethical responsibility. Description is therefore always situated within a tension between different interpretive views, as noted scholar J. Hillis Miller notes (writing about the *Sketches*):

No language is purely mimetic or referential, not even the most utilitarian speech. The specifically literary form of language, however, may be defined as a structure of words which in one way or another calls attention

to this fact, while at the same time allowing for its own inevitable misreading as a “mirroring of reality.” (119)

Thus, Miller argues the transcendental illusion is somewhat inevitable,³³ indicating that even language explicitly directed towards exposing the illusion must do so within a linguistic form which is always susceptible to it. Wittgenstein, in agreement here, writes: “We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it” (*BB* 1). Similarly, the *Sketches* cannot be entirely extricated from the conception of realism as describing reality, which is fundamentally involved in its descriptions and its use of language more generally.

Yet, it is (conceptually or practically) impossible to align the *Sketches*—or any realist text—as unambiguously progressive or conservative because language itself always achieves meaning within an interpretive context, which it cannot completely control.³⁴ The battle between the transcendental illusion and a more organic approach is thus fought and won outside of the text, which in its pure linguistic form cannot determine which of these possibilities will dominate. Yet, while as a textual object the *Sketches* contains both possibilities, as a philosophical space its rhetoric invites and supports a careful reading of its own construction that reveals the dangers and weaknesses of the transcendental illusion. To critique the transcendental illusion is therefore merely to warn about its dangers and to reflect on its power, not to mandate any singular interpretation or course of action. Literary performativity thus functions by forcing the active reader to critically confront the reality presented by the description,

³³ Kant, Wittgenstein, and many post-structuralists also tend to share this outlook.

³⁴ For the purposes of this project, such moral characterizations are of no more use than the attempting to fully define the boundaries of realism as a taxonomic category—we are concerned here with how the influence of notions of realism influences our engagement with the texts.

relying on the reader's ability to engage productively with these descriptions rather than simply receive them with the unreflectiveness of the transcendental illusion.

Having seen that the language of the real is a powerful force in characterizing fiction, we must recognize that using the word 'real' invokes potentially dangerous illusions. Understanding fiction as merely describing a material, historical, or social reality creates a unidirectional rather than relational connection between agent and world. This unidirectionality moves from world to agent, characterizing the agent as a primarily passive spectator in the unfolding events of the world. Taken too seriously, this view can have crippling consequences such as resignation, despair, and inaction. Furthermore, the unidirectional notion of representation typically reinforces the existing hegemonic power structure, which itself relies on unidirectional relationships. Thus, modern critiques of realism as socially conservative or ideologically fraught, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4, accurately point out the dangers in taking the claim to reality at face value and interpreting fiction through the transcendental illusion. It is neither incorrect nor unethical, however, for Dickens and his fans to characterize the *Sketches* or any other realist work as 'real' or 'realistic.' There is a sense in which this is precisely the right term. It is not the way described above, however, and it remains for us to see in what sense fiction truly is real, namely in the sense of being *generic*.

THE WORLD OF GENERIC SPACE

If the transcendental illusion misrepresents reality as an absolute state of affairs which literature can only reflect and describe, a proper understanding of the reality of

fiction will show how literature can expose, critique, and transform the relational foundations of the world. In this way, the unidirectionality of the passive agent trapped in an absolute reality gives way to the reciprocal relations of the co-constitutive agent and world. This brings us back to the objectivity of a reality into which we are thrown, the site of ontology, agency, and ethics. This relational perspective helps us recontextualize the realistic descriptive style of realist literature not as a mimetic description of a physical actuality but as the immersive portrayal of a world conceived as *generic space*, which I define as the systematic, generalized regularity that forms the condition of possibility for multiple particular experiences to be of or in the same space. There is, for example, often an intimate correspondence between the visual narration in the *Sketches* and London as it would have looked in the 1830's, an effect heightened by the forty illustrations of noted artist George Cruikshank. This strikingly visual picture of London is stereotypical of realist fiction in general, which Peter Brooks argues emphasizes a 'realist vision' that thrives upon representing a thing-filled world resembling ordinary, often lower-class conditions. Reading these details exclusively as visual or physical mimesis cannot, however, account for the literary and performative elements of realist fiction—the text might as well be a travel guide. Instead, the significance of this descriptive photo-realism is how the sense of physical reality makes the virtual space of fiction more immersive to draw the reader into its performative content. Creating an interactive virtual world that exhibits generic space, an intersubjective objectivity that relates particular individuals to one another within a generally acceptable shared framework, realist fiction describes the world as one we can interact with and within *together*. Thus, whereas the absolute

reality of the transcendental illusion is abstracted from human activity and therefore has no significance to our lives, generic reality presents the (spatial) relationality of the world we live in as always already open to interpretation and action.

Dickens' narration of London as a generic space is evident in the two linked sketches entitled "The Streets – Morning" and "The Streets – Night" which begin the text's central section³⁵ by introducing us to the streets which tie together his individual scenes into a picture of London as a whole.³⁶ The morning street sketch proceeds in linear installments tied with the rising sun, as London begins its day with bustle and activity. The streets are portrayed as a stable environment, an unchanging arena upon which people stage their daily lives. The descriptions contain incredible visual detail that is both particularized—the details metonymically represent the variation and complexity that make the streets an actual environment—and ubiquitous—the descriptions emphasize the commonness and repeatability of the streets' detail, as shown in the sketch's opening lines:

The appearance presented by the streets of London an hour before sunrise, on a summer's morning, is most striking even to the few whose unfortunate pursuits of pleasure, or scarcely less unfortunate pursuits of business, cause them to be well acquainted with the scene. There is an air of cold, solitary desolation about the noiseless streets which we are accustomed to see thronged at other times by a busy, eager crowd . . . (69)

³⁵ Although the sketches were originally released in serial form, Dickens revised and organized them into a single volume divided into four main sections: "Seven Sketches from our Parish," "Scenes," "Characters," and "Tales." "Scenes" is the longest and most iconic section.

³⁶ After describing the streets generally, Dickens proceeds with a series of highly particularized sketches devoted to London landmarks (such as "Seven Dials," "Meditations in Monmouth-street," and "Astley's"), institutions (such as "Doctor's Commons," "Hackney-coach Stands," and "Omnibuses"), and activities (such as "London Recreations" and "Public Dinners").

This establishes the streets as a generic space, a constant structuring environment to which language can refer and upon which activities can rely—one can become ‘accustomed’ or ‘acquainted with the scene.’ Furthermore, what is ‘most striking’ about this scene is the uncanniness of seeing the streets, which are usually rendered invisible as the background for the ‘busy, eager crowd,’ empty and noiseless. That Dickens’ description of this space is always already implicated in the possibility of acting within it resonates with Kant’s definition of space as “the condition of the possibility of experiences, not as a determination dependent on them, and is an *a priori* representation that necessarily grounds outer appearances” (*CPR* 175). Both Dickens and Kant’s treatment of space are generic, therefore, in that they depict realization as an intersubjective condition for experience rather than particular facts of an external world.

In order to think the world (and thereby also to interact with or in it), we must have some notion of its independence from us, as Wittgenstein describes when he writes that “The world is independent of my will” (*TLP* 6.373). This is built into even very basic notions of agency, even unconscious ones, such as those involved when we step around an ottoman: “My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there” (*OC* §7). Whether or not we (can) articulate our assumptions, we talk and act *as if* objects were somehow outside of us and that it is possible to have similar interactions with a single object—a pencil seems not to care which hand moves it. Yet, despite the fact that we think of the world as independent in this way, Wittgenstein argues that this is simultaneously a form of dependence, writing that “Things are independent in so far as they can occur in all possible situations, but this form of independence is a form of

connexion with states of affairs, a form of dependence” (*TLP* 2.0122). When Wittgenstein discusses independence as ‘occurring in all possible situations,’ he avoids the transcendental illusion by not moving outside of the language of human activity into some posited metaphysical realm. Instead, he talks of ‘possible situations,’ that is, of the ability of multiple individuals to have similar experiences. Thus, the heart of this ‘reality’ is in the fact that human experience is regular—on some level experience falls into regular patterns that hold relatively stable across different times or individuals. Simply put, ‘two can play at that game’—at the *same* game. Although this regularity is itself not an object or a universal law, it is an element of consistency that is necessary for human agency, ranging from our ability to continually orient ourselves with respect to objects in space and time (Kant’s emphasis) to our ability to communicate (Wittgenstein’s emphasis). This difficult-to-define discursive regularity, this imperceptible feature of our experience and agency, this always operative but never discoverable principle, this is generic because despite being inherently subjective and experiential, it is not particular—the generic is something that is (potentially) accessible to different individuals at different times.³⁷

In fiction, generic space is rarely expressed philosophically, but emerges from linguistic strategies of physical or visual description. Generality is expressed in the street sketches through non-particular descriptions, which lack any features to distinguish individual streets, a notion that recurs even in the highly particularized sketches. In “Seven Dials,” for example, Boz writes that “The peculiar character of these streets, and

³⁷ I don’t say that it is equally accessible or that it is accessible to all individuals at all times.

the close resemblance each one bears to its neighbour, by no means tends to decrease the bewilderment in which the unexperienced wayfarer through ‘the Dials’ finds himself involved” (94). The Dials are thus oddly distinguished *by* their repetitiveness and generality. The form of description involved in depicting these spaces enforces the sense of generality, tied to Dickens’ critique of London society, as Garcha notes when he describes this description of the Dials:

Several attributes make this passage typical of Dickens’ descriptions in his urban sketches: it focuses intently on an impoverished place and people; it includes an excessive number of adjectives and telling details that accentuate the scene’s degenerate state, to the point of redundancy (“dirty men, filthy women, squalid children”); it interlaces its bleak representation with humor and irony (the narrator’s “irresistible conviction that no bird in its proper senses, who was permitted to leave . . . , would ever come back again” and his characterization of brokers’ shops as “refuges for destitute bugs”); and it takes a large amount of textual space, continuing long after it has made its central point about the scene’s sorry condition. (122-3)

These formal elements indicate that Dickens’ deployment of generality is part of the content (as well as the form) of the description, as he links the tragedy of generic life with the materiality of describing generic space. This descriptive stasis indicates that these social spaces persist across time and through changes. For example, Dickens writes that “We have hinted at the antiquity of our favourite spot. ‘A Monmouth-street laced coat’ was a by-word a century ago; and still we find Monmouth-street the same” (96-8). Throughout the text, this kind of relative permanence of places is tied to a repetitiveness in social function, as the stability or instability of social practices is seen as determining whether the physical changes to the locations are material or immaterial.³⁸ That realist

³⁸ An example of small changes becoming significant is found in the “Astley’s” sketch, where Dickens writes: “Astley’s has altered for the better – we have changed for the worse. Our histrionic taste is gone,

literature has an important role alongside the descriptive language of everyday interactions is therefore not that it simply replicates or informs us about the world just as ordinary language does. Rather, the literary construction of generic space engages and relates generality in a unique way, tied to the uniquely freedom of fiction in several important ways. The commonality of mass-produced text, for instance, creates a generic reading experience which links individual readers in an ‘imagined community’³⁹ that anchors the regularity of social experience. Furthermore, being a fundamentally linguistic form, this experience of reading *in language* also draws the reader into the discursive regularities in which generic space resides. Finally, whereas everyday language relies so heavily on generic space to accomplish social activities that it often cannot reflect upon its own operation, fiction’s relative freedom from practical concerns gives it the ability to dwell upon generic space itself, creating a self-reflective engagement with generic discursive constructions that can be an end-in-itself.

Thus, literature takes advantage of its status as representation to challenge the transcendental illusion by providing a generic intersubjective environment that operates as a reality (environment of interaction) devoid of reality (absolute objectivity). Philosophy likewise uses the intrinsic agential and context-dependent character of language to deconstruct rigid propositions of external reality. For Kant, this generic treatment of space as the immanent condition of external experience directly contradicts the notion of the world as an independently existing reality. As the self-locative

and with shame we confess, that we are far more delighted and amused with the audience, than with the pageantry we once so highly appreciated” (129).

³⁹ Benedict Anderson, who first coined this phrase, links print culture to the rise of nationalism.

establishment of spatial relations, therefore, space is not a thing-in-itself, but is a way of understanding external phenomena such that we can engage with them in productive ways. For philosophers like Kant and Berkeley, the realist metaphysical claims that the external world of objects extended in space exists in any way beyond our ability to perceive and interact with it are both nonsensical and misleading—what purchase have things-in-themselves on *our* lives. Instead, we ought to think of space as a conceptual regularity that organizes our experience, a feature of agency rather than of reality.

Although Kant focuses primarily on the perceptual/conceptual apparatus of individuals in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, his argument is thoroughly implicated in the regularity of language. An individual may move around his or her immediate physical environment without any articulate or philosophical notion of space, but an articulate discursive notion is implicit in all linguistic (inter-personal) invocations of the physicality or locality of objects. Wittgenstein extends this notion more explicitly to encompass both social action and the regularity of language, showing how our interwoven lives require discursive constructs thinking and talking together. To put it differently, whether or not we all inhabit the same world in ‘reality,’ in order for us to inhabit the same world in *practice*—in action and discussion—we need to characterize our activity in relation to a notion of generic space. Thus, just as Kant finds that human action without the organizing regularity of space is inconceivable,⁴⁰ so too is social action without the practice of relating to the world as a generic space impossible.

⁴⁰ Applied to language use, this closely resembles Wittgenstein’s so-called ‘private language argument,’ in which he claims that a language entirely for a single person is nonsensical.

Dickens likewise deconstructs this rigid notion of objectivity, but employs representation rather than argumentation to do so. His journalistic background and reputation as a realist make his fiction easily associable with external reality, yet his imaginative portrayal of his world reveal that his objective portrayals are inextricable from his subjective interpretations. In this way, his realism reveals that the true nature of objectivity is generic rather than metaphysical. That Dickensian narrative tends towards these subjective acts of creation is well-documented. For example, Garcha notes that “Dickens’ amazing descriptive style appeals precisely because it revels in *creating* the marks and striking features that define characters and objects vividly” (141). Likewise, J. Hillis Miller remarks that “The *Sketches* are not *mimesis* of an externally existing reality, but the interpretation of that reality according to highly artificial schemas inherited from the past. They came into existence through the imposition of fictitious patterns rather than through the discovery of patterns ‘really there’” (143-4). In both these passages, it is clearly indicated that Dickens’ descriptions are also creations. The transcendental illusion can therefore be alternately described as artificially separating the objective from the subjective by claiming the reality of a completely standpoint-independent perspective. Instead, in Kantian terms, objective and subjective are necessarily interrelated, in that the very possibility of an objectively valid experience must make sense of how individual standpoints can be intersubjectively connected. Thus, the subjectivity of Dickens’ narrative, which relies upon and relates Boz’s particular standpoint in general terms is precisely what makes it appear objective and real.

This is evident in one of the most well-known of the *Sketches*—“Meditations on Monmouth-street”—in which the narrator’s imaginative tendencies take a particularly explicit form. While describing displays of used clothing, Boz ‘sees’ the clothes come to life, inhabited by their interpolated former owners. In this sketch, Dickens explicitly inverts the direction of realization implied by the transcendental illusion—instead of only proceeding from the materiality of the world to its description, he emphasizes how the phenomenological basis of human significance precedes our understanding of the material plane (the absent owners of the used clothing) and reveals the role of subjectivity in the moment of perception (the dreamlike character of his imagination). Thus, like his description of door-knockers in another sketch, as this story tells the tales of people who are absent, the trace of the human element—of cares and sufferings—provides significance for his flight of fancy. This aligns with his social critique as this reversal highlights the alienation of the industrial productive apparatus that fills the world with products, falsely locating significance within the material reality of products rather than the subjective, human reality of the producers.⁴¹ Thus, even the inanimate objects that populate the world are no mere things-in-themselves, with physical characters independent from their role in human practice. Dickensian objects are both symbolic and transformative.⁴² This backward movement from the material trace to its human antecedents represents a dominant paradigm in the *Sketches*, as Miller argues:

If the *Sketches* are a work for the critic to explicate, searching for patterns dispersed in their multiplicity, London was for the young Dickens, in his

⁴¹ Admittedly, I am reading Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism into Dickens here. Yet, although Dickens would likely not have expressed himself in these terms, this reading does fit nicely with the text.

⁴² Heidegger similarly argues for the non-neutrality of objects in “The Question Concerning Technology”

disguise as Boz, also a set of signs, a text to interpret. The speculative pedestrian is faced at first not with a continuous narrative of the lives of London's people, not with the subjective state of these people at the present moment, and not even with people seen from the outside as appearance or spectacle. What he sees at first are things, human artifacts, streets, buildings, vehicles, objects in a pawnbroker's shop, old clothes in Monmouth Street. These objects are signs, present evidence of something absent. Boz sets himself the task of inferring from these things the life that is lived among them. Human beings are at first often seen as things among other things, more signs to decipher, present hints of that part of their lives which is past, future, or hidden. (125)

Thus, the realist mode of the *Sketches* itself challenges the very notion of objective reality as the physicality and materiality that form much of the text's descriptive content is contextualized both by general questions of human significance and Boz's particular cast of mind. Writing in the wake of industrialization, in which a technological revolution went hand in hand with a social one, Dickens' things either signify or structure personhood. His world, moreover, is a generic space for personhood to unfold in relation to both world and others.

This version of Kant's 'Copernican revolution,' in which we center the universe of realist literature on subjective engagement rather than objective reality, is aptly described in the progression of Boz's thinking as he begins to re-center his world. At first, already well within realist assumptions about external reality, Boz is troubled by the encroachment of his own imagination upon objective reality. Yet, as his experience at Monmouth-street progresses, his confidence in his imagination solidifies: "The idea seemed a fantastic one, and we looked at the clothes again, with a firm determination not to be easily led away. No, we were right; the more we looked, the more we were convinced of the accuracy of our previous impression. There was the man's whole life

written as legibly on those clothes, as if we had his autobiography engrossed on parchment before us” (99). This is not a simple rejection of the notion of external reality, but a reformulation of reality. At this point, comparing his reading of the garments to that a reading of text, Boz considers reality in a new non-objective framework—a literary one. The fictionality of the text paradoxically becomes part of its realist aspect here. The subjectivity of Boz’s unique interpretation reveals the world as not wholly objective, as not the final arbiter of truth and representation. Thus, Boz destabilizes the divide between reality and fiction when he claims “we saw, or fancied we saw – it makes no difference which – the change that began to take place” (100). This blurring of reality and imagination is not merely indicative of a dreamlike state of confusion, but rather displays the necessary connectedness between visual presentations and their interpretation, the world and how we engage it, reality and fiction.

That it no longer matters to Boz whether his narration conforms to some external notion of truth and reality shows that he moves outside the transcendental illusion, even though he never abandons the notion of or desire for a ‘realistic’ approximation. Instead, the *Sketches* indicate that their imaginative component simply is realistic, conceived in a different way. Finally, when Boz notes that “We could imagine that coat – imagine! we could see it; we *had* seen it a hundred times – sauntering in company with three or four other coats of the same cut, about some place of profligate resort at night” (100), he unhinges his fiction from the standard notion of linear time—the imagining becomes part of a series of repetitions extending backwards from the moment of narration and yet all simultaneous and equivalent. The narrated experience transcends the practicality of his

singular impression and becomes a (textual) event, part of the relations that enable subjective interpretation to be replicated across the particularity of individual subjects. The experience is realistic precisely in its textuality—as reading, the subjective experience is precisely what makes reality accessible. Thus, there is something right about the calling fiction real, in that it has significance for our engagement with the world. Thus, subjectivity does not threaten objectivity. It is precisely the subjective element that finds realism at its most ‘real.’ This Kantian turn locates the significance of notions of the world within our conceptual framework. More self-representation than representation, realism is an exploration of the self, of conceptuality, and of the very discursive fabric from which it is woven.

Subjectivity is thus revealed at the heart of the material world, and the subject/object binary is problematized. Wittgensteinian philosopher Stanley Cavell notes that “The problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his subjectivity, but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement, but to master it in exemplary ways” (*MWM* 94). This certainly applies to Dickens, whose *Sketches* are almost autobiographical in their recognition of the interpretive eye, as well as to Tolstoy, whose narratives are legendary for their pointed critical commentary on the narrated events. More generally, the realist novel is firmly situated within the discursive, social, and material contexts working, as Wittgenstein does, from within their object of analysis. The realist novel is therefore far more self-reflective than reflective, presenting a subjective engagement with reality whose significance lies in this self-referential moment. To actively read a realist novel is thus to engage one’s own subjective relation to the world, to inhabit an analytical

space that exposes and engages the preconditions for knowledge, language, and activity. Characterizing this as merely reflective of reality is a gross oversimplification that fails to recognize that reality only has significance for us because we participate in it. Reality cannot be objective for us because *we* are not objective—if we interact with reality at all, it is from within what Wittgenstein calls a ‘form of life.’

THE EXPERIENCE OF GENERIC TIME

As the condition of possibility of intersubjective interaction, generic space underlies but does not contain experience itself—how a person acts and interacts in space necessarily unfolds temporally. Dickens’ repeated emphasis is of the lived experience of relating to space, both in the material space of London and the textual space of the *Sketches*, and both life and experience are fundamentally temporal. Generic space is essentially abstract, a way of characterizing an environment. Whereas space relates to the world as a way of understanding its externality and materiality, time relates directly to our experience of the world, to subjectivity itself. Thus, Kant pairs the ‘external intuition’ of space with the ‘internal intuition’ of time, which is not perceived in an experience, but is that which makes experience experiential, as he writes:

Time is nothing other than the form of inner sense, i.e., of an intuition of our self and our inner state. For time cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position, etc., but on the contrary determines the relation of representations in our inner state. (*CPR* 180)

That is, because temporality is a feature of us rather than the world, temporality is implicit in all experience. As an inner intuition, time systematically organizes all

perceived events as events located temporally relative to one another because they are all temporally located relative to us. Like space, time unifies conception and agency relative to the subject, who understands the systematicity of the world (as thinkable and interactable) by virtue of being immersed within the relations that make up the system. As temporal beings, we *experience* the world, rather than grasping it as either a totality or a meaningless whirl of sensations.⁴³ The possibility of time is therefore the possibility of experience and therefore also the possibility of agency, as it allows the subject to both perceive and enact changes in the relations that connect the subject to the outer world.

Just as space is intrinsically generic, in that conceiving of oneself as located relative to other possible locations builds in the possibility of other subjects and objects populating and giving extension to other parts of space, so too time necessarily relates one's own experience to others by situating the self within relations of simultaneity or succession. As is usually the case for Kant, subjectivity and objectivity are integrated in the very nature of temporal perspective:

Time is therefore merely a subjective condition of our (human) intuition (which is always sensible, i.e., insofar as we are affected by objects), and in itself, outside the subject, is nothing. Nonetheless it is necessarily objective in regard to all appearances, thus also in regard to all things that can come before us in experience. (*CPR* 181)

For Kant, subjectivity consists in the fact that one's cognition and agency are always already performed from within one's self-location in space and time, the distinctive perspective available only to the self. On the other hand, that this self-location is always shifting relative to generic space and time constructs a relational framework that specifies

⁴³ The former is theoretically the perspective of a God, *sub specie aeternitatis* ('from the standpoint of eternity'), while the latter would theoretically be the perspective of non-agential things-in-themselves.

one's particular position in a system, and is therefore objective. Thus, intersubjectivity in Kant does not entail that one's particular subjective experience is immediately transparent to others, but rather that one's subjective experience is developed in contextual relations to generic space and time that an individual only contingently occupies. The potential interchangeability of individual perspectives is a structural feature of our conception and agency, in that the possibility of changing from one standpoint to another is implicit in understanding and acting from within one's extant standpoint. This view enables a theoretical distinction between subject and subject position, a relation at least theoretically able to be occupied by more than one subject.

Depictions of generic time (and generic experience) are characteristic of the *Sketches*, which explicitly depicts a stage upon which a generic drama is enacted and reenacted. Despite the particular historicity of Dickens' narrative, which describes the London of a particular era, the narrated time is portrayed as cyclical and thereby generic. The morning and night sketches exemplify a theme that runs throughout the text, the notion that particular moments that Boz presents are instances of a reiterated series of the same scenes, plots, and conditions that keep repeating themselves within the habitual cycles that make up the London lifestyle. For example, Boz writes of a newspaper account of a hot-air balloon launch, "If we have forgotten to mention the date, they have only to wait till next summer, and take the account of the first ascent, and it will answer the purpose equally well" (159). Even permanent changes are contextualized in this way. For example, "Shops and Their Tenants" describes the succession of failed shops that pass through one particular location in a way that makes these changes symptomatic of a

recurring pattern of social struggle. In this case, and many others like it, temporal succession is characterized as repetition, indicating that generic experience is based on the relational nature of experience itself and not located in the reality of particular moments.

That experiences, unfolding in generic time, are thus intersubjectively available, has consequences for Dickens' characterization, which presents individuals primarily as particular instantiations of general tendencies. In the 'Scenes' especially, the characters that inhabit the generic space and time of London are often described as types or subject positions. Ubiquitous rather than unique, particulars are frequently rendered in general terms. Thus, in "The Streets – Morning," the numerous people are initially indicated by generic descriptions, marked by indications of frequency: "the last drunken man" (69), "an occasional policeman (69), "numbers of men and women" (70), "here and there, a bricklayer's labourer" (70), "a little knot of three or four schoolboys" (70), "the usual crowd of Jews and nondescripts" (72), etc. Even when later passages in the street sketches develop particular characters with proper names, the generality of these characters is unmistakable. For example, Mrs. Macklin and Mrs. Walker appear simultaneously with identical responses to a situation described as typical of street-life:

In the suburbs [generic space],⁴⁴ the muffin-boy [generic character] rings his way down the little street [generic space], much more slowly than he is wont to do; for Mrs Macklin [proper name], at No. 4 [generic space], has no sooner [generic time] opened her little street-door [generic space], and screamed out 'Muffins!' with all her might, than Mrs Walker [proper name], at No. 5 [generic space], puts her head out of the parlour-window, and screams 'Muffins!' too [generic time] . . . (75)

⁴⁴ The bracketed comments in this passage are my own interjections.

The interchangeability of people with respect to generic experience, represented here in the parallelism between Mrs Macklin and Mrs Walker, is a recurring theme in the *Sketches*. While the proper names inserted in this sea of generality attest to some essential level of individual uniqueness, the narrative subsumes these individuals within repetitive patterns of behavior, presenting social experiences as the same for many individuals. The reality of fiction, seen in this sense, is that characters are not genuinely autonomous⁴⁵ but are rather in constant negotiation with social conditions that structure generic experience. Thus, while the particulars of fiction are typically untrue—such and such character did not actually exist—the relations uncovered by generalizing the descriptions can have real effects.

Thus, the narration of generic time within fiction enacts a literary and linguistic engagement with its object of study, in that the intrinsic abstractness of textual representation is itself expressive of the move from particular to generic experience. There is a degree of generality to Boz's description of his contemporary London; one really could observe scenes quite like those narrated in the *Sketches* in that the events of the narrated generic time, any/every London morning or evening, could be experienced by any/everyone. This may be less true for us, who are too far removed from Dickens' London, yet we can access a deeper generality implicit in the generic experience of reading itself, a textual mediation that wields generic space and time as itself an experience which is not localized or particular. Generic time is, therefore, as much part

⁴⁵ For example, in the Nietzschean sense of the autonomy of the übermensch, who is somehow able to transcend social conditioning. If this concept has any hold, it is an idealistic rather than a realistic image, an imperative to resist total conformity and become more self-caused.

of the form of fiction as its content. For example, in the aforementioned passage from the “Seven Dials,” the narrative draws the reader into a peculiar engagement with the narrator’s act of observation. In describing the Dials, Dickens does not discuss an objective similarity between the streets; he focuses instead on the state of confusion which the streets produce in the “unexperienced wayfarer.” In so doing, Dickens employs the experience of reading as its own lived experience, constructing the text as an environment to be perused for its own sake—the generality of the description can create the same confusion as the streets themselves. This experience is not identical to that of walking through London itself, but it interacts with it in complex ways—as precession, reminder, or even substitute. Thus, independently of a lived experience with the Dials, the linear unfolding of the textual narrative does more than describe that (in)experience—it itself produces an experience that is also in some way *of* the Dials. The form of the narration, in which Boz relates temporal experience from a personal perspective, maintaining a journalistic and autobiographical frame throughout, is characterized as accessible to a wide range of readers.⁴⁶ This singular perspective is converted to generic time both by the mass production of the text and by the narrator’s use of the plural pronoun ‘we’ to describe his perspective, which enables readers to identify with and to some extent occupy the narrative perspective. Thus, generic space and time both provide an environment within which readers can engage in the lived experiences through

⁴⁶ Although the accessibility of the text was (and still is) not completely universal, due to the unequal distributions both of books and of literacy, Dickens’ diligence in making his publications cheap and available speak to his awareness of this problematic.

reading. These reading experiences are ‘of the world’ to a certain extent, in that they directly respond to the world as a set of experiential possibilities.

That the generality—and therein the reality—of fiction transcends representation itself to include the experience of reception is also seen in the theatricality of fiction. Even realist literature, which explicitly characterizes itself as mimetic rather than theatrical, is a *presentation* as well as a representation and therefore ‘stages’ itself for the reader. No matter how much a narrator strives to make the reader feel like a voyeur, with privileged access to the ongoing life of others who are oblivious being observed, in fact the entire lives of fictional characters are always already *for us*. That is, fictional characters and plot exist in order to be observed, and even the most isolated characters—a Robinson Crusoe or Fanny Price—are in that sense public figures. This is especially true for Dickens, whose devotion to the theater played a significant role in his life and fiction. From a strict analysis of style, Dickens is a problematic realist at best because he consistently presents exaggerated and theatrical scenes that fly in the face of pure mimesis. As we have seen, however, criterion of mimetic re-presentation an objective external reality does not capture the more fundamental reality of fiction. The theatricality of fiction is part of its reality, the reality of a generic experience that can be intersubjectively shared amongst the members of its audience. In fact, sometimes the moments when fictional presentation diverges most strongly from paralleling extra-literary experience is where they feel most real. That is, the theatricality of literary conventions render the represented actions in terms we can understand, for theatricality is

nothing but a system of signification that makes internal motives, characters, and thoughts generally accessible from an external perspective.

Throughout the *Sketches* there are moments where Boz explicitly resists purely realist description and presents theatricality as more fundamental. This is especially evident in the sketches on Astley's and Vauxhall-gardens, where Boz presents London spectacles to the reader. The sketch on Vauxhall-gardens describes Boz's daytime visit to a popular London spectacle that was previously only open at night, in the light of the ubiquitous gas-lamps which emphasize London's artificial modernity throughout the *Sketches*. Dickens writes that "In an evil hour, the proprietors of Vauxhall-gardens took to opening them by day. We regretted this, as rudely and harshly disturbing that veil of mystery which had hung about the property for many years" (155). Daylight symbolizes descriptive realism, which in this sketch does violence to the inherent theatricality that made the spectacle so compelling, as Boz regretfully comments:

We paid our shilling at the gate, and then we saw for the first time, that the entrance, if there has ever been any magic about it at all, was now decidedly disenchanted, being, in fact, nothing more nor less than a combination of very roughly-painted boards and sawdust. We glanced at the orchestra and supper-room as we hurried past – we just recognized them, and that was all. (155)

Portraying realism as disenchantment, Boz emphasizes visuality here as simple recognition devoid of significance. On the other hand, the magic of fiction is largely that its descriptions are laden with significance. In Dickens' theatrical realism, used clothes and door-knockers come alive as expressions of their owners' characters. Always already inflected by the lives which give significance to the external world, Dickensian descriptions focus on places and objects as causes and symptoms of society. The reality

of fiction is not, therefore, photographic, historical, or scientific accuracy—all better captured by non-literary modes of representation. Instead, the reality of fiction is decidedly a portrayal of generic reality, the reality of a world implicated in the practice of giving intersubjective significance by generalizing subjective interpretations of objective reality. Fiction therefore presents an illusory truth by relating already interpreted appearances that we can experience as a reality unto itself.

Just as the ordinary conception of time is unfolded in the experience of living, generic time is both linear and finite; it is measured in the intervals that span human experiences (including the temporal experiences of reading and imagining). Furthermore, like the Kantian conception of time, generic time is somewhat subject-independent despite its subjective qualities, relating an experience that transcends individual experience and is generally accessible to different individuals at different times. Thus, to portray generic time is to relate how simultaneity and succession underlie experience itself, and to characterize individual lives as participating within a network of inter-social relationships that generate significances while operating in an environment described by generic space. Generic time is therefore closely tied to generic life or experience, that of a subject position (inhabitable by any one of many interchangeable individuals) whose significance within a larger social context exists, despite its abstraction from the individual who occupies it.⁴⁷ This is a particularly literary idea, as the written word is at once atemporal (the words do not change) and temporal (it is always read experientially).

⁴⁷ There are certainly ethical questions surrounding the existence and control of generic life, which will be discussed further in subsequent chapters, particularly Chapters 3 and 4.

The generic, then, is part of what is considered ‘real’ in the realist novel, namely its applicability to lives that share concerns, significances, and relations. While for Kant, the possibility of access of others is present in even an isolated individual’s application of generic space and time, the fact that there actually are others who actually do share our generic experience is of vital importance, especially to a socially-conscious author like Dickens. That subjects and subject positions exist in constant relation to other subjects and social conditions introduces the ethics of social interaction into all generic representation. This is illustrated in a passage in which Dickens more clearly indicates that he is describing relations between subject positions rather than subjects by providing generic names for the characters involved:

Animosities spring up between floor and floor; the very cellar asserts his equality. Mrs A. ‘smacks’ Mrs B.’s child, for ‘making faces.’ Mrs B. forthwith throws cold water over Mrs A.’s child for ‘calling names.’ The husbands are embroiled – the quarrel becomes general – an assault is the consequence, and a police-officer the result. (96)

This particular narrative operates both in generic space and time, producing a story that has narrative continuity but is not tied to any particular place, time, or character. This story can be enacted in a multitude of contexts—the quarrel not only ‘becomes general,’ but is already general. Cause, consequence, and result are linked through generic time, which is also narrative time, since narrative focuses on the relations and interconnections of a linear unfolding story. That even highly personalized realist narratives, such as *Jane Eyre* or *Anna Karenina*, are considered relatable depends on the generality of narrative time, of the realist emphasis on a relational structure that operates across multiple places, times, and individuals. Yet, the relational structures described by realism are not enacted

equally across all places, times, and individuals and the mobility across generic space and time is restricted in many ways. The generality here is never the pure generality of human experience, if such a thing even exists. The *Sketches*, like all realist texts, works from *within* the operational, generic experience of an extant social reality. Thus, even when the realist novel touches on elements of human nature that transcend the particularities of its cultural situatedness, it does not do so from an objective standpoint—the reality that the realist novel stands on is itself the generic life of the society into which it is born.

Furthermore, a tension arises between the regulation that molds actions into repeatable, recognizable, generic experience and the freedom of the individual not exclusively bound to a particularity within generic life. Thus, in the social criticism of “The Prisoner’s Van,” which describe the transition of the younger girl into the elder (within a repeated drama), Dickens establishes a tension between two possibilities of the generic. On one hand, the availability of transition and becoming that the younger girl embodies demonstrates that generic life is to some extent subject-independent—one individual can be in the world according to various different relations (one girl can *become* the other). On the other hand, the *inevitability* of the described transition locates this mobility outside of the girls’ agency—the mobility described here has no freedom in it. This is because while different subjects are interchangeable within a subject position, the subject position itself is socially-constituted as to compel a particular narrative. By simultaneously forcing the girls into this position by maintaining conditions of poverty that feed into the institution of prostitution and ostracizing the girls for accepting the fate

they have been driven to, this social conditioning holds subjects accountable for occupying marginalized subject positions, maintained by disparities of economics and identity politics. Yet, whereas within the narration individual agency is assaulted by the inexorability of social construction, simply by revealing generic experience narration itself reveals the intrinsic contingency of social construction. Rather than merely describing the actual, narration of generic experience opens up the realm of the possible, showing how experience might have been different is implicit in experience itself. Even while showing the uniqueness of individual subjectivities, integrating these subjectivities in a relational framework of interrelated subject positions realizes counterfactuals within the significance of the (f)actual. Thus, another might have occupied any of the available perspectives presented by the text, including those of the characters, narrator, or reader. Furthermore, the world as experienced through these perspectives might have been different. Because the generic experience of fiction is one of signification—the relation of subjectivity to an objective discursive environment consisting in multiple interpretive and experiential possibilities—the reality of fiction is always already questionable. Its reality must be *realized*, a process at once subjective (in that it can be realized only through the activity of a particular subject) and objective (in that the narrated space and time open an intersubjective space in principle generally available). Elucidating the possibilities in generic experience, therefore, enables the reader/critic to navigate these textual possibilities in an openly self-reflective manner, making literature's effect on us more an active than a passive process.

RE-READING THE REAL

The reality of fiction, therefore, comes to how the presentation of fictional worlds enables and structures interactive relational experiences that connect general and particular, objective and subjective. The act of reading is an act of realization in which individual subjects enter a performative fictional space that is real insofar as it realizes the very relational framework of the world through generic space, time, and life. Literature is itself a relational context, ideally suited to show rather than say the relations into which we are thrown. Under the sway of the transcendental illusion, which sees fictions as disguised or imitative descriptions of the way things really are, texts are reified as determinable amalgams of form and content. Not only does this misrepresent the inherently active and dynamic process of representation itself, treating representation as a static correspondence to external reality can promote passivity ('this is how it is' taken uncritically limits agency by expressing resigned acceptance of the status quo). Although in a certain sense, realist novels speak only once through their fixed published form, realization happens anew with each reading or rereading. When our understanding of the reality of fiction is reformulated as generic, therefore, the role of our cognition, subjectivity, and agency become visible. That is, the reality of fiction is neither that the represented world is equivalent to our own nor that it directly corresponds to our own, but rather that we relate to the represented world as part of our lived experience. Representation as such, revealing what is, is neither conservative nor revolutionary. There is no great potential here. Our responses to fiction, on the other hand, are necessarily inflected with pragmatic, social, and ethical concerns and have enormous

transformative potential. We must read fiction, insofar as it is realistic, as an attempt to connect imagined worlds not with the actuality of our own world (the domain of cartography, history, and science), but with the relations that implicate us in our lived realities. The reality of fiction is therefore objective only insofar as it connects individuals in an intersubjectively accessible framework. Just as the Kantian notion of space and time characterizes our self-locating ability to situate ourselves with respect to the world we can interact with, generic space and time in fiction situate readers with respect to a reality that is always already social.

This act of ‘relating to’ fiction realizes relations that transcend fictional space. Realist literature, therefore, can only be understood as a possibility space in which readers are confronted with transformative engagements that pertain to their ongoing situatedness within everyday life. Firstly, in exposing the relations, characteristics, and consequences of generic experience within the ongoing human activity of broader social engagement, realist novels teach us much about the discursive construction of the reality we constantly engage in—the reality of a generic environment that enables the regularity of inter-personal interaction. Secondly, in forming part of the discursive fabric of the social contexts it describes, realist novels participate and enable participation in these discursive regularities, thus providing a textual environment that necessarily conduces to a self-reflective philosophical engagement with our own conditions of thought, speech, and action. Finally, as a textual/literary environment, realist novels create their own generic environments, separate from (albeit related to) the one we call reality. As a unique fictional interactive space, the realist novel thus creates a new plane of experience

in which we can apply our own agential makeup—thoughts, beliefs, tendencies, feelings, desires, ethical views, etc.—to an othered context, performing an active, self-reflective becoming within the provisional safety of the fictional (virtual) world. In all these ways, realist novels enable readers to *do*, to have performative engagements with textual spaces that can have productive and transformative impacts. Although texts themselves cannot express the totality of this significance, it can provide this significance by enabling the active reader to have an experience that closely relates to, but is not identical with, the experiences of the everyday, of reality itself.

Scholium 2

The Realist Gaze

To some extent, the relationality of generic space and time are implicit in all language and representation. Description itself entails a parallelism from the singularity of a particular utterance and the general conditions of possibility for agential experience. Realism, however, depicts generic space and time not only because it is a linguistic representation. Instead, the stylistic and aesthetic features of realism, the conventional literary ways realism represents reality, are all oriented around this realist imperative. This section is therefore concerned with the specifics of realism as representation, as a situated historical practice of art. As a conventional, historically-situated artistic practice, realism explicitly developed in order to look at the ordinary,⁴⁸ as Linda Nochlin notes:

A new demand for democracy in art, accompanying the demand for political and social democracy, opened up a whole new realm of subjects hitherto unnoticed or considered unworthy of pictorial or literary representation. While the poor might always have been with us, they had hardly been granted a fair share of serious artistic attention before the advent of Realism – nor had the middle classes, who were now the dominant force in society. For the Realists, ordinary situations and objects of daily life were no less worthy of depiction than antique heroes or Christian Saints: indeed for the *‘peintre de la vie moderne’* the noble and beautiful were less appropriate than the commonplace and undistinguished. (33)

⁴⁸ By ‘ordinary,’ I do not mean ‘mundane’ or ‘non-exceptional.’ Instead, I mean that realism attempts to create a fictional world that emphasizes all the things that are important in lived experience, namely the values, interests, and materiality of everyday life in contemporary culture.

In contrast to the tradition of separating pure art and aesthetics from the ‘dirty’ or ‘low’ vicissitudes of the everyday, “The Realists held that the only valid subject for the contemporary artist was the contemporary world” (28). Realism, intrinsically aligned with the ordinary, therefore relies upon an intimate correlation between artistic practice and lived experience. Realization, with its reader-centered focus, becomes a crucial component of realist art, because it requires that ordinary readers identify with the ordinariness of its representation. This ‘realist gaze’ takes a purportedly objective stance on everyday life and therefore is one of the primary literary technologies through which the objective and subjective are connected, making this topic an ideal link between the generic descriptions of Dickens and the psychological realism of Dostoevsky.

Realism starts with the seemingly simple (but incredibly important) decision to direct our attention to ordinary subjects, and subsequently develops rhetorical strategies to represent such subjects. That is, the methods of realist art were developed in order to best portray its chosen subjects. To this end, realism stressed a particular artistic style that stressed mimetic representation that claimed to accurately reflect the real world by occupying the standpoint of an objective or detached observer, as Nochlin describes: “Its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life” (13). Similarly, Lilian Furst writes:

The pressure on writing to mimic and compete with this new form is evident in the program outlined by Duranty in the first issue of the short-lived journal *Réalisme* (1856-57): art should give a truthful representation of the real world by studying contemporary life and manners through meticulous observation, and it should do so dispassionately, impersonally, and objectively. These prescriptions are predicated on two fundamental assumptions: the intelligibility of the universe and the capacity of the

individual eye “to see things clearly, as they *really* were, and to draw appropriate conclusions from this clear apprehension of reality.” (6)

Appropriating journalistic and scientific language, which were both on the rise in this period, realist literature portrayed individuals as extant phenomena to be accurately related in the style of reporting truth, as Ian Watt describes:

Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (32)

This combination of narrative cohesiveness, an aura of authenticity, and a claim to accurately represent the world is characteristic of the literary form we call realism, which Watt claims rises in the eighteenth century, but has its heyday in nineteenth-century Western novels. With the centrality of both the reader-text and text-world relationships, realism strove to be the vanishing mediator that facilitates a reader-world relationship through its representational practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, the possibility of a pure mimetic relationship between text and world has been thoroughly criticized. Language, not to mention art, provides no completely objective viewpoint from which to fully represent the world—that is, representation necessarily differs from represented. Yet, realism itself does not respond to such a theoretical claim in kind, that is, by providing an argument for the correlation between its language and actuality. The very labels of ‘fiction’ (meaning ‘fashioning or feigning’) and ‘art’ (connected with ‘artifice’) suggest the constructedness of the form. Realism makes its claim to truth, rather, by facilitating an aura of

trustworthiness so that the reader will be drawn into the realism of the presentation, accepting the guise of reality as a reality unto itself. It is no secret that fictional reality is not identical with the world as such, but in the moment of reader-text relationship, the fictional world can feel incredibly real. This is the basis of the implied contract between reader and (implied) author, which is based on trust, as Lilian Furst points out:

[Realism] depends closely on the establishment of a sound, trusting relationship between narrating voice and readers, a secure narrative contract that disposes readers to persuasion by the rhetoric. The words printed on the page are designed to act on readers in certain ways: to encourage belief in the illusion by fostering a shared angle of vision with the narrator and, at times, with the protagonists and by implicating place causally in the action. (ix)

As a school of art and literature, realism has developed many techniques to heighten the sense of reality and strengthen the bond of trust readers place in the fictional reality. Yet, these techniques merely accent or deepen a relational sense of fictional reality as pointing to the relationality of the objective world. In fact, in a book all about literary technique, Wayne Booth writes that “the problem of objectivity is not, finally, a problem of particular techniques but of how all techniques are marshaled to convey a given vision of a world” (417). That is to say that although realism is partially defined by the styles, techniques, and strategies it employs, these rhetorical features cannot circumscribe the full significance of realism. Instead, realism opens up a particular type of realization as the condition of possibility for particular types of reader activity. What is important here is therefore that the aforementioned scholars demonstrate that realization is not merely an abstract capacity or textual feature, but is a purposive activity that plays into the significance art has for ordinary people.

To develop this connection further, we must explore the practice of realist representation as presenting a way of relating to this lived context. Representation is fundamentally re-presentation, that is, it presumes that there is something in or of the world already present, which can be understood when presented anew in another medium. Realist representation is typically seen as referring to something directly present, namely ‘reality,’ which is re-presented in language, particularly novelistic prose. Thus, an essential component of realism is the realist gaze,⁴⁹ a particular method⁵⁰ for looking at the world, selecting what to re-present, and characterizing it in language. As every society has its own interests and taboos, choosing what to represent is a highly significant social and political maneuver—there is no such thing as ‘mere’ representation. In England as well as in France,⁵¹ literary realism was accompanied by a changing emphasis that directed the realist gaze towards social reality, an emphasis which helped shape our modern discourses of science, journalism, sociology, psychology, and art. In “This Sublime Museum: Looking at Art at the Great Exhibition,” Rachel Teukolsky describes how the realizing gaze organizes and thereby authenticates the reality laid out for its purportedly objective assimilation:

⁴⁹ In “Censuring the Realist Gaze,” Jann Matlock writes: “I begin this chapter with two premises: that the “realism” imagined both by these critics and by the state censors of 1847 and 1857 can be associated with certain theories of looking, what I am here calling the “realist gaze,” and that this gaze is forged out of a series of anxieties about looking” (Cohen et al. 32).

⁵⁰ The realist gaze is a stance towards fiction, not a literary technique. Technique, however, can make such a stance seem far more natural.

⁵¹ In an essay that connects French realist representation to its contemporary cultural brethren of the wax museum and morgue, Vanessa Schwartz writes that “It is as though the imbrication of realism and spectacle that *flânerie* became a cultural activity for all who participated in Parisian life. As such, realism cannot simply be dismissed as one in a litany of representational practices that reproduced male privilege. Rather, by focusing on realism during the moment of the emergence of mass society in France, we can begin to understand how realism in the age of spectacle (which is not yet passed) necessitated the transformation of all subjects into spectators—offering men and women alike the opportunity to participate in social life by looking at the ‘real thing’ (Cohen et al. 270).”

The mode of disciplined looking advocated by such experts was a rational kind of vision associated with science, especially natural history. It attempted to fit objects neatly into the Exhibition's intricate classificatory system in the same way that eighteenth-century naturalists attempted to categorize the natural world. Objects confronted by this orderly gaze were subjected to a kind of pedestal effect; even blocks of coal and stuffed frogs were meant to be observed with serious contemplation. The expert eye was didactic in spirit, instructing working-class visitors to look but not to touch. It was typified in the detached attitude taken by the Exhibition experts, art writers, botanists, museum curators, chemists, professors, and other jury members who judged the exhibits. It owed something to the optical experience of panoramas, dioramas, and other Victorian visual technologies where the illusion arose from a perspectival distance from the visual stimulus. It would eventually be assimilated to department stores, art galleries, and other new middle-class institutions that featured objects in enticing but untouchable display. In other words, the expert eye assumed a critical distance from the object, both literally and metaphorically: seeing the object in itself, "for its own sake." (Buzard et al. 87-8)

The very gaze of the ceaseless crowds who encountered the whole world at the Great Exhibition parallels the gaze that explores the world in realist fiction. Focusing on nineteenth-century fiction, as I do throughout this project, we can see the clear inheritance of this emphasis. Despite its materiality, the Great Exhibition represented the world symbolically, through carefully arranged and presented items that spoke to forms of life too complex to be captured in a museum. With the synecdochal tendencies that realist fiction is famous for,⁵² tools stood for production, artworks for culture, and artifacts for history. The curating gaze of realism may strive for what Teukolsky calls "critical distance from the object," but it in fact brings objects into systems of significance that structure their meaning and worth. In this vein, Wittgenstein writes "The human gaze has a power of conferring value on things; but it makes them cost more

⁵² Cf. Roman Jakobson on metonymy and metaphor.

too” (*CV* 1). The realist gaze, therefore, is both end and means, purpose and method as it constructs the world as to be related to.

As such, the realist gaze embodies an entire mode of engagement with the world. And as one mode among many it has its advantages and disadvantages. Especially in retrospect, realism has often been criticized for its claim to depict objective truth, a critique that gains ethical purchase in the face of certain nineteenth-century practices of employing the critical distance provided by such objective language to justify social violence. This is the price of conferring value, especially conferring value perceived or portrayed as absolute—in a world of interrelations, conferring value in one area detracts from value in another sometimes to horrifying extent as one can see in the history of colonialism. At the same time, a major motivation for the realist gaze is that the seeming objectivity protected subjects from distinctions such as class in allowing the ordinary individual its rightful place in literature. Fiction is more than museum or display in that it is about more than the material or cultural world—realist fiction is first and foremost about ordinary, individual people. The nineteenth-century realist novel is extremely character driven, providing detailed narration of the inner and outer lives of characters engaged in life’s struggles. The text necessarily engages the story through a narrative frame that brings its characters and events into the domain of the realist gaze. This creates an overtly mediated system—the text embodies a perspectival stance that gazes at its characters, but the text itself is gazed at by the readers. Despite the myth of objectivity, the realist gaze is thoroughly interconnected with ongoing human practices. Thus, although it can be connected either with a totalitarian reifying of one’s value at the

expense of the culturally other or with a democratic valuation of the everyman, one thing is certain—the realist gaze itself shapes the world and therefore has wide-reaching social consequences.

As a representational medium, the realist gaze is not an objective stance towards an independent reality, but rather represents a mediated process of relating to reality. Realism entails realization. Embracing the overt paradox of claiming authenticity and truth despite being explicitly fictional and artistic, realism takes the realist gaze itself its subject, even while it employs it. Thus, the importance of realism's 'looking at the ordinary' is as much about the act of 'looking at' as it is about foregrounding the 'ordinary.' As representational practices, realism and realization alike reveal the role of the gaze in constructing the ordinary. This presents the ordinary not only as a valued subject for fictional representation, but as the subject or agent of realization. The realist gaze, therefore, demonstrates how we approach and construct the way things are. The realist gaze confers value, normativity, and conceptual depth to what it focuses on and is therefore as much about how the one who gazes relates to the world as it is about the world itself. Thus, the next chapter shall turn to the question of subjectivity, how the reality of fiction constructs a subjective world, through Dostoevsky's psychological realism.

Chapter 2

A Matter of Mind:

Dostoevsky's Psychological Realism

"The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world."

-Ludwig Wittgenstein (*TLP* 5.632)

The extent to which we are beholden to the objective, external world is the extent to which our agency is limited. These limitations do not contradict agency, however, but rather structure agency by locating the agent within a nexus of pushes and pulls, tangible connections that allow movement and action. The world is int(e)ractable in the dual sense of being simultaneously beyond and implicit in our agential interventions as, according to Newton's third law of motion, to manipulate and be manipulated are one and the same. Thus, "the subject does not belong to the world" in that subjective thoughts and actions are not mere symptoms of external, objective forces independent of agency, but are implicitly part of the swirl of forces that constitute objective reality. Instead, the subject "is a limit of the world" (*TLP* 5.632) in that it is through our conceptual and agential engagement with the world that both subject and object become coherent, sensible forms rather than undifferentiated, abstract substance. Matter—objective reality—needs mind to make it *matter*, to make it significant for us. Thus, in the previous chapter we found that the objective reality of fiction necessarily entailed

way of capturing an intersubjective agential space, pulling subject into the description of world. In this chapter, we shall re-approach this topic from the other side, starting with the literary portrayal of mind in Dostoevsky's psychological realism, to uncover how the subjectivity of fiction likewise entails objectivity.⁵³

Kant calls the recognition that objective reality is in fact beholden to the meaning-making practices of human subjectivity a "Copernican Revolution," because it inverts our understanding of what reality fundamentally revolves around. Historically, this gradual shift towards subjectivity is enacted in many areas of society whose significance reach far beyond any philosophical theory. For example, Bill Bryson traces the architectural and social progression that transformed the public space of the hall to the private space of the house, structuring society as a conglomeration of individual, relatively isolated domestic spaces—the atomism of nuclear families that underlies the individualist attitudes of democracy and capitalism. Similarly, Ian Watt traces the rise of diary and letter writing as symptomatic of a developing interest in private narrative that directly enabled 'the rise of the novel.' What, however, does this shifting emphasis entail? Does the increasing

⁵³ While I do suggest that the collapsing of the subject/object antinomy is implicit in all literature, this is a particular concern for Russian realism in general and Dostoevsky in particular. As Donna Tussing Orwin writes:

The self that Russian realists construct is made up of matter not visible under a microscope, and we confirm its existence only because we feel its motive power in ourselves. Contemporary European naturalist realism with its links to science tended by contrast to be reductive and therefore to undercut or distort the inner life it was describing. In Russian realism, objective distance is suspended to an unprecedented degree by the author; as a result the subject retains its original "subjective" appearance and complexity. Simply put, the irreducible facts that the Russian author analyzes are broader than those that were allowed by science because the author takes what subjects feel as seriously as what they think or do. Because human beings have direct access only to their own feelings, the prose we will be examining is ipso facto autobiographical to the extent that it depends on the author's ability to examine himself. The defense of subjectivity posed a unique challenge: both Russian authors and their readers had to resist, to some extent, the temptation to dissect what they found in the brave new world of the psyche. At the same time, they had to avoid self-serving sentimentality. The works of Russian realism had to be objectively true and yet remain sympathetic to subjectivity. (10-1)

recognition of the subjective component of reality destabilize its objectivity? The answer I shall pursue here is that reality is far too complex to be merely either objective or subjective—reality is a dance to which both agents and non-agents are invited. We must proceed in both directions—from objective to subjective (Chapter 1) and from subjective to objective (this chapter)—in order to understand both the value and limitation of looking at the reality of fiction from either perspective.

To pursue this dialectic,⁵⁴ we must shift from the third-person journalistic prose of *Sketches by Boz*, whose title emphasizes the separation between content (the sketches) and authorial narration ('by Boz'), to the first-person, highly personalized style of *Notes from Underground*, whose title indicates collected content from the subterranean spaces both of social-marginality and of the subconscious mind. While, as we have seen, some measure of subjective influence is present even in the most objective narrations—such as Boz's journalistic style—explicitly subjective narration is prevalent enough that literary scholars felt it warranted its own designation—*psychological realism*. Although the subjective significance of fiction is not exclusive to this particular literary category, psychological realism is typified by a character-driven, character-focused narration that sheds light on the subjective elements of realization more generally. The essence of this

⁵⁴ Diana Orwin argues that Russian psychological realists enact an exploration similar to this critical investigation, pursuing a dialectic relation between objective and subjective: "Russian writers, even those who rejected Hegelian rationalism for Schelling's 'positive reality' of prerational emotion, framed their ideas within the structure of the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This was true of psychological realists, who built their works around juxtaposition of opposites, including most importantly the inner (subjective) and outer (objective) world. The interaction between these two rather than the romantic preference of the former over the latter was a central theme for the realist school in Russia, the more so because its greatest representatives did not treat subjectivity as simple a delusion. They considered it 'real': the reality of subjectivity is a cardinal principle of all great works of Russian psychological realism" (4-5). The dialectic I pursue here, however, is neither literary nor Hegelian, but follows instead the tradition of the Kantian antinomy and Wittgenstein's ordinary language methodology.

literary form is the destabilization of the realist gaze, the recognition that the seemingly objective standpoint of the scientist or omniscient narrator is itself a guise, a particular psychological mask. Instead, therefore, psychological realism emphasizes the way in which the gaze expresses both looker and looked at, creating meaning through the subjective interpretation of objective phenomena. Typically, this manifests in an intense narrative focus on the inner lives and thoughts of characters, employing such literary techniques as first-person narration, free indirect discourse, and stream-of-consciousness. Such literary style, however, is not what makes fiction psychologically realistic. Psychological realism structures the reader's experience of the text such that the reader feels that the profound affective knowledge of the characters' inner lives bears important resemblances to the actual and possible unfoldings of the 'real' world. Dostoevsky himself comments in a footnote:

Both the author of the notes and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the writer of such notes not only may but even must exist in our society, taking into consideration the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed. I wished to bring before the face of the public, a bit more conspicuously than usual, one of the characters of a time recently passed. He is one representative of a generation that is still living out its life. (3)

Connecting this fictional portrayal of inner life with the hidden truths of everyday people, Dostoevsky's writing is typical of psychological realism in that it makes the reader both think and feel the lived experience of agency by attempting to represent the inarticulable, private, subterranean realm of the subject, the feeling of untouchable, unknowable personal depth that underlies the subject's objectively accessible interactions. In some sense, these fictions take up the challenge offered by the philosophical challenge known

as “the problem of other minds”—that we can only confirm that other people have inner lives like ours by looking for confirmation in their external actions, meaning we can never prove there are any others who are ‘human’ in the way we experience humanity—by accepting that knowing other minds is a leap both of faith and of the imagination and spinning a tale that convinces us of the depth of other minds by showing rather than proving.

Relying on an imaginative showing of what other minds might be like requires not only that the portrayal ring true but also that the depiction have a certain life to it. If one is to make the inaccessible accessible, style matters a great deal. Dostoevsky is particularly notorious for the intense psychological affect of his writing, leading Russian critic D.S. Mirsky to comment that “It has been said of Dostoyévsky that he ‘felt ideas,’ as others feel cold and heat and pain” (284). This leads to his distinctive style, which bears some resemblances to the later modernist styles of stream-of-consciousness and automatic writing, as Mirsky describes:

The dialogue of the novels and the monologue of those of his writings that are written in the person of some fictitious character are also marked by a nervous tension and an exasperated (and perhaps exasperating) “on-endness” that was their creator’s own. They are all agitated, as it were, by a wind of desperate spiritual passion and anxiety, rising from the innermost recesses of his subconsciousness. (284)

Much more has been written on Dostoevsky’s unique style and technique, the various ways in which he strives to make static words take on the complex life of a human’s inner being. Yet, at the same time, Dostoevsky’s psychological narration goes so far that many consider it outside the conventions of psychological realism. For example, Lydia Ginzburg writes:

One of the most controversial issues in the Dostoevskii literature is whether his novels are psychological in the sense of nineteenth century gave that term. If psychologism means the investigation of spiritual life in all of its contradictions and depth, then it would be odd, to say the very least, to exclude Dostoevskii. Yet there can be no doubt that in creating his novel of ideas, Dostoevskii departed from classical nineteenth-century psychologism, the basic principle of which was *explanation*, whether explicit or concealed. . . . The interpretation of the motives governing a character's behavior frequently changes in the course of the Dostoevskiiian novel, and each new solution is by no means the final one. (259-60)

In looking more closely here at realization than realism, Dostoevsky's departure from classical models of explanation demonstrates the more primal nature of realization, which is felt and experienced before it is analyzed. In accord with Wittgenstein's mandate that "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place" (*PI* §109), Dostoevsky emphasizes where lived reality defies explanation, where rational conceptions of psychology fail to account for how people really live. In many of Dostoevsky's texts, his characters act in ways that are not only incomprehensible to others, but make little sense even to themselves. This is a defining characteristic of the *Notes*, whose central character explicitly argues that rationalistic pictures fail to capture the inherent absurdity of life, indicated in statements like "And what if it so happens that *on occasion* man's profit not only may but precisely must consist in sometimes wishing what is bad for himself, and not what is profitable?" (21) and "two times two is five is sometimes also a most charming little thing" (34). In Dostoevsky, depth does not entail clarity—quite the contrary. The better one understands these characters, the more questions are raised, the more explanations fall apart. The more alive these characters seem, the less easy they are to explain, because ultimately to reduce the inaccessible inner space of the subject to objectively clear and distinct terms would be to destroy that inner

life, just as performing an autopsy on a living human would explain its life only by destroying it.

In exploring psychological realism, I wish to accomplish three related tasks. First, I will clear up a possible misconception of the psychological reality of psychological realism by showing how the notion of a private, inner space necessarily collapses into a notion of a subjective-objective interplay. Second, I shall examine how any attempt to explain inner life, especially psychoanalytic critical discourses, is itself activity within inner life and therefore has purpose and significance that go far beyond uncovering the ‘truth.’ Finally, I shall argue that psychological realism enacts a Wittgensteinian philosophical therapy, neither by relating a purely objective truth behind subjectivity or by providing a subjective retreat from objective reality, but by creating an experimental space for the reading subject to realize the nature of his or her own subjectivity.

THE LIFE OF THE MIND

By definition, psychological realism depicts inner life, portraying the experience of living not only as agency is expressed in outward actions—empirical phenomena, if you will—but also as agency is directed and felt from within. In some sense, the life of the mind is especially suited to fictional expression—whereas the ‘truth’ of objective reality seems best expressed through the factual descriptions of journalism and history, the ineffable ‘truth’ of subjective reality seems to *require* some degree of poetic license. Yet, just as we saw that describing seemingly objective reality actually came to creating

intersubjective presentations of generic life, we shall see that presenting subjective reality is tied to the same intersubjective conditions of experience. Dostoevsky's *Notes* contains one of the most intense, almost obsessive, examinations of inner life in literature and yet, like all psychological realism, the reality of the fiction transcends the personal and accesses the interpersonal. Despite the underground man's resolve to "speak about myself" as an isolated, underground, individual self-consciousness, this discourse on self always already turns out to be a discourse about others. A fellow Wittgensteinian, Garry Hagberg asks in "Wittgenstein Underground" not whether Dostoevsky portrays "hyper-self-consciousness" but rather "what precisely this comes to" (380). Arguing against an overly Cartesian model of hermetic introspection, Hagberg demonstrates the many ways that the underground man's prose breaks the hermetic seal and explicitly ties itself to the significance-generating practices of ordinary language and everyday society. Here, I shall focus on three elements that connect the underground man to society and its discourses: language, sensation, and desire.

Activity is far from the defining characteristic of the underground man. In fact, he perpetually attempts (in a futile attempt at self-justification) to make a virtue of stasis: he praises the sin of laziness as 'conscious inertia' (37) and defines himself according to perversity, inaction, and boredom. Where the underground man is far and away the most active is his frantic writing, his obsessive attempt to describe and therefore justify his inner life (even at the expense of an outer life). Thus, he ties inaction in life to action in describing it when he writes:

Oh, gentlemen, perhaps I really regard myself as an intelligent man only because throughout my entire life I've never been able to start or finish

anything. Granted, granted I'm a babbler, a harmless, irksome babbler, as we all are. But what's to be done if the sole and express purpose of every intelligent man is babble—that is, a deliberate pouring from empty into void.⁵⁵ (18)

He babbles compulsively, generating static (noise and stasis) in the hope that pouring out from one's inner thoughts is precisely what life is about. This hope is perpetually dashed, however, by the recognition that babbling in this manner is no more than a desperate attempt drown out the feeling of the void pressing around himself, making meaning that is perpetually slipping away into nothingness. If babbling were valuable in-itself, were the whole meaning of existence, ought not the practice be somehow self-satisfying? He somehow knows that the significance of the fleeting is necessarily unable to be captured and therefore he chooses the written word, seeking significance through the permanent trace of a practice he does not consider valuable in itself. This gesture towards permanence invests the activity's significance in an external context, making the act of babbling more interpersonal than personal. Thus, in true Wittgensteinian fashion, Hagberg emphasizes how the underground man's outpouring of thought is always already situated in a significance-generating context:

He is positioned not as the sole owner of a hermetically-sealed point of consciousness, but rather as a mind: (1) positioned in relation to a remembered past that is not given transparently and immediately in introspection but rather one with a problematic significance that he must *work out*; (2) positioned with an ironic distance from his present self; (3) positioned in relation to his present sentences as they appear not with immediate inward transparency, but rather with a layered complexity that belies the simple notion that the autobiographical or self-descriptive

⁵⁵ Compare to Raskolnikov's statement at the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*: "I babble too much, however. That's why I don't do anything, because I babble. However, maybe it's like this: I babble because I don't do anything" (CP 4).

sentence stands in a one-to-one relation to a mental state only contingently expressed in language. (381)

To babble is to express oneself in a seemingly self-directed, self-sufficient manner, yet expressing oneself implies a self that is positioned in a multitude of significance-generating relations. The underground man's babbling is not just an expression *of* himself, but is *about* himself—introspection is a practice mediated by “ironic distance” whose motion is not to further insulate the self against all outside influences but whose motion rather deconstructs the self by exposing “a problematic significance that he must *work out*.”

Furthermore, the fact that babbling is an act of language also destabilizes the “inward transparency” of the hermetic subject. Hagberg writes “It is *language* that not only conveys, but more strongly constitutes, the content of the inner self of which we can and do make sense” (382-3), adding “Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* is *in* language; his thinking, as depicted with the greatest literary subtlety by Dostoevsky, is not prior to that and of an ontological kind different from it. His layered senses are in the sentences, and he learns *from* them rather than invariably imparting life *to* them” (383). In these statements, Hagberg ties the underground man's language use to Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of a private language, which in essence states that forms of expression developed exclusively by and for oneself gain their coherence from the way they connect to intersubjectively accessible systems of meaning. Put another way, even the most private words one speaks to oneself necessarily relate generic experience, which is in principle tied to public understanding. This is not to say that words cannot have special significance to individuals or that they must maintain a perfectly standardized

meaning across all contexts. On the contrary, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, the unique contextuality of Dostoevsky's prose is one of its most pertinent characteristics: "It is characteristic that in Dostoevsky's works there are absolutely no *separate* thoughts, propositions or formulations such as maxims, sayings, aphorisms which, when removed from their context and detached from their voice, would retain their semantic meaning in an impersonal form" (*PDP* 95). On the other hand, it would not be possible for these individual meanings to exist without appropriating generic significances. Looking at the underground man's babbling, for example, we find very explicit engagements with the historical, cultural, and philosophical background of his time. His attempt to define his personal agency against the oppressive mandate of rationalism is just one of many instances in which his private assertion of unique identity appropriates language and defines itself against and through the terms it uncovers.

Futilely attempting to break from the Cartesian rationalist model of self-definition, the underground man can only express his desire for such a break through the language of self-definition, the always already meaningful terms through which self-reflective identity comes to understand itself and others. The underground man's babbling becomes a compulsion despite and perhaps because of the logical impossibility of breaking out of significance from within—the stronger he fights to free himself from definition, the tighter he clutches the definitions themselves. This is shown through what is perhaps the most accurate and cutting description of the underground man, which comes not from his own introspection, but from the deceptively simplistic Liza:

I was so used to thinking and imagining everything from books, and to picturing everything in the world to myself as I had devised it beforehand

in my dreams, that at first I didn't even understand this strange circumstance. What occurred was this: Liza, whom I had insulted and crushed, understood far more than I imagined. She understood from it all what a woman, if she loves sincerely, always understands before anything else—namely, that I myself was unhappy. (123)

This masterful observation condenses the whole of the underground man's ramblings (which continue even after the text officially ends) into a single description: "unhappy." Ironically, the farther the underground man retreats into the underground of books, dreams, and philosophizing, the more closely he defines himself according to public discourse, a use of language that produces very public significances. Liza thus recognizes that his inner life is not insulated from the outer world, but on the contrary is all too beholden to it, when her first real response to his ravings is simply "It's as if you . . . as if it's from a book" (98). Thus, while he writes his book precisely to express an inner, underground self he instead becomes a manifestation of bookishness, created rather than creating (an irony which is heightened by the existence of the fiction itself). Liza's simple words reveal the artificiality of the underground man's poseur, revealing his drive towards uniqueness as an absurd existentialist fantasy which in fact reinforces his dependency upon his social, discursive, and literary contexts.

Far from becoming hermetically sealed in the underground, positioning himself beneath the ground redoubles the ground's influence on him—whereas the agency of the aboveground is enabled by the stability of the ground, the agency of the underground is oppressed by the weight and knowledge of the ground. The freedom the underground man seeks in writing becomes his chains, reinforced by his own pen. Similarly, his retreat into sensation and debauchery, part of which led him to Liza in the first place,

does not insulate him from language but is precisely defined by language. For Wittgenstein (and Hagberg) as well, the sensation of pain is an excellent example of the illusory nature of hermetic private experience. While Wittgenstein sensibly admits that in a strong sense one cannot feel the pain or inner sensations of another person directly, he argues in the *Investigations* that our self-awareness of sensations is tied to our competency with discursive practices, an idea which is encapsulated when he writes “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (*PI* §580). Putting it more directly, Wittgenstein states that “We learn to describe objects, and thereby, in another sense, our sensations” (*RPP1* §1082). Dostoevsky also ties sensations to their expression in language in a famous scene (which Hagberg also describes):

“There is also pleasure in a toothache,”⁵⁶ I will answer. I had a toothache for a whole month; I know there is. Here, of course, one does not remain silently angry, one moans; but these are not straightforward moans, they are crafty moans, and the craftiness is the whole point. These moans express the pleasure of the one who is suffering; if they did not give him pleasure, he wouldn’t bother moaning. It’s a good example, gentlemen, and I shall develop it. In these moans there is expressed, first, all the futility of our pain, so humiliating for our consciousness, and all the lawfulness of nature, on which, to be sure, you spit, but from which you suffer all the same, while it does not. (14)

This passage connects inner sensation with public expression in two critical ways. First, in describing a complex linguistic practice of expressing pain through moans, the underground man shows how the experience of the sensation itself is structured like a Wittgensteinian language game, whose meaning is determined by its role in our practices. Second, the pleasure derived from the toothache shows that not only is the *meaning* of

⁵⁶ Wittgenstein also uses a toothache as an example of pain sensation (*PI* §257). Whether this is coincidentally or intentionally related to Dostoevsky I do not know.

sensation tied to the larger intersubjective system of language but that the *value* of the sensation is tied to larger intersubjective social relations. To be in such a state is therefore not to be isolated from others, but rather to have a highly particularized relationship to others.

In despair, the underground man ends his ruminations attempting to break the cycle by abandoning his writing project:

Leave us to ourselves, without a book, and we'll immediately get confused, lost—we won't know what to join, what to hold to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise. It's a burden for us even to be men—men with real, *our own* bodies and blood; we're ashamed of it, we consider it a disgrace, and keep trying to be some unprecedented omni-men. We're stillborn, and have long ceased to be born of living fathers, and we like this more and more. We're acquiring a taste for it. Soon we'll contrive to be born somehow from an idea. But enough; I don't want to write any more "from Underground" . . . (130)

The story doesn't end here, however, as Dostoevsky interjects to point out that "the 'notes' of this paradoxicalist do not end here. He could not help himself and went on. But it also seems to us that this may be a good place to stop" (130). On his own, the underground man can get no further than recognizing the extent to which he is akin to everyone else in requiring outside definition. He never wholeheartedly accepts his constructedness, of course, but when he finally must recognize that it is absolute and that he can never retreat into the underground, he is at an impasse and the story stops. To proceed, then, we must move beyond the resources of the underground man's own reflections, which are limited by being always inside his relentless pursuit of self. We must understand how the text itself functions as both philosophy and psychology, presenting a perspective which we, outside the text, can occupy. As Hagberg writes:

Dostoevsky's *Notes* is a kind of writing that does cast a good deal of light on the nature of self-awareness, of self-scrutiny, and of (if in this case more than a little tortured) autobiographical attentiveness. Wittgenstein's writings work in their own underground as well, digging beneath the often-unwitting presuppositions and foundational question-formulations that can powerfully shape our subsequent thinking. They both demonstrate that the inner life, given a thorough description by Dostoevsky and a thorough rethinking by Wittgenstein, is not what we may all-too-easily think it to be in accordance with a Cartesian legacy. It is, rather, what philosophical-literary investigations show it to be once description, in Wittgenstein's sense, has supplanted explanation, and once literature has been given its distinctive "light" by philosophy. (391)

Literature, philosophy, and psychology are all narratives and therefore do not merely describe the act of self-reflection, but *realize* it. We shall now turn to the significance of psychologically realistic narration, and how they can realize subjectivity for readers.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NARRATION

That our inner lives are inextricably connected to our outer lives seems to make the psychological realist's task of describing inner life that much more complicated. As Wittgenstein points out, introspection not only fails to provide clear explanations of ourselves, but the more we introspect the more complex we feel our lives to be:

But one would like to say: "Human mental life can't be described at all; it is so uncommonly complicated and full of scarcely graspable experiences. In great part it is like a brewing of coloured clouds, in which any shape is only a transition to other shapes, to other transitions.—Why, take just visual experience! Your gaze wanders almost incessantly, how could you describe it?"—And yet I do describe it! (*RPP1* §1079)

The solution to this paradox—that we seemingly do the impossible when we describe “human mental life”—is the sufficiency of incomplete descriptions. The task of describing each movement of our incessant gaze is of course impossible, but ultimately the significance of our incessant gaze is not the totality of micro-motions but the overall impression it leaves, and this often *is* describable. Thus, while the statement “I noticed the box was empty” is incomplete with regards to the full sensory experience, it may completely relay the salient information. In a similar vein, psychological narratives gain their significance through salience, through emphasizing the important landmarks of one’s mental map while omitting countless trivial details. This emphasis on filtering the important from the unimportant in order to give meaningful order to the world is a feature Lydia Ginzburg describes as common to both psychology and psychological realism in literature:

But if even everyday personality is a kind of construct, then it follows that in daily life there takes place a continuous selection, omission, and correlation of the elements of personality, that there takes place work, in other words, that is potentially aesthetic, and that reaches its most highly organized form in art. Art is always organization, a struggle with chaos and nonbeing and the transience of life. (10)

The aesthetics of perception and cognition, a topic also discussed extensively by Kant, show how explanation is not exclusively in service of law courts or the scientific method, but in fact connect literary discourse to the ongoing attempts to grapple with inner life. Although Wittgenstein calls for description over explanation in an attempt to mitigate the philosophical temptation to reduce complex topics to simple coherent theories, explanation provides the only way to capture inner life by providing a framework within which the salient can be separated from the trivial. Relating a life through narrative

already presupposes explanation in that narratives make sense of lives by turning disconnected events into a connected story. And in reciprocal fashion, the stories we live and tell shape the selves they attempt to explain. The significance of an explanation is therefore not that it captures a true and eternal essence just waiting to be articulated but that the human practice of narrative participates in the unfolding of everyday life. Here, we shall examine how the explanations constructed and presented by psychological narratives provide means for understanding the self through self-reflection.

Formatted as a diary, of which the underground man notes “I do not want to hamper myself with anything in preparing my notes. I will not introduce any order or system. Whatever I recall, I will write down” (40), the *Notes* purport to be by, about, and for the underground man himself. However, the underground man’s own discourse has a strong explanatory component which makes a narrative out of the seemingly description-dominant form of the autobiographical diary. The underground man explicitly strives to create a private space, articulating the narrowly self-centered focus of his text when he writes:

But can it be, can it be that you are indeed so gullible as to imagine I will publish all this and, what’s more, give it to you to read? And here’s another puzzle for me: why indeed do I call you “gentlemen,” why do I address you as if you were actually my readers? Such confessions as I intend to begin setting forth here are not published and given to others to read. At least I do not have so much firmness in myself, and do not consider it necessary to have it. But you see: a certain fancy has come into my head, and I want at all costs to realize it. Here’s what it is. In every man’s memories there are such things as he will not reveal to everyone, but perhaps only to friends. There are also such as he will reveal not even to friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. Then, finally, there are such as a man is afraid to reveal even to himself, and every decent man will have accumulated quite a few things of this sort.

That is, one might even say: the more decent a man is, the more them he will have. (38-9)

In the first paragraph, he explicitly disavows that his text is directed towards others.

Although, as we shall see later, this disavowal ultimately deconstructs itself and reveals a deep desire to explain to others, this does not eliminate the independent self-directed attitude expressed here. A man of paradoxes, especially in his desires, the underground man genuinely desires to provide a self-sufficient explanation, to retreat fully into the underground and become fully autonomous. In the second paragraph, he explains his explanation, showing how the underlying purpose of constructing this diary is to probe the innermost reaches of his self, as he describes: “Now, however, when I not only recall them but am even resolved to write them down, now I want precisely to make a test: is it possible to be perfectly candid with oneself and not be afraid of the whole truth?” (39).

In making a trial of truth, he shows that he seeks truth not for its factual accuracy but rather for his psychological contiguity—can he look truth in the face and accept it? This makes truth a matter of affect rather than fact as he desires not just to tell the events of his life, but to comprehend and justify them to himself, that is, to *explain himself*: “Eh, I’ve poured all that out, and what have I explained? . . . How explain this pleasure? But I will explain myself! I will carry through to the end! That is why I took a pen in my hands . . .” (8).

Although here the underground man is despairing of the impossibility of explanation, he is simultaneously driven to pursue it. This captures an important truth about explanation—that explanation is an integral part of our agential practices *and* a philosophical temptation to force understanding upon the unknowable. The underground man’s mania for explanation enacts, as Wittgenstein warned, the violence of demanding

and forcing explanations. In this case, the violence is on himself. Unable to justify himself to himself because if one is unjustified one is tautologically unable to be the source of justifying oneself, the underground man also explains himself to others, his imagined readers, seeking the justification from without that he could not produce from within.

When he justifies himself, therefore, we have less the feeling of eavesdropping on another's private ruminations and more the feeling that he flings barbed comments towards us for our recognition and approval.⁵⁷ Thus, despite disavowing that he will publish the text for real readers, he cannot help but continue to address himself to us. For example, when he writes "I made up adventures and devised a life for myself so as to live, at least somehow, a little" (16-7), he attempts to explain himself as pitiable, making an excuse for his fantasy life. This explanation is, of course, partially for himself, but it is so clear that he never accepts any of his own justifications or forgives any of his own excuses that it seems his only hope is for someone else to accept and forgive on his behalf. His desperate attempts to draw recognition out of his former schoolfellows and Liza confirm this tendency. Even his self-deprecating explanations have a similar barbed feeling. Just as he praises himself in the hopes that we will agree, he puts himself down in the hopes that we will contradict him. In fact, he pulls out a wide range of explanations, hoping that with enough attempts we will ratify one form of explanation and agree that his life is fundamentally significant (contrast this with Liza's understanding of him which conversely presumes his fundamental significance and

⁵⁷ This is similar to the move at the end of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, where the narrator and central character seeks atonement through the elicited reactions of the readers.

dispenses with convoluted explanations). In making these pointed explanations, however, the underground man shows a great deal more of himself than he would like, as when he writes parenthetically: “A bad witticism, but I won’t cross it out. I wrote it thinking it would come out very witty; but now, seeing for myself that I simply had a vile wish to swagger—I purposely won’t cross it out!” (4) In this shifting, complex judgment, a whole psychological narrative unfolds from this statement as he first impulsively makes a statement, then reflects on and judges it, then recommits. Whether intentional or not, one of the tenets of psychology is that our actions are *purposive*, they are manifestations of our selves as agents. Thus, while his writings do not have the rhetorical consistency to persuade us to accept his various justifications, the overall picture his babblings paint of his inner state is remarkably clear. Everything he says reflect the purposive character of his being, admittedly one typified by cross-purposes but purposes nonetheless. Fully indicative of this, while he constantly explains in order to become understood, he also fears and loathes being understood, especially when he has let on more than he intended. Thus, he erupts in fury at Liza after opening his heart to her, saying:

And those tears a moment ago, which, like an ashamed woman, I couldn’t hold back before you, I will never forgive you! And what I’m confessing to you now, I will also never forgive *you*! Yes—you, you alone must answer for all this, because you turned up here, because I’m a scoundrel, because I’m the most vile, the most ridiculous, the most petty, the most stupid, the most envious of all worms on earth, who are in no way better than I, but who, devil knows shy, are never embarrassed; while I will just go on being flicked all my life by every nit—that’s my trait! (122)

This passage, while incredibly revealing, is not an explanation exactly. Yet, in some sense everything he says is explanatory in that it is driven by a fundamental desire to make sense of life, a desire whose complement (despair) is always also at hand.

Ultimately, his attempts to explain himself to others—both inside and outside the text—fail because of his fundamentally contradictory nature. While he seeks validation from others, he simultaneously alienates and deplores them, making it so that he cannot even accept the validation when Liza offers it to him. While he hopes to find significance, he is too cynical and even masochistic to fully commit to the quest.

Much more could be said about this complex narrator and his many contradictions, but I wish now to turn towards the other half of the explanatory conundrum, namely, how to read and receive such explanations. The underground man is, after all, fictional, and the significance of the text is much more for us than for him. Like reading any psychological realist text, reading the underground man entails our evaluation of an inner life. We do not merely observe and note that the character is how he or she describes; we automatically consider how this particular depiction of inner life has consequences for the reality of mind more generally. This, as Wittgenstein might say, already leads us into philosophical temptation, which of course is only barely distinct from philosophical achievement. This temptation is precisely that of theorizing psychology, of looking at individual minds according to rules and principles that overwrite lived reality with taxonomic distinctions. Thus, Wittgenstein repeats his mandate for description in a specifically psychological context, writing “Not to explain, but to accept the psychological phenomenon—that is what is difficult” (*RPP1* §509). At the same time as theories can enact violence, Wittgenstein’s ordinary language impulses preserve a value for theories and models:

But such a theory is really the construction of a psychological model of a psychological phenomenon. And hence of a physiological model.

The theory really says “It could be like this:....” And the usefulness of the theory is that it illustrates a concept.

It may illustrate it better and worse; more, and less, appropriately. The theory is thus so to speak a notation for this kind of psychological phenomenon. (*RPPI* §431)

We need to accept the phenomena over the explanation, but without any explanations the phenomena would not cohere into anything phenomenal. Explanations are better or worse, but they always provide a model of understanding that brings experience from the realm of the insensible to the sensible. In true Wittgensteinian fashion, we cannot abandon the explanatory project⁵⁸ (nor even understand what abandoning would entail, for we would lose our capacity to understand if we gave up explanation) but must recognize the illusions explanation brings. The model is always only a model, whereas for Wittgenstein—and all ethicists who ground their ethics in the value of the individual person—inner life must take precedence over the structure which makes it sensible.

This point of collision between theory and person speaks to the deconstruction of hermetic subjectivity discussed in the previous section. The one and many, subjective and objective, described and explained all touch one another. To navigate this ethically, we must see how the underground man’s explanations of himself for us enable us not only to explain psychological truths, but to apply similar self-reflection to our own cases. Realizing that much of inner life is inexpressible, we ought to recognize that “Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning” (*CV* 16). That is,

⁵⁸ As Lydia Ginzburg points out, “Coming in contact with a stranger, we instantly and so to speak provisionally assign him to one or another social, psychological, or domestic category. This is one of the conditions of social interaction. It is also a condition of any relationship between reader and literary character” (13)

we must resist the illusion that this problem of articulation is of the sort that it can be fully overcome through the rigor of our psychological understanding. To put it another way, we must realize that the theoretical backdrops through which we attempt to understand are methods rather than truths. We must therefore deconstruct the mythos of the analyst as a scientist who is able to turn subjective experience into an objective understanding, another view which Wittgenstein criticizes:

The analyst is supposed to be strong, able to combat and overcome the delusion of the instance. But there is no way of showing that the whole result of analysis may not be “delusion”. It is something which people are inclined to accept and which makes it easier for them to go certain ways it makes certain ways of behaving and thinking natural for them. They have given up one way of thinking and adopted another. (LC 44-5)

In thus rejecting the essentialism of believing one can have a definitive take on the infinitely deep significances of a person or text, Wittgenstein begins to show how we can embrace the productivity of the endeavor without requiring anything so farfetched. For Wittgenstein, explanation and linguistic acts in general are *purpose-sensitive*. That is, we talk because our talk fits into the flow of our lives, which are always motivated by our interests and investments in the particularities of our relational contexts. The psychological explanation is thus valuable only insofar as it overcomes difficulties and improves our capacities. When Wittgenstein writes that Freud “has not given a scientific explanation of the ancient myth. What he has done is to propound a new myth” (LC 51), he demonstrates that no discourse is merely *about* its subject, but instead always has significance as an additional move in our ongoing practices: “Whenever we interpret a symbol in one way or another, the interpretation is a new symbol added to the old one” (BB 33). Applying this to our critical practices, we can say that no literary analysis can

merely *reveal* what is already present in the text (and neither can the text merely reveal its own content). Instead, every analysis is its own narrative that contributes something of its own. And every analysis is valuable only insofar as it aids the betterment of our ongoing activities.

This can be explored further through Wittgenstein's notion of dream interpretation, as he writes: "When a dream is interpreted we might say that it is fitted into a context where it ceases to be puzzling. In a sense the dreamer re-dreams his dream in surroundings such that its aspect changes" (*LC* 45). Rather than uncovering a latent psychological reality, this way of reading psychological realism fits the text into a new context within which certain aspects become clear, an act whose purpose and value is always its integration into the ongoing activity of the reader's life. The model of the dream has value for what the model can do to transform our understanding and thereby fit into our unfolding inner lives. To sacrifice this unfolding to the model goes beyond folly. To analyze the dreamer—or fictional character—without recognizing how the explanation itself has consequences is incredibly violent, and is a major bone of contention between Wittgenstein and his distant acquaintance Sigmund Freud. Here, however, I consider dream interpretation as a metaphor for reading fiction (which Freud, incidentally, connects as well). The unreality of the dream is closely akin to fiction in that both take and recombine impressionistic elements from reality to construct a virtual pseudo-reality that speaks to the problematics of our experience. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, Raskolnikov's fevered dreams, the dreamlike nature of his too-real murder, and the strange abstraction of his philosophical views all become somehow

muddled together. This is compounded by the experience of memory, in which time turns lived reality into a virtual narrative not unlike dream or fiction: “However, it was not that he was totally unconscious during the whole time of his illness: it was a feverish condition, with moments of delirium and semi-awareness. Afterwards he remembered a good deal” (*CP* 117). For Raskolnikov, whose name means “schismatic” (xv), and who lives in a “corner” not unlike the underground, the clarity of his memory distances him from the brutality of his sinful actions, making him a spiritually dual character. When analyzing another, the schism between analyst and patient—reader and character—promotes a philosophical distance and abstraction that is beneficially in bringing a more intersubjective perspective to bear on the subjective although this is precisely the element that makes possible the epistemic violence of normative psychology. When analyzing oneself, however, this dual nature is part of the conflict it attempts to resolve. Again, we seem to have arrived at an impasse, a tautological condition in which the recognition, the self-reflective realization, of psychological narratives seem to only make clearer a separation they cannot alter. We shall proceed, therefore, to consider self-reflection more fully, by unpacking the connection between philosophy and therapy proposed by Wittgenstein and enacted by Raskolnikov.

REALIZATION AND THERAPY

The despair of the underground man is particularly existential in nature—his struggle to articulate himself, to achieve self-knowledge, seems to reinforce the meaninglessness of his existence. In contrast to Liza, who intuitively perceives the heart of

the matter—his unhappiness—the underground man gets mired down precisely by his textuality. Defining himself through his writing and described as ‘from a book,’ the words of the underground man fail to produce personhood, as he is lost in the emptiness of the signifier, embodying the endlessly deferred meaning of the linguistic trace. If psychological narratives are attempts to make sense of lives through words, the important question is not just what can these narratives *say*, but what can they *do*. That is, are self-reflection, self-knowledge, and self-expression mere manifestations of an unchanging inner life, or are they also part of the ongoing transformation of such life? This question will be examined in a more holistic fashion in the next chapter, which focuses on becoming and the *Bildungsroman*, but here I shall examine particularly the role of articulated self-knowledge, the attempt to express in objective terms the psychological regularities of one’s inner life. I firmly believe that such explanations are as much input as output, operating upon the selves they describe and therefore have inherent therapeutic power. To pursue these questions, I will extend Wittgenstein’s assimilation of philosophy—which, like the underground man’s diaries or psychological realism itself, is a fundamentally textual activity—to *therapy*. Although the underground man’s own attempts to philosophize his way out of his problems are more symptom than cure, as indicated by his statement “You will forgive me, gentlemen, for philosophizing away; it’s a matter of forty years underground!” (27-8), the therapeutic possibilities of psychological narratives are implicit both in the *Notes* and in literary explanation itself. I suggest that the value of subjective narration in fiction is to provide a therapeutic interlocutor with which a reader can encounter, interrogate, and reform his or her own

subjectivity. Psychology is, of course, a *therapeutic* rather than a purely descriptive science, that is, insofar as psychology *is* descriptive, its descriptions are generated and evaluated in terms of their relevance to a practice of applying our theories about the regularity of human behavior to the betterment of ongoing human activities. Just as the theories of psychology are better served to anchor the productive practice of therapy than to rationalize essentialist notions of human nature, the content of psychological realism is better understood as *engaging* the reader's psychology than telling the reader about his or her psychology.

It's a cliché of popular psychology that the road to recovery begins with the simple acknowledgement that one has a problem. While the underground man is hardly a model of psychological recovery, his perceptive take on his own condition does exhibit this form of self-knowledge. Demonstrating awareness of his split subjectivity, the Underground Man points out how the objective and normative he has of his life fails to encompass his action:

Why was it that, as if by design, in those same, yes, in those very same moments when I was most capable of being conscious of all the refinements of "everything beautiful and lofty," as we once used to say, it happened that instead of being conscious I did such unseemly deeds, such deeds as . . . well, in short, as everyone does, perhaps, but which with me occurred, as if by design, precisely when I was most conscious that I ought not to be doing them at all? The most conscious I was of the good and of all this "beautiful and lofty," the deeper I kept sinking into my mire, and the more capable I was of getting completely stuck in it. But the main feature was that this was all in me not as if by chance, but as if it had to be so. As if it were my most normal condition and in no way a sickness or a blight, so that finally I lost any wish to struggle against this blight. I ended up almost believing (and maybe indeed believing) that this perhaps was my normal condition. (7)

As we saw in Chapter 1, there is a danger in the objectivity of a diagnosis, namely that to fixate on the existence of a state can obscure the *contingency* of that state, making it difficult to recognize that the way things are is not the *only* way. Paradoxically clinging to both the objective reality of perceived natural and moral law and the subjective willfulness of his desire to transgress this law, the underground man is unable to reconcile his subjective and objective sides and remains always schismatic. This paradoxical double-movement is exhibited as he treats his condition as both individual and global, connecting his disease to the highly particular locales of his underground environment and consciousness and the highly generalized locales of his historical and cultural setting:

I swear to you, gentlemen, that to be overly conscious is a sickness, a real, thorough sickness. For man's everyday use, ordinary human consciousness would be more than enough; that is, a half, a quarter of the portion that falls to the lot of a developed man in our unfortunate nineteenth century, who, on top of that, has the added misfortune of residing in Petersburg, the most abstract and intentional city on the entire globe. (6-7)

Yet there is not a reciprocal relationship between the local and global here. The particularity of consciousness is the disease, but the objective grounds are treated as the cause, reinforcing Dostoevsky's initial note that this fictional account is intended to portray a social epidemic. That the historical condition is clearly beyond the underground man's individual agency no doubt contributes to his sense of powerlessness, but more importantly the fact that he makes his self-consciousness the disease precludes it being the cure. As long as he believes this, any attempt to use self-reflection to change his underlying condition will defeat itself and ultimately strengthen his schismatic self-

loathing. It's clear from all this that although recognizing the problem may be a necessary first step to recover, it by no means necessitates recovery.

The underground man cannot undergo therapy because his fundamentally divided self will resist the very changes that can free him from his division. Yet, for Dostoevsky, the dividedness of the world and fracturing of the self actually enable a dialectic therapy that can transcend the fundamental problems of human psychology. Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes Dostoevsky's style as the epitome of the dialogism of literature, writing:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multiple of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse. (PDP 6-7)

Thus, while from the underground man's personal perspective, he is blinded by the intensely monologic nature of his own writing, which always replicates his current condition, the reader approaches the text as a "genuine polyphony" due to the facts that we recognize the underground man's voice as other to ourselves, we understand Liza's discourse as a valid engagement with his, and we recognize how the story is framed by the author and narrator's discourses. This dividedness does not work against itself as the underground man's schismatic nature does. Instead, this dividedness allows for the multiplicity of voices to engage in a conversation that produces meaning through interaction and resists static significances.

For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's dialogism is also tied to his carnival spirit, in which the problems of the everyday are suspended and rendered absurd in a shared sense of social play. While ultimately this is no more effective at necessarily inverting social values than self-reflection is, the carnival always entails the possibility of transcending the monologic and accessing the dialogic:

Carnivalization made possible the creation of the *open* structure of the great dialogue, and permitted social interaction between people to be carried over into the higher sphere of the spirit and the intellect, which earlier had always been primarily the sphere of a single and unified monologic consciousness, a unified and indivisible spirit unfolding within itself (as, for example, in Romanticism). A carnival sense of the world helps Dostoevsky overcome gnoseological as well as ethical solipsism. A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone. (*PDP* 177)

In sharing this self-reflective play, the carnival spirit is a self-realization that points beyond the self, demonstrating a connection between the subjective and objective. In general, the underground man does not embrace this mentality, but even within his masochistic judgment of himself, he recognizes the therapeutic or “corrective” possibilities:

At least I've felt ashamed all the while I've been writing this *story*: so it's no longer literature, but corrective punishment. Because, for example, to tell long stories of how I defaulted on my life through moral corruption in a corner, through an insufficiency of milieu, through unaccustom to what is alive, and through vainglorious spite in the underground—is not interesting, by God; a novel needs a hero, and here there are *purposely* collected all the features for an antihero, and, in the first place, all this will produce a most unpleasant impression, because we've all grown unaccustomed to life, we're all lame, each of us more or less. We've even grown so unaccustomed that at times we fell a sort of loathing for real “living life,” and therefore cannot bear to be reminded of it. For we've reached a point where we regard real “living life” almost as labor, almost

as service, and we all agree in ourselves that's it's better from a book.
(129)

This passage is important for several reasons. First, the underground man authorizes Bakhtin's view of literature (and, less directly, Wittgenstein's view of psychological explanation) by connecting the appeal of novels over living life to the presence of a hero (a sense-making individual) within a sense-making structure. That is, he recognizes that psychologically realistic stories are defined not so much by the accuracy of their representation but by manifesting the desire for the continuity of the self, the promise that lived life will share the narrative making-sense of fiction. Although the underground man talks as if real life (at least, *his* life) could never approach this continuity, the perspective of carnival suggests that even so, suspending the insufficiency of real life to indulge in the fantasy world can bring new understanding to real life, even if this understanding is just that we are dialogically connected to others.⁵⁹

This is a realization, namely the deconstruction of the notion of the autonomous, hermetic self, is very close to the underground man's problem, as he desperately wishes to join the society he continually distances himself from: "I was simply incapable of dreaming for longer than three months at a time, and would begin to feel an irresistible need to rush into society" (58). For Wittgenstein, the result of philosophical therapy is this kind of honest understanding of one's problematic agency, not so that agency will entirely cease to embrace the problematics and contradictions that define humanity, but

⁵⁹ Diana Orwin considers this realization to be particularly connected to the Russian cultural context shared by Dostoevsky and Bakhtin: "The self as Russian conceived it is not an individualist one . . . they acquired the idea of individualism from the West, but none of them could simply embrace a Cartesian model of the soul according to which it is self-sufficient and the source of all meaning. No man can be an island in Russia" (6).

rather that these contradictions will not handicap and mislead the individual to the extent of the underground man's paralysis. Recognizing that psychological narratives are constructed stories, are fictions on some fundamental level, does not deprive them of their value. On the contrary, the underground man speculates that even an imagined social connection may operate as a real one: "There is, however, a whole psychology here. Maybe it's also that I'm simply a coward. And maybe also that I'm purposely imagining a public before me so as to behave more decently while I write" (40). Whether or not this is true of the underground man, it is clear that from a psychological perspective the presence of the imagined other has a huge impact on individual agency. In the Freudian model, the *ego ideal*, or internalized imagined other, necessarily connects the individual consciousness to the society. Thus, while the subjective space is to some extent truly subterranean, that is, the unconscious is always to some degree underground, the nature of the underground is shaped by the aboveground, by the ever-present possibilities of social interaction. Psychological realism is therefore never able to completely dissociate itself from the possibility of others to create a truly hermetic space (and if a text did accomplish this, we could never know). Instead, as Hagberg writes "There is, then, an intelligible contrast here between the outer role and the inner person, but we make sense of the phrase "inner person" here as a self that is recognizing its manifest social proclivities, not as a self introspecting upon its inwardly hidden pre-linguistic mental content" (382). Inner life is, after all, still *life* and thereby necessarily participates in a complex ecosystem of symbiotic relationships.

COLLAPSING THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DIALECTIC

As we have seen, while the underground man desires to find full identity in a subjectivity disconnected from intersubjective influences, this task is ultimately self-defeating as he obsessively returns to and reinforces the very conditions he tries to escape. In criticizing the limitations of rationality, the underground man stresses the importance of desire, writing “reason, gentlemen, is a fine thing, that is unquestionable, but reason is only reason and satisfies only man’s reasoning capacity, while wanting is a manifestation of the whole of life—that is, the whole of human life, including reason and various little itches (28). His critique of rationalism is at times painfully accurate, but the underground man’s tendency towards overreaction prevent him from achieving “the whole of human life” as he ruthlessly excises rationality and social significance, replacing one partial existence with its diametrical opposite. While the underground man’s unbalanced view make the opposition of subjective and objective incommensurable rather than complementary, for us readers, who are insulated from his monomaniacal focus by the awareness of the story’s textual frame, the story can help us understand how to properly resolve the seeming contradiction between subjective and objective. Although he will not allow himself to accept any truly reciprocal relationship to others, it is clear that on some level he genuinely yearns for some manner of significant relation to others, proving that this “whole of human life” is fundamentally not autonomous. To understand what the underground man only dreamed of, we must see how the dialectics of subject/object or self/other are complements rather than confrontations and thereby unlock the therapeutic potential of fictional representation.

Just as there is an objectivity to the subjective in that external, generically-available conditions structure individual agency, there is a subjectivity to the objective in that the generic systems of significance exist only through individual expression. Agency is never either subjective or objective, but is always something of both—constrained freedom, particularized universality, differential reiteration.

Thus, in Dostoevsky, as in most realist literature, not only can the self only be realized in community, the self is most fully realized in community. Going beyond a socially normative model of conformity, however, the intersubjective aspect of subjectivity entails a holistic understanding of the individual as both a part of and apart from its entire significance-generating relational context. This is exhibited in three interconnected ways: the recognition of the social dimension of the individual self, the spiritual dimension of the individual soul, and the objective dimension of subjective narration. Together, these reveal that the subject is an object and the object a subject, demonstrating how both literature and reality hinge upon reciprocal relations between self and other.

There are many instances in which the underground man's seemingly perverse anti-social actions reveal a deeper desire for social recognition. This is clear, for example, when he is unceremoniously pushed aside by an officer—instead of reveling in the anonymity of being so ignored, the underground man spends months and even years obsessing over this slight and carefully plotting a counterattack in which he can regain his sense of self by bumping the officer on equal footing (an endeavor, incidentally, that meets with dubious success). Similarly, his insistence on dining with his old

schoolfellows despite the recognized unpleasantness for all concerned indicates the extent to which his self-worth is tied to the recognition of others. He writes,

It's perfectly clear to me now that it was I who, owing to my boundless vanity, and hence also my exactingness towards myself, very often looked upon myself with furious dissatisfaction, reaching the point of loathing, and therefore every time I came to work I made a painful effort to carry myself as independently as possible, so as not to be suspected of meanness, and to express as much nobility as possible with my face. (43)

Making poignant what is now psychological cliché, the underground man seeks a uniqueness that would be recognized in his face, thereby looking for recognition rather than genuine autonomy. The essence of envy is, after all, the desire for uniqueness, which for Raskolnikov comes out in both the philosophy and act of killing an inferior because of the belief in one's superiority and for the underground man is expressed primarily in his babbling: "One other circumstance tormented me then: namely, that no one else was like me, and I was like no one else. 'I am one, and they are *all*,' thought I, and—I'd fall to thinking. / Which shows what a young pup I still was" (45). In acknowledging the naiveté of this thinking, the underground man reveals that the desire for uniqueness is not only shared by many (if not all) people, but derives its significance from generic discourses. Thus, insulted by both the officer and his old acquaintances, the underground man dreams of a revenge played out through the social systems of reclaiming face, contemplating dueling in both instances. It is less his fear of death or fundamental inactivity that prevents these hypothetical duels from taking place than two recognitions that demonstrate how his sense of inner significance is tied to others: first, his worry that neither enemy would recognize him as a worthy opponent and second, that his desire to gain recognition through dueling is internalized from society and more

specifically from well-known Russian literature on dueling. Even his fantasies are bookish, and his desire to become autonomous is ultimately self-defeating precisely because the desire itself is not autonomous.

Each attempt at insulation—from life to inner life, from inner life to word, from word to sensation, from sensation to desire—necessarily fails as this chain of retreats always maintains a connection to the systems of significance that link upwards and outwards. In Dostoevsky, this movement makes a circle of overlapping characteristics which is ultimately brought together by the spiritual contiguity of the self. Innermost and outermost find their point of contact in spiritual concerns in that the deepest recesses of the self are the ones with closest access to the universal. Dostoevsky always points out that inner life is not merely thought and concept, but includes a complex relationship to spiritual and moral truths. In several of his novels, for example, radical crimes are connected with spiritual regeneration. Similarly, the underground man makes a parallel movement with his flight from morality: “My debauchery I undertook solitarily, by night, covertly, fearfully, filthily, with a shame that would not abandon me at the most loathsome moments, and at such moments even went so far as a curse. I was then already bearing the underground in my soul” (48). He is unable to be hermetically sealed in his underground spiritually as well as socially—the secrecy of his debauchery does not isolate him, but rather exposes him to shame. Rather than retreating into the underground as escape, the underground invades him and he ends up “bearing the underground in my soul,” a condition of being strongly conditioned. This too collapses the dichotomous distinctions that separate subject from object by revealing a spiritual interconnectedness

that underwrites social relationships. The shame experienced by the underground man and Raskolnikov reveals that they are connected to others not only through a series of explicit interactions, but also because one's spiritual essence is defined as relational. For Dostoevsky, one's spiritual condition is thus not a purely private matter, nor even a private dialogue between the self and divine. Just as the Christian God of Dostoevsky's belief is three-in-one, the individual self finds definition through the delocalized interplay of three terms—itsself, God, and others. The self cannot achieve spiritual harmony by denouncing the world (a lesson learned by the would-be monk Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*), but instead can only experience and express the divine in relationships to others. For Dostoevsky, therefore, the social interdependency discussed above is not merely a fact of life, an attribute of the human animal, but is connected to the fundamental spiritual essence of humanity. That is, the necessity of relating to others is a moral as well as physical necessity, a fulfillment of human purpose.

Spirituality is generally thought of as ineffable to some degree, despite the tangibility of its manifestations when lived out. Thus, it is often connected more with the textual than the actual. Discussions about the relationship between spirituality and literature have too storied a history to be recounted here, but certainly indicate a close connection. The underground man also draws this connection by tying his debauchery and bookishness:

At home, to begin with, I mainly used to read. I wished to stifle with external sensations all that was ceaselessly boiling up inside me. And among external sensations the only one possible for me was reading. Reading was, of course, a great help—it stirred, delighted, and tormented me. But at times it bored me terribly. I still wanted to move about, and so

I'd suddenly sink into some murky, subterranean, vile debauch—not a great, but a measly little debauch. (48)

Unable to collapse the subject/object antinomy in any clean, healthy way, the underground man reveals a complicated tangle of competing forces tied to this split. He is both captivated and bored by reading because he cannot reconcile the division between the internal and external experiences. He desires to read because it seemingly promises an inner life that 'stifles external sensations' and promotes a hermetic, autonomous self that 'stirs, delights, and torments.' On the other hand, he acknowledges that reading is itself an external sensation and fans his desire for more external sensations. For the underground man, his reclusiveness and debauchery are sides of the same coin, symptoms of a broken relationship to society. His reading and action both reveal a spiritual condition in which he tries to break a fundamental connection to others that he falsely views as a weakness or addiction and futilely strives to break. From inside this perspective, no solution is visible to him. From outside, however, Dostoevsky's readers are shown the connection between reading and spiritual condition as Dostoevsky emphasizes how what one works out in text is thoroughly implicated in how one lives.

Revealing the artificiality of the subject/object antinomy in this way has profound consequences also for narration generally and psychological realism particularly.

Looking first at the larger picture, one might say that all narrative is psychologically realist insofar as it expresses relational connections between a subject and the many objects which simultaneously define and are defined by subjectivity. Thus, a narrative need not be as intensely psychological, inwardly focused, and autobiographical as the underground man's first-person diary to realize subjectivity. For example, in *Crime and*

Punishment the somewhat distancing effect produced by the omniscient third-person narrator enhances rather than detracts from the poignancy of the novel's psychological realism by enabling us to see the workings of Raskolnikov's mind without being drawn into his own self-deception. This is demonstrated particularly at the end of the novel, in which we hear of Raskolnikov's gradual conversion through particularly dry and factual descriptions that are actually very telling, a perspective on Raskolnikov we share with some of the novel's other characters:

To Dunya and Razumikhin, Sonya's letters at first seemed somehow dry and unsatisfactory; but in the end they both found that they even could not have been written better, because as a result these letters gave a most complete and precise idea of their unfortunate brother's lot. Sonya's letters were filled with the most ordinary actuality, the most simple and clear description of all the circumstances of Raskolnikov's life at hard labor. They contained no account of her own hopes, no guessing about the future, no descriptions of her own feelings. In place of attempts to explain the state of his soul, or the whole of his inner life generally, there stood only facts—that is, his own words, detailed reports of the condition of his health, of what he had wanted at their meeting on such-and-such a day, what he had asked her, what he had told her to do, and so on. All this news was given in great detail. In the end the image of their unfortunate brother stood forth of itself, clearly and precisely drawn; no mistake was possible here, because these were all true facts. (541)

Acting almost as a treatise on psychological realization through literature, this passage further undermines the subject/object dichotomy in the case of fiction by demonstrating the intimate connection between inner and outer truth. We understand the hidden inner nature of Raskolnikov's subjectivity, the passage argues, precisely because the description is realistic (objective, factual, true). Just as attempting to define the autonomous subject without understanding the relational nature of subjectivity is impossible, attempting to clearly distinguish between objective and subjective realism is

likewise futile. To depict life one cannot describe one or the other, but always the relationships between subject and object.

Yet, of course, we do draw distinctions between objective and psychological realism, between the realisms of different authors, times, and cultures, between realism and other literary styles, and between literature and other discourses. These differences are ones of emphasis. We can extrapolate how this emphasis works from a definition from outside literary studies, given here by Kathleen McCormick, who writes, “Influenced by American pragmatism and phenomenology, ‘psychological realism’ is a modern theory of perception that concentrates its analysis on the relation between perceivers and their environment, defining each only in terms of the other” (42). Here, we can see that while a ‘relation between perceivers and their environment’ is implicit in most narrative, the act of ‘concentrating its analysis’ on this relation and ‘defining each only in terms of the other’ gives psychological realism a particular critical stance upon this implicit interconnectedness. Namely, psychological realism depends on saying what typically goes without saying in how we realize ourselves in relation to our environment. This is an extremely holistic project towards which Dostoevsky clearly aims “The effect toward which Dostoevsky is striving is to show us the whole man, mind and heart together” (Orwin 52). A peculiar character of this critical stance is that it is a quest for understanding that acknowledges the necessary incompleteness of its understanding as well as its fundamentally performative character. In attempting to understand a relation that only exists when it is performed, psychological realism itself generates relations between self and text to lend insight to relations between self and

others. At its best it is a humble style, recognizing that its seemingly omniscient insight into inner lives is at best incomplete: “Here we reach the outer limits of self-reflection as a tool for understanding others—and Dostoevsky respects that limit. Despite all his insight into the souls of others, the subjectivity of others therefore ultimately remains a mystery in his fiction” (Orwin 131). A process of realization more than an account of reality, the truth of psychological realism is more *for* minds than about them.

Ultimately, life, word, sensation, desire, and spirit are all connected in the self and all connect the self to others. No matter how closely one attempts to focus exclusively on the inner self, to discover the human essence as scientifically detached from all muddying outside influences, the more it seems that individual essence involves and requires the things outside it. A subject is such by virtue of countless relationships to external objects, without which it could neither function nor exist. To realize fiction is, therefore, to reflect upon the interconnectedness of subject and object that run throughout our lives from within a web of textual interconnections that run throughout the fiction.

Scholium 3

I, Reader

This project is about fiction, or rather, about the experience of fiction. We have seen that this experience relies on a complex interplay of subjectivity and objectivity, an interplay that coalesces in the activity and experience of reading. We shall see how the act of reading is itself a transformative encounter that participates in becoming with all its ethical consequences. If this project is about the process of realization, it is therefore also about reading, the activity of deciphering, dwelling upon, and responding to significances communicated by texts, which condenses the whole range of significances interwoven in a form of life into an immanent interpretive act. That is, the reader invokes an unspeakably complex amalgam of linguistic, cultural, and philological significances in comprehending even a single word. All this typically goes without saying. I dwell upon it here simply because the ubiquity of this process is more than the presupposition of this project—it is its very impetus. This project is parasitic upon the importance of reading as a cultural activity, in that the supremacy of reading itself makes a way for questioning: what can (and should) we do with fiction? That reading matters to us in vast and countless ways justifies or even demands such critical investigation because our activity in general raises questions: what can (and should) we do? Wittgenstein reminds us that “A confession has to be a part of your new life” (*CV* 18). While it doesn’t necessarily follow that all new lives must begin with confessions, a confession—a self-reflective

revelation of one's past and current state—can indeed prepare a way for future states. In confessing myself as a reader, I demonstrate myself to be a social being, a participant in cultural practices to which I am beholden and responsible, but in which I also intend to critically intervene.

Increasingly, literary scholarship has stressed the participation of the reader in the text, a view which opposes to the symbolic autonomy of textual meaning. In particular, the work of Wolfgang Iser, a founder for the school of thought known as 'reader-response,' stresses how the activity of the reader realizes⁶⁰ textual significances:

Through such transformations, guided by the signs of the text, the reader is induced to construct the imaginary object. It follows that the involvement of the reader is essential to the fulfillment of the text, for materially speaking this exists only as a potential reality—it requires a "subject" (i.e., a reader) for the potential to be actualized. The literary text, then, exists primarily as a means of communication, while the process of reading is basically a kind of dyadic interaction. (*ROF* 18)

Although Iser is an avowed inheritor of J.L. Austin's notion that words *do* things, here we see that in themselves words only *can do* things—they do nothing without a doer, in this case, a reader. This view does not degenerate into relativism because Iser does not claim that readers are the complete arbiters of textual meaning. On the contrary, he talks of the reader activity as "the fulfillment of the text." At the same time, the reader does more than actualize completely determined meanings. On the contrary, in 'constructing the

⁶⁰ Iser also uses 'realization' to mean something like this, as he writes: "The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader" (*TRP* 279). Although I basically agree, I want to use Iser's work in foregrounding the reader as part of the literary work as a starting off point rather than an end. Thus, for me, realization needs to be elaborated much further in specifics and so should not be restricted to this definition.

imaginary object' the reader creates something more like a living image than a static meaning, which is why Iser ultimately calls the process of reading "a kind of dyadic interaction."

Thus, if we think of texts simply as repositories of meanings, we miss two crucial components. Firstly, linguistic meanings are nothing without language users—writers and readers who wield language in purpose-driven contexts. Secondly, these individual acts of language could not exist without larger linguistic practices that give meaning to particular exchanges. As Iser writes:

Let us sum up our findings so far: fictional language has the basic properties of the illocutionary act.⁶¹ It relates to conventions which it carries with it, and it also entails procedures which, in the form of strategies, help to guide the reader to an understanding of the selective processes underlying the text. It has the quality of "performance," in that it makes the reader produce the code governing this selection as the actual meaning of the text. (*ROF* 14)

Thus, in describing reading literature as a performance, Iser portrays the active process of realization as purposively bringing together the significance-generating context of the text—conventions, strategies, and codes—with its particular significations and expressions.⁶² As the agent which productively reconciles the static arrangement of a particular text with the dynamic but latent potential of language itself, the reader becomes both the site of and the force behind the unfolding of textual meaning.

In redefining the reality of fiction not as something concrete that the reader merely observes or understands, but instead as an active process, Iser indicates that

⁶¹ This term is drawn from the work of J.L. Austin. Although the illocutionary act is neither clearly nor rigorously defined here, it suffices to say that Iser is drawing upon Austin's notion of performativity, namely that words *do* things (rather than just express meaning).

⁶² This is itself a complex topic, which is discussed more comprehensively by the school of literary hermeneutics, of which Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is perhaps the clearest example.

realization is in fact the reality of fiction. Thus, he uses the word ‘reality’ in a somewhat counter-intuitive way, linking it to process and event rather than independently-existing realm, when he writes that “Reading, then, is experienced as something which is happening—and happening is the hallmark of reality” (*ROF* 20). Rather than divorce experience and reality by philosophically separating reality as the inaccessible essence of the physical world which is only experienced indirectly, Iser treats the real *as* what is present to experience. Although the abstract notion of reality is clearly an operative meaning of the word, Iser’s use resonates with ordinary language as well. When we use ‘real’ to mean ‘authentic’ or ‘realistic’ to mean ‘pragmatically grounded,’ we show the inseparability of experience and reality. Thus, Iser unparadoxically connects reality to process, writing “Events are a paradigm of reality in that they designate a process, and are not merely a ‘discrete’ entity” (*ROF* 20). While both uses of the term reality—as praxis or as discrete entity—are equally born out by actual language, I agree with Iser that focusing on the performative reality of fiction will better capture the significance of reading as we experience it. Reading is a happening, an event, a moment of realization. When we read, we perform a transformative interpretive act by relating to a fictional reality that we simultaneously construct and are constructed by. Although every reader will make a different way to fiction, all these ways are infused with the unique readerly activity of realizing text and context.

This emphasis on this self-critical, performative approach to fiction follows a widespread recognition that possibility of an absolutely objective standpoint from which

to conduct an investigation from ‘without’ is not available to us.⁶³ Although Wittgenstein admits that talking of an ‘objective standpoint’ does have rhetorical weight and can even function as a beginning in that sense, it is never a beginning as pure origin, *ex nihilo*. The objective standpoint is at best metaphorical, a discursive construction enabling us to pursue particular human purposes in special human contexts. As Stanley Cavell notes, “Wittgenstein’s motive (and this much is shared by Austin) is to put the human animal back into language and therewith back into philosophy” (207).⁶⁴ Here, the method and motive of philosophy are united in the practice of beginning at the beginning, of working from within human conditions, purposes, and language.⁶⁵ The absolutizing and totalizing danger with this, of course, is in the definite article: *the* human animal or *the* human condition. To work within human practices without imposing a singular system upon them requires an act of faith, faith in the ability of humans to form communities even without there being *the* human community. We talk and act. And when we do, we do not do so in a perfectly isolated or individual fashion—we talk and act in ways that mesh (albeit sometimes imperfectly) with others. Thus, when I write this, I rely on the fact that these rows of squiggles will convey something to you. This reliance of writing on

⁶³ This is very much the domain of postmodern critiques of absolute truth, in particular poststructuralist theory, which will be relatively absent in this project despite its possible relevance because I want to develop this project within discourses of the ordinary through literature and Wittgenstein, although I use the abstractions of Kant and Spinoza as philosophical contexts that do not explicitly perform, yet parallel the self-critical moments I want to develop out of fiction.

⁶⁴ Contrasting this emphasis with that of the objective standpoint (sometimes called ‘sub specie aeternitatis,’ meaning ‘under the aspect of eternity’), Cavell writes “Experience must, *sub specie humanitatis*, make sense” (62).

⁶⁵ Of course, following post-humanism, one is correct to wonder at the repetition of the word ‘human,’ which is both difficult and dangerous to define. Yet, here it functions without external definition, without criteria for membership, and without any clear relation within a classificatory system. To say that you and I are ‘human’ is to say we share something in common, or as Wittgenstein would put it, that ‘we go on together in a form of life.’

assumptions about readers is at the heart of realism as well. Realist literature is often criticized for embodying the aforementioned totalizing impulse in depicting worlds that are absolutely bogged down with particular ideologies. At the same time, realist literature is typically very aware of the power of the reader and often explicitly appeals to the dear reader.⁶⁶ While assumptions are certainly built into every particular text, realism is designed for realization; it is something to be enacted.

Building on faith in readership means that both the Wittgensteinian philosophy and the literary analysis performed here are always provisional, experimental, and incomplete: there can be no final word on philosophy or literature while real people continue to find them relevant. I direct this project towards readership not because the answers to text lie in the readers, but because texts matter only when there are readers. Privileging realization over realism is not therefore a statement about the ontology of fiction, but rather about our agency with fiction, how fiction participates in our lived reality.

This methodology which permeates this text also closely resonates with the methodology of the realist novel, whose inherent performativity is present throughout, despite lacking a singular spokesperson or absolutely unified characteristics. In particular, the productivity of the ladder is exemplified by the figure of Konstantin Levin,

⁶⁶ At the height of the nineteenth-century novel, when mass publishing provided a populist aura to the notion of literature as art, the success of a literary work was measured as much by its circulation as its critical reception. Dickens in particular exemplified the commercial literary celebrity whose impact was expressed precisely in how—and how many—readers responded to his writing. Thus, nineteenth-century novels always implicitly and often explicitly address the reader, encouraging him or her to take part in the production of literary meaning. For example, the very title of Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* directly asks the reader to judge (and forgive) the novel's main character, making the central moment of the text lie in the reader's performance.

who like Wittgenstein, always works from within life itself. Levin's self-characterizations are often simplistic and awkward, as in searching for a stable identity, he constantly interrogates and revolutionizes his life. For example, he says, albeit somewhat inaccurately, that "Really, I've never thought about what I am, I'm Konstantin Levin, nothing more" (170) and, much more accurately, that "My chief sin is doubt. I doubt everything and for the most part live in doubt" (440). Remaining fully grounded in himself and his experience, not as a stable identity but as an entity in flux, Levin exemplifies the becoming-self of Wittgensteinian philosophy. Yet, despite being an intellectually gifted thinker, Levin struggles with all manner of abstractions—not because he fails to understand them, but because he desires to turn his learning to better living, a task he finds equally difficult whether managing his own emotions or implementing reforms to his farm.

Just as for Wittgenstein the purpose of philosophy is to transform the inarticulable bases upon which life itself must be lived from within, while challenging reductive articulations that reify the dynamic process of development, Levin pursues a changing self while resisting reifying his life with philosophical characterizations:

When Levin thought about what he was and what he lived for, he found no answer and fell into despair; but when he stopped asking himself about it, he seemed to know what he was and what he lived for, because he acted and lived firmly and definitely; recently he had even lived much more firmly and definitely than before. (789)

Thinking, of course, plays an important role for him and he is no better off when he remains purely unreflective. Levin could not be who he is and live intuitively if he did not also doubt, a fundamentally cognitive process. On the other hand, his eventual

revelation is expressed not in coherent thoughts, but in a revitalized intuition, an ability to live better. His revelation captures the method of this project, throwing away Wittgenstein's ladder and using thought primarily as a tool of self-development, a view that extends beyond Levin's own narrative and infuses the novel itself as a rhetorical device. Levin thus concludes that "I haven't discovered anything. I've only found out what I know" (796). Yet, in admitting that his revelation is no discovery, he does not trivialize it in the slightest. Working from within his own experience, this already extant knowledge has a completely transformed relation to his agency—he does not have a fully expressed, perfect philosophy, but has instead a positive integration of his philosophy, his intuition, and his action. Although Levin's revelation is rather idealized, and could be argued to represent Tolstoy's unfulfilled wishes for personal happiness, the performative nature of his revelation speaks to a fundamentally literary methodology that resonates with Wittgenstein's view of philosophy. As one cannot begin anywhere except within human activity, we cannot end anywhere except within human activity. When we *become* we do not become non-human, but more or at least differently human. Wittgenstein and Levin do not begin in our talk and action begrudgingly, simply because they have no other starting point. On the contrary, they begin so because they deeply care about the ongoing activity of being human. They turn analysis and self-reflection upon human activity not to escape it, but to come to know it better. In this way, philosophy and literature are seen as part of life, beginning within ongoing life and turning their critical eye inwards upon that ongoing activity in order that we live (talk, act, think, etc.) better.

This Wittgensteinian method is both taken from and applied to the philosophical and literary discourses that form this project's primary source material. Wittgenstein constantly characterizes and performs his philosophy in this way, maintaining an exclusively aphoristic, repetitive style that is expressed in a famous passage:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must transcend these propositions. (*TLP* 6.54)

Wittgenstein's philosophy is therefore designed to be worked *within* rather than mined for its philosophic content—what is said cannot be extricated from the activity of doing philosophy.⁶⁷ Likewise, reducing literature to its content—character, setting, plot, and the like—renders it impotent by ignoring its power as a site of performative engagement for the reader. Wittgenstein and the realist novel not only begin with how we talk and act, but in fact operate exclusively in that realm. Just as these texts engage surrounding discourses from within, their value is in their ability to be occupied and engaged from within (the task here). I argue that focusing on this performative aspect enables us to actively read these texts as *productive* in their role in human activity and praxis. Likewise, Wittgenstein both labels human activity as not only appropriate for a beginning, but also as an appropriate end, as he modifies his ladder metaphor:

I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by way of a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now.

⁶⁷ This is behind his statement that there are no philosophical theses because “If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them” (*PI* §128).

Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me. (*CV* 7)

When one ‘throws away the ladder,’ it is not simply because its value has been expended.⁶⁸ Instead, one must rethink the metaphor of a ladder—Wittgenstein’s philosophical ladder is not a means to traverse from one point to another, but is instead a vehicle for productive self-development. Employing the ladder philosophically entails engaging in text in order to develop something within oneself. To read actively is to become.

⁶⁸ Thus, we cannot read Wittgenstein’s desire to ‘throw away the ladder’ as an admonition not to re-tread the same ground. In fact, Wittgenstein is notorious for returning to the same questions and images again and again, which he himself recognizes: “Each of the sentences I write is trying to say the whole thing, i.e. the same thing over and over again; it is as though they were all simply views of one object seen from different angles” (*CV* 7).

Chapter 3

The 'I' of Bildung:

Narrating the Self in *Jane Eyre*

"I am by no means sure that I should prefer a continuation of my work by others to a change in the way people live which would make all these questions superfluous."
-Ludwig Wittgenstein (CV 61)

As the author of her own tale, Jane Eyre demonstrates how characterizing her life in particular ways has radical impact on her life itself—not merely retrospective, her lively narration reflects an actively probing subjectivity attempting to come to grips with its place in the world with all its social and ethical significances. As a first-person account, Jane models the transformative power of both literature and philosophy as her ability to both narrate her life as story and engage in philosophical self-reflections are instrumental in bringing about her growth as a person (this is widely recognized, as the novel is typically characterized as a—or even *the*—*bildungsroman*, or novel of self-development). Yet the novel is also a second-person narration, as Brontë's famous addresses to her 'dear reader' indicate that such self-development is meant for us as well. I propose that we treat Jane's reading of her own life as a model for our reading of fictional narratives, engaging the story as the development of a lived experience that invokes philosophical self-reflection and is ultimately aimed at our own (ethical) becoming or self-development. While the modern reader may find much to censure in

Jane herself, the very act of censoring renders her narrative a productive part of our narratives, as thinking through the ramifications of character is an act of developing character.⁶⁹

Using *Jane Eyre* as a paradigm case for the element of becoming present in realist art, I trace how narration engages our subjectivity and thereby participates in the self-development (*bildung*) of the reader. In the particular case of novels like *Jane Eyre*, intensely personal characterological studies of ordinary people engaging others within social settings, I further suggest that these narratives have value through engaging our (ethical) relations to everyday social reality, both through allowing philosophical self-reflection on our social structure and through provoking an exercise of *care* that blurs the self/other distinction. We respond to such literature with the whole of our being—not just the intellectual part. Therefore, the becoming of the reading subject is implicit in literary experience. The purpose of this chapter is at one remove from this direct experience—in reflecting upon the nature and possibility of such becoming, I hope that we can become more active participants in the nature and extent of such literary influence, that we might not merely become other, but that we might become *better*.

BILDUNG AND BECOMING

If there were a central tenet to the historically, culturally, and stylistically diverse literary category known as the *Bildungsroman*, or ‘novel of development,’ it might be “to

⁶⁹ In this case, the negative example would function as what Andrew Miller calls the *optative* mode in which one defines the self (what we are) against possible alternate selves (what we are not, but could have been). This will be explored further in Chapter 4.

be is to become.” That is, narratives of youth, education, personal development, and social integration paint human *being* as an ongoing process of internal change or *becoming*. Stressing human existence as fundamentally involving a capacity to change, adapt, and grow, the *Bildungsroman* parallels philosophical discourses of becoming, to borrow Deleuze’s term for Spinoza’s notion of essential changeability in which our essence simply is our striving (“conatus”) to realize a state of being circumscribed by the constellation of terms “power of activity,” “freedom,” “perfection,” and “reality.”⁷⁰ The realization of potential, in this view, requires the simultaneous realization (recognition) and realization (fulfillment) of this definitional drive, this fundamental ability to become-other in order to become more truly what we were already supposed to be. Yet, while diverse texts present varied perspectives on the extent to which becoming is teleological, here I shall investigate *Jane Eyre* as an example of how the notion of becoming can be interwoven into realist narration such that the text becomes neither just an objective nor a subjective account of how things are, but a dynamic investigation into the possibilities of agency. As a character who overcomes trials and adapts to new situations, as a narrator whose representation of events is connected with self-development, and as a text that opens her progression to critical scrutiny, ‘Jane Eyre’ performs and models narrative becoming.

⁷⁰ The mystical circularity of Spinoza’s vision, with its strange but elegant blend of mathematical and poetic style represents an unusually ambitious extreme to a notion of development that is often more pragmatic and ordinary. I will not assert Spinoza’s strongest claims here, but rather use his ideas as a means for understanding and articulating becoming.

In *Jane Eyre*, the emphasis on realization over realism⁷¹ is seen in Brontë's re-deployment of the image of the mirror, a symbol that has stood for a perfect representation and reflection of reality (mimesis) in art for centuries. As early as the pivotal scene in Chapter 2 where Jane is locked in the Red Room, Brontë relates two significant encounters with a mirror that distorts rather than reflects reality. In the first, Jane sees her own reflection in a strange and uncanny light:

Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking in the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travelers. (8)

Unlike Alice, who passes through the looking glass into an alternate reality which subverts traditional notions of sense, Jane remains rooted in the reality of her current situation, but perceives otherness within herself. Replacing an accurate account of Jane's physical appearance with an impressionistic image reminiscent of Jane's own artistic imaginings, this mirror subverts the objectivity of the real. Yet, while observer and observed are both ostensibly Jane, the distortion of the image preserves the subjectivity of reality and allegorically portrays the real relations into which Jane is introduced—the poor dependent of an Aunt and cousins who despise her, she is in fact alien and other with respect to her limited society. This image of the lonely spirit⁷² is Jane, in that it

⁷¹ The frequent Gothic elements—a recurring trope of supernatural imagery that runs through the text and culminates in the often criticized moment where Jane and Rochester manage to spiritually communicate from afar—undermine the novel's objective realism but reinforce its psychological realism.

⁷² This rhetoric is extended throughout the novel, especially in Jane's relationship with Rochester, who repeatedly describes Jane as a 'sprite,' 'fairy,' or 'imp.'

accurately reflects her inner character while it misrepresents her outer character. Here, the psychological realism of the novel is not manifest in stability, but in turmoil, as Jane spends her imprisonment in the Red Room agitating over both her character and her condition when she encounters the mirror again:

As I sat looking at the white bed and over-shadowed walls—occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror—I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed . . . This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realized. (10)

The mirror here—dimly gleaming, not clearly reflecting—becomes a surface upon which Jane’s inner terror can find form in her imagination. Here, Jane’s trauma oscillates between the fear of a supernatural intervention into reality and the trauma of reality itself, which seems so hopeless that only something more terrible could change it. While this passage, hinging on the subjunctive marker ‘if,’ indicates that the supernatural is not yet realized, it simultaneously speaks to the palpable reality of Jane’s inner dialogue—Jane’s active imagination is the dim mirror that always already ‘makes real’ its own reality through an intermingling of imagination and perception. That is, refracting rather than reflecting, the mirror (symbol of literary signification) demonstrates that appearances in fact have reality if not substance, and that if truth and fiction are opposed, it is because they are united as vehicles of realization and becoming.

This intrusion of Jane’s inner world into the mimetic reality of fiction is the first in a long series of transformative episodes that structure the novel as a *Bildungsroman*. In this and each subsequent instance (roughly outlined by Jane’s passage through a series of locations: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor’s End, Ferndean), Jane’s deeply

subjective first-personal account represents not a singular, static subjectivity, but rather successive stages of a developing consciousness. Jane's mirror—her unique perspective as both narrator and character—mingles her self and her reality in a continually unfolding becoming reminiscent of the developmental narratives of the mind presented by Hegel or Jung. Having thrown Jane into the Red Room as a psychological punishment for an outbreak perceived both as class warfare and feminine hysteria, the Reeds are surprised to find that this imposed trauma was effective after a fashion, that Jane really has transformed (although, of course, not in the way they expect or hope). This newness of Jane's desperately rebellious attitude (5-6) is described by the intermittently sympathetic Bessie, who berates Jane "You little sharp thing! you've got quite a new way of talking. What makes you so venturesome and hardy?" (33) Following this narrative of development through the novel, we see a series of significant encounters engendering transformations, similar to the Jungian notion of individuation through successive encounters with archetypal characters.

To summarize, she begins as we have seen with her encounter with the Reeds at the aptly named Gateshead where the birth of Jane's individuality, desire, rage, and resistance breaks her cycle as a perpetually abused dependent and precipitates an external and internal journey. She is disciplined again at Lowood school, but is transformed by encounters with Helen Burns and Miss Temple, of whom she writes: "I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits; more harmonious thoughts; what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind" (76). Here, in addition to tempering her anger through her first experiences with kindness, Jane acquires

enough of the skills and attitudes of nurturing to become a governess, a position that despite its incredible marginalization and exploitation of feminized affective labor provides a rare possibility for a woman to support herself. At Thornfield, of course, she encounters Rochester and the home, work, and (eventually) love he provides, a pivotal event that leads to mental, emotional, and even physical becoming: “So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin-crescent destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength” (137). Moving through both love and heartbreak, Jane moves on, explicitly stating the need for further becoming when she tells Rochester of her resolve to leave, saying “All is changed about me, sir, I must change, too—there is no doubt of that” (285). At this point, having fled physically, her becoming is itself in flight as she desperately seeks a stoic or Puritan form of internal change that is somewhat bittersweet, as we can see in a passage she writes about adjusting to teaching rural schoolchildren that could as well sum up her attempts to pursue happiness in spite of her deep emotional void:

But let me not hate and despise myself too much for these feelings; I know them to be wrong—that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them. To-morrow, I trust, I shall get the better of them partially; and in a few weeks, perhaps, they will be quite subdued. In a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress and a change for the better in my scholars may substitute gratification for disgust. (343)

In the company of St. John and his sisters, Jane finds both a figurative and a literal family and, while she must reject the deeply flawed becoming St. John offers her, in which he proposes endless static labor without any emotional becoming or support, she progresses further towards individuation in a cyclical move that reaffirms the unknown origin of her

self at exactly the moment she has progressed far enough to properly internalize it. This cyclical becoming, in which the end result turns out to be something there all along, ultimately leads to the renewal of Jane and Rochester's relationship in an non-destructive context and in her inverted relationships in her return to Gateshead. Unable to fully progress without transcending the angry child whose tumultuous selfhood initiates the novel, Jane makes a virtue out of the internal inconsistency of renegeing on a promise when she forgives her aunt: "I had once vowed that I would never call her aunt again: I thought it no sin to forget and break that vow now" (218). Initially an orphan, with a battered, fractured identity, a "heterogeneous thing" (9), Jane finds her own identity not as an entirely new person, but as the person she always already was supposed to be—she receives at the end what she ought to have had at the beginning, a father, family, inheritance, love, self. Here, being is the fulfillment of becoming as this narrated series of transformative encounters is not an endless regress of slipping identities but is rather a formative encounter, the birth of the eponymous character of *Jane Eyre*.

This narrative of becoming is just that: a narrative, an ordered outline that makes sense of a life in terms of becoming. Furthermore, this narrative continuity is imposed by the narrator herself, who constructs the story of her life in a way that demonstrates personal *Bildung*. As the writer of her own tale, Jane stresses her own role in making meaning out of plain reality as more lens than mirror. Thus, she complicates the simplistic notion of the *Bildungsroman* as merely reinscribing social norms by complicating the conventions and thereby the implications of the *Bildungsroman*,

demonstrating that its realizing potential is not entirely beholden to the particular ideologies that dominate its historical development as Sonjeong Cho describes:

The female Bildungsroman inscribes the normative model of the female body and virtue that stipulate the bourgeois ideal of domesticity. The heroine's gradual Bildung concludes with a realignment of class alliances in compliance with a marital transaction. The marriage plot, the most common script of female Bildung, takes on the form of "voyage in," as opposed to the masculine "voyage out." The feminist revision of the Bildungsroman investigates the ways in which women novelists rewrite the male-centered script of Bildung to present a Bildung paradigm that counts the female experience of "voyage in." (26-7)

Through this process of revision, Brontë shows that the becoming-engendered *Bildungsroman* does not necessarily demand becoming precisely what society dictates. Instead, the classed and gendered Jane writes herself into a narrative of becoming not traditionally accessible to one of her subject position. In so doing, she wields narrative as an instrument of realization, a tool of self-definition, rather than merely reproducing the reality through the literary conventions of realism. Jane expresses this revisionist attitude when she inverts the gendered paradigm of masculine agential superiority. Whereas Rochester believes his privileged subject position gives him authority to dictate the truth of a conversation, saying "do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house" (124), Jane contrarily challenges him to follow *her* lead in taking up agential becoming, saying "I no more assign this fate to you than I grasp it for myself. We were born to strive and endure—you as well as I: do so" (301). These

words—‘strive’ and ‘endure’—mark Jane as embracing the nuanced blend of persistence and change, internal sameness and difference, that characterize becoming. As a highly marginalized character, Jane’s very existence exposes a rift in the logic of becoming, namely the gap between the oppressive subject positions society tries to squeeze her into and the possibility of agency, personhood, and individuation promised by discourses of education and development. Enduring the former and striving for the latter, Jane shows how becoming can be an assertion of personhood in that it must alternately persist through and engender change in order to carve out a space where self-definition can be truly definitional. This view reminiscent of Spinoza’s when he defines the essence of individuals in terms of both striving (conatus) and enduring (persistence): “*The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself*” (3p7). Reframing the ‘essence’ of selfhood as a drive to both maintain and alter the self, Spinoza ties the active expression of agency with the nature of the agent. To become is not merely to change, but to become more self-caused, to bring one’s actions and nature into alignment, a complex task—doubly so for a woman writer like Jane—which requires an individual to both find definition through and against social integration. Thus, the novel itself must strive and endure if it is to pursue what Cho calls a “feminist revision” in the face of a condescending attitude towards domestic fiction that could easily appropriate Rochester’s argument about the intellectual authority of masculinized experiences over the feminized domesticity of living “quietly with one set of people in one house.”⁷³ As representational forms, realist literature and the

⁷³ This is a critique directed particularly against the Brontës and Jane Austen, for example, in Virginia

Bildungsroman are about becoming and thereby involve the challenges of achieving selfhood within an environment that often co-opts the becomings it facilitates by holding identities under the sway of identifying structures. As an affective human activity, moreover, these forms also engender becoming, which is why *Bildung* is the central to Jane as both narrator and character. For Jane, to narrate, to strive, and to become all become linked in a complex, developing agential structure in which critically defining reality through fiction enacts self-definition. For us, to strive and become are part of the activity of reading itself, and Jane can therefore be a figure who is more than either an author or a character. In this way, Jane acts as the subject and advocate of a transformative encounter in our own *Bildungsroman*, almost as if she turns to us with a half smirking, half kindly “Dear reader,” saying “We were born to strive and endure—you as well as I: do so.”

The alternative to this active striving is, of course, stasis and passivity, an attitude exemplified by both positive and negative figures in the novel. Thus, whereas Jane is able to forgive her aunt, her aunt cannot reciprocate, despite an obsession with seeing Jane again that indicates some desire for resolution. Jane’s aunt cannot progress, so she instead regresses, becoming senile and then dying. Yet, while her inability to become is based on narrow-minded bitterness, the angelic Helen is equally unable to adapt (literally, she cannot adapt to the physical deprivations and systematic education at Lowood; figuratively, her uncompromising goodness can only submit to an imperfect world by negating itself) and she too dies. In a *Bildungsroman*, where becoming is key, stasis is

Woolf’s argument that Austen could never aspire to the sweeping social portraits of a Tolstoy.

linked with death. The most extended examples of static figure are St. John Rivers, whose uncompromising privileging of work over self is explicitly tied to death—Jane’s potential death as his wife/servant and his own actual death which concludes the novel—and the Thornfield version of Rochester, a man haunted by a deep secret he maintains in an unhealthily precarious state of suspension. Tormented alike by the continual, unchanging presence of his mad wife (whom he keeps imprisoned in his attic) and his inability to forgive his past transgressions, Rochester links his own inability to become with Bertha’s, describing his wife as “common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything larger” (291). In response to his condition, Rochester also initially refuses becoming—which is why Jane needed to reject his second proposition—with self-rationalizing language, arguing that “since happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may” (127). Here, Rochester reveals two critical failures to become. Firstly, he portrays his dissipated life as the consequence of such failure by immersing himself in a static, relentless pursuit of pleasure as an alternative to self-development. Secondly, although he acknowledges the necessity and possibility of reformation, he pins it on external circumstances and thereby disavows his own agency in the self-self relationship. Thus, his attitude of wishing for his own becoming to be caused externally in fact inhibits any possibility of becoming. Saying that “My principles were never trained, Jane: they may have grown a little awry for want of attention” (249), Rochester demands Jane be the agent of his becoming, a marked contrast to Jane’s attitude of taking responsibility for her self and encouraging Rochester to do likewise (as quoted earlier). In a close parallel with the cliché about

realism that “The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means” (Wilde 1788), Brontë demonstrates a similar pattern with realization: those who become end happily and those who don’t end unhappily at worst or have an extremely bland form of happiness at best.⁷⁴ Here, we can clearly see the normativity implicit in the *Bildungroman* firstly in that becoming is clearly preferred over stasis and secondly in that Brontë’s notion of becoming has a very specific direction, raising a host of ethical questions to which we must now turn.

Not only are the fates of characters explicitly connected to their participation in becoming in the novel, the moral of the novel is expressed in terms of *bildung* as well, as seen here in the novel’s most explicitly feminist statement:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action and they will make it if they cannot find it . . . Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties. (101)

Although in one sense this refers to the gendered restrictions on female action in Brontë’s society, this statement more importantly characterizes the *reason* why such restrictions are unjust in the language of becoming—action is superior to tranquility because it enables the ‘exercise of faculties,’ that is, the development of the self. Although Spinoza focuses on philosophical rather than literary engagement with experience in the *Ethics*, his attitude towards activity and passivity sheds light on Brontë’s compatible perspective. For Spinoza, every perception and action is relational—the product of the interaction between self and other. Since one’s agency consists equally in acting and being bounded

⁷⁴ Brontë gives Bessie, Miss Temple, and the Rivers sisters, for example, happy marriages one and all, but their marriages mark their exclusion from the story, as if there is nothing more to say of them afterwards.

(which are the same thing for Spinoza, who is deeply influenced by Newton's third law of motion), Spinoza draws a distinction between the extent to which the agent's action is *active* (self-caused) or *passive* (externally determined), the former being more desirable (free) than the latter. For Spinoza, as for many scholars, the proper application of thought to our everyday (inter)actions is a major determinant of how active or passive our activities are. To this end, careful reflection is an integral part of flourishing as individuals according to the *Ethics*: "*The mind, as far as it can, endeavors to think of [imagine] those things that increase or assist the body's power of activity*" (3p12). Becoming is therefore not something neutral that merely happens to us, but is part of our striving, our self-propelled desire to improve ourselves. Spinoza agrees with both Kant and Wittgenstein about the incredible contextuality of subjectivity and agency, which are always already active within a network of relations, and about the importance of reflecting on the relations themselves. Unreflective thought responds only to the particularity of each context, and is thus subject to the passivity of illusions generated by such particularity. On the other hand, reflective thought responds to the particularity of each context by examining the principles and relations operative in responding to the context, enabling it to both address the immediate demands of the situation and to develop conceptual resources that improve future decisions and actions. That is, reflection is an investment in and direction of becoming in the service of flourishing, an activity that Spinoza portrays as both essential and ethical. As a fundamentally discursive form—an activity of reflection—realist literature works like philosophy to ground positive reflection by revealing the relations immanent in the depicted situations.

In writing as well as living her becoming, Jane engages her capacity for reflection as part of her ethical striving, a contiguity between mind and body, agent and context, that lends ethical directionality to her deliberate change, making her journey one of growth and progression rather than undirected transformation.

The reality of fiction, conceived according to its subjective aspects, is therefore the reality of becoming—that *real* changes occur through the self-self and self-other relations instigated with respect to the text. Just as Jane is famous as a literary character because of the radical shifts in her personality that define the novel, the reality of the text can be experienced in the changes experienced by the reader. Jane can be for us what the archetypal others were for Jane. The structure of the bildungsroman present in *Jane Eyre* may be only one of many possible narrative structures, but its emphasis on narrated moments as incitements to individual self-development rather disconnected happenings accurately portrays the *reader's* confrontation with literature more generally. For Cho, this ties Jane's story not only to female becoming, but to female writing:

The nineteenth-century female Bildungsroman is the narrative of transformative becoming in time. Feminine subjectivity is a site of transformation and the passage to becoming; concomitantly, narrative space becomes a textual body of sexual difference too. The fulfillment and materialization of sexual difference is an ongoing event, but nowhere fully present. The feminine in literature, just like the feminine in feminism, is something that bodies forth, emerges on the horizons of becoming. (30)

If to become is to participate in a narrative of development, to *strive* is to write one's own narrative, as Jane's first-person narration does. The distortion of Jane's realizing mirror is thus not just subjective noise that muddies an otherwise objective truth, but is rather a deliberate and necessary tactic for creating a female *Bildungsroman* in a world that

restricts female agency. ‘Bodying forth,’ Jane advances her becoming through a narrative of self-reflection that uses the inscriptive power of narrative not to reinscribe social norms, but to inscribe herself into active realization. This is complicated in an odd reversal where Jane intentionally employs the mirror to temper her subjective expectations with cold, hard reality:

Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity, write under it, “Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.” (150)

Swallowing her both hope and desire and objectifying herself through the portrait and her second-person address, Jane attempts to align her self-concept with what she deems socially acceptable through realist representation. Yet, this realist therapy is misguided as Jane only tries to stifle her subjectivity to diminish her internal suffering from a perceived loss and in the end only directs her passionate temper in upon itself. The very violence of this encounter reveals that how one mirrors oneself to oneself is a transformative (not merely representational) action—to reflect or inflect is to become. Here, this attempt to reinscribe social norms is portrayed almost as suicide, as a striving towards stasis that negates true becoming. While Jane was certainly “a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain,” the thrust of this developmental model ensures that she need not remain so, and indeed by the end of the novel none of these descriptions is fully accurate.

Furthermore, this temptation of stasis combines the personal becoming of Jane the character with Jane the narrator’s realist representation by showing how a style that

thrives on the mimetic similarity between the represented reality and our own encourages the reader to come to terms with his or her own place within the already existing social realities. While realist literature is often subject to this critique of conservatism, here Brontë portrays it not as the essential nature of the mirror itself, but as a particularly unhealthy stance taken up by Jane in a moment of despairing weakness. Although it is possible to use realization to focus on the way things are at the expense of how they could be, both possibilities are left open, as Wittgenstein points out when he describes his own philosophy as a therapeutic mirror: “I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right” (*CV* 18). If psychological individuation requires the so-called ‘mirror stage,’⁷⁵ in which one cannot fully develop until one learns to distinguish the self as a separated out part of the world, so too does social and ethical individuation require constant reflectings of the self in and through others. As we shall see, despite the implicit subjectivity of such engagement, the self can only become with and in relation to others, and therefore absolutely requires the type of individuating becoming exemplified by *Bildung*. The self *ought* only become within the social, discursive, and normative regularities of such intersubjective contexts as are related by the reality of fiction, since the goal of self-betterment comes out of the self’s situatedness in an already-extant lived relational context.

SOLIPSISM

⁷⁵ Cf. Jacques Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.”

To think of the *Bildungsroman* as an imperative to strive and endure is to align it with the project of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy in that both present the text as a mirror that facilitates self-reflective becoming. These projects are fundamentally ethical in nature because whether one has an absolutist, relativist, or some other notion of morality, these self-directed becomings operate in the ethical domains of discourse, agency, and social interaction. The ethics of becoming, the directed changes of agency, are of course aligned with ethics in general, the nature of an agent's relationships to self, others, and world. The privacy of the reading experience, however, problematizes this therapeutic quality of realization by performing the becoming in virtual spaces isolated from the actual practice of social interaction. That is, the therapeutic reflection instigated by literature is primarily located in the experiential (temporal) interaction of self and text, which temporarily suspends and withdraws from the reader's immediate social context.⁷⁶ That such interaction is typically private in one sense facilitates becoming by providing an immersive, speculative space that challenges becoming from the relatively safe space of a private engagement with a virtual reality. On the other hand, one of the great dangers of privacy and virtuality is that the self-text relationship can become so strong it begins to exclude or pervert the self-other relationships that play out in the actual world. Thus, it is a relatively common trope for young protagonists of nineteenth-century novels to be 'poisoned' by romance or adventure tales that generate unrealistic expectations. Or, to put it another way, the self-text relationship, in which the text serves as a mirror of the self's own subjectivity, can promote a self-self relationship that can have either positive

⁷⁶ This is the very situation that enables the 'escapist' quality of fiction.

or negative consequences. The therapeutic aspect of literature attempts to deploy this self-self relationship so as to strengthen an individual's relationships with self and other. Yet, although literary texts certainly can exert *a kind of* agency upon a reader, encouraging the reader to develop in particular ways, this agency must be qualified as largely suggestive. When the reader engenders a self-self intervention in private,⁷⁷ he or she necessarily engages dispositional relations to others and the world, but the resultant becoming may be either active or passive, empathetic or solipsistic. By better understanding how the subjectivity and privacy of fiction are situated within relations that point outside the self, we can pursue active reading practices that connect us with others.

To begin, we must deconstruct the very notion of the privacy of the reading experience, which is private only insofar as it can be performed by a singular individual without the direct physical presence of others. However, just as Wittgenstein argues that there is no such thing as private language (although one can certainly talk to oneself) because the very notion of language implies that meaning is at least potentially accessible to others, so too can we state that reading is not truly private because the reader receives meaning only within an enormous web of linguistic and social relations that are at least potentially accessible to others. This implies neither that we all receive literature in exactly the same way nor that we can clearly express everything we feel in response to literature. It does imply, however, that whatever individual meanings a reader generates through reading literature are situated within conditions of meaning that transcend the

⁷⁷ Certainly, the communal reception of literature influences and potentially improves this private moment, but we can still isolate the moment of reading as an individual act of realization which can help make the self-self relationship more positive, *even in* relatively private circumstances.

individual reader or text. Thus, far from being an exclusively personal or literary notion, our discursive practices of portraying the subjective as real⁷⁸ are intimately connected to operative *practices* that permeate a wide variety of social institutions. Eyewitness testimony is therefore a central feature of disciplines that investigate reality, such as law, history, and journalism. Even the physical sciences employ a brand of witnessing (empiricism) to determine the deep structure of reality, despite their recognition that no observation is absolutely reliable. That is to say, our evidentiary practices treat disputable claims *as* certain because they are baldly evident to us—we neither have nor need further evidence to demonstrate that what *appears* clearly before us genuinely exists.⁷⁹ Although this connects truth to individual standpoint, as Wittgenstein indicates when he writes that “I act with *complete* certainty. But this certainty is my own” (*OC* §174), the role of such subjective understanding within evidentiary practices indicates that the certainty of the ‘my own’ depends upon the certainty of social acceptability. Thus, although the success of our everyday activity justifies itself, we must resist thinking of human subjectivity as ever fully autonomous, thereby falling into solipsism. Although there are reasons for privileging subjectivity over objectivity in the antinomy of the real, in fact the subjective requires objectivity just as much as objectivity requires subjectivity. And, just as Kantian ethics requires subjectivity be tempered by

⁷⁸ This is also seen in how the structure of English grammar itself, which uses nouns both for individual agents and for a whole host of abstract notions pertaining to experience, including ‘subjectivity,’ ‘mind,’ and ‘reality.’

⁷⁹ In “Realism and the Realistic Spirit,” Cora Diamond effectively parallels Wittgenstein and Berkeley on such matters. In essence, Berkeley complements Wittgenstein by arguing that even if we lived in a world stripped of the metaphysical claim that everything consists of matter, we could still continue living as we do because the regularity of a practice supersedes whatever hidden causes enable it.

intersubjectivity,⁸⁰ so too social interaction requires an intersubjective basis for reality (which I called *generic* in the first chapter). To synthesize objective and subjective realization within lived reality, we must therefore turn to becoming as the point of intersection or interaction between inner and outer, self and other. This node between self and other is the site of ethics, the place where the self-other relationship finds expression. To achieve the therapeutic ethics of becoming, therefore, we must find the other within the private space of fiction, resisting the solipsistic tendency to reproduce the self as an autonomous and isolated ethical agent that privileges the self-self relationship over the self-other.

Although the danger of such thinking is in its performance, we can further understand its allure by examining its theoretical formulation in the philosophical concept of *solipsism*, which is roughly the idea that the only reality is *my* reality. There is something subtly right in this view, even though it is rarely asserted by philosophers, which Wittgenstein indicates when he writes, “In fact what solipsism *means* is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself. That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which only I understand) mean the limits of *my* world” (*TLP* 5.62). In this sense, solipsism simply captures the insight we uncovered in Chapter 1, namely that our very notion of objective reality is only accessible and significant to us through our subjective perspective of it. Our lives as agents show clearly that we talk, think, and act only from the situated position of our own

⁸⁰ The Categorical Imperative is essentially that a particular individual should act according to principles that he or she would like everyone else to follow. This is therefore subjective because the individual’s judgment is part of the ethical process, but it is also intersubjective because the cardinal sin for Kant is precisely to have a double standard between oneself and others.

selves. Yet, the rhetoric of solipsism obscures such an interpretation, as when we say what can only be shown we often generate powerful illusions that have significant ethical consequences. To say that the only reality is *my* reality sounds very like privileging oneself over all others, whereas, as Wittgenstein argues the opposite: “The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it” (*TLP* 5.64). Ignoring how the subject is thus coordinated with reality of world and others outside the self, the problem of solipsism is that it can engender egoism—thinking of the world exclusively in terms of one’s own way of seeing it can easily de-mean other views and the people who hold them. The hypocrisy of Rev. Broklehurst, who enforces a doctrine of perfect austerity at his school and practices complete indulgence at home, is one of many examples of this. In fact, much of the novel attempts to situate Jane in direct opposition to such examples, demonstrating that compassion and care for the value of others is vital for opposing the desire to unilaterally impose one’s worldview on others. Thus, Jane must resist the propositions of both Rochester and St. John because both require that she simply conform to their vision of a perfect reality and neither pay heed to the consequences their propositions would have for Jane. While Jane the character is sometimes criticized for being excessively passive in asserting her agency in the story, Jane the narrator presents a much more compelling model of agency by demonstrating the possibilities of (ethical) agency through the contrasts drawn between the characters. Thus, while Jane’s selflessness in paradoxically both passively resisting and compassionately caring for the autocratic figures in the novel does not represent a fully individuated self, it does represent the *possibility* of individuating a self by revealing the

tension between selflessness and self-centeredness implicit in the ongoing activity of becoming-self which is the central theme of the novel. Thus, immanent in the critique of the dangers of overemphasizing the reality of subjectivity, the deeply personal narration of the novel gives us a model of a subjectivity that draws on individual subjectivity to create *real* connections with others.

Akin to a Wittgensteinian ethical intervention, which is typically aimed at dispelling the operative illusions generated by our forms of expression in order to reclaim ethical action from the violent consequences of acting upon reductive statements rather than truly ethical (empathetic) feelings, *Jane Eyre*'s literary language exposes the solipsistic illusions of the first-person narration and proposes instead another basis for self-other ethical relations. In short, although there is something genuinely real about subjective experience, treating this reality as autonomous and allowing it to overwrite objective reality runs the risk of authorizing the solipsistic privileging of the self. Language—literary or otherwise—can be a site of both self-self and self-other interaction and thus if we are to advocate empathic ethics, we must resist the illusion of private language. In literary contexts, this means we must see that the fictionality of fiction—its illusory, imaginative reality—transcends the private, personal experience of an individual reader and always already connects that experience to systems of signification and significance that connect to others. Moreover, we must recognize that private or solipsistic language will inherently break down, that creating a fortress of words to isolate a stable subject is an impossible task, and an isolating self-self relationship will spiral into both non-being and non-sense. Although the narrative of *Jane Eyre* subsumes Jane's

subjectivity into the first-person narrative voice with the full authority of a narrator with all of language at her disposal, the text exposes the illusion of self-self autonomy by showing how Jane struggles to *say* her experience. A marginalized, heterogeneous thing, Jane's becoming-self is not accomplished through her becoming-author (her *Künstlerroman*) because narrative control is insufficient to speak into being a self that always escapes outside the strict confines of her restricted autonomy and reaches towards others. Initially, this difficulty is portrayed as that of being whose identity is only partially formed and whose competences are only partially developed, as we see when startled by Dr. Lloyd's sudden interest and asked to narrate her life while yet unskilled as an author, young Jane lacks the resources to express herself despite her evident desire to do so:

How much I wished to reply fully to this question! How difficult it was to frame any answer! Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words. Fearful, however, of losing this first and only opportunity of relieving my grief by imparting it, I, after a disturbed pause, contrived to frame a meager, though, as far as it went, true response. (17)

Striving, even in this unformed stage, to provide a 'true' albeit 'meager' articulation of her selfhood, Jane's desire is not quite to retreat into a solipsistic utopia of private language. Instead, her driving desire is to become known to the good doctor, to find self within a self-other relationship that operates under a different paradigm from the exploitative relationships she has become accustomed to. Here, the fraught inarticulateness of her language is not a mere failure of expression, but is a symptom of the tenuousness of the self-other relationship, which always imperfectly bridges the

incredible nexus of uniqueness that differentiates individuals. Even as the novel progresses and Jane becomes educated, articulate, and comfortable narrating her life, Jane continues to struggle with saying. At Lowood, she writes “What my sensations were, no language can describe” (60). After becoming an artist, she states “I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize” (117). And, upon hearing St. John’s impassioned preaching, she laments: “I wish I could describe that sermon: but it is past my power. I cannot even render faithfully the effect it produced on me” (335). We get to know Jane by progressing from sensation to emotion to artistic imagination to spirituality as we seem to delve deeper and deeper an inner self that perpetually resists linguistic characterization. Yet, the fact that Jane’s narrative can never provide a completely clear expression of a fully actualized self is precisely what enables us—who despite our privileged access as readers would be always situated outside any self-sufficient self-self relationship—to relate to her. This paradox of simultaneously seeming to know someone better and better and always feeling like true knowledge is endlessly deferred is effectively modeled through Jane’s fictional existence, which is fully circumscribed by words, but applies as well to existing individuals, who may—and, I believe, *do*—possess an inaccessible nature or essence. However, even if knowing someone to the very core is impossible in some sense, this does not imply that subjectivity has significance outside of the significations present in the generic conditions of intersubjective experience. In fact, the breakdown of language in articulating autonomous selfhood reveals the spaces where

selfhood is not self-sufficient and upon which the self-other relationship can develop through reciprocal becoming.

While it is true that language (saying) breaks down in describing the self, the illusion is thinking that this is because it fails to capture an already present essence of the subject. Psychology tells us (1) that the subject is not fully accessible even to him- or herself and (2) that linguistic practices partially form (do not merely describe) such subjectivity. Thus, this illusion is based on the connotation of the word ‘failure;’ language ‘fails’ to represent subjectivity not because it has specific flaws that make it unable to capture the reality that should have been accessible, but because the nature of reality is such that it is not itself representable in language, as Wittgenstein indicates when he writes, “Propositions cannot represent the logical form: this mirrors itself in the propositions. / That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent. / That which *expresses* itself in language, *we* cannot express by language” (*TLP* 4.121). The persistent problem of drawing conclusions from self-examination is that by its very nature subjectivity obscures its object of analysis and therefore cannot see itself clearly. Representation (even to oneself) is always already re-presentation; rather than providing absolute and direct access to how and what we are, subjectivity entails interpretation—the act of ‘making real’ one’s individual relation to an ever-changing context. Subjectivity therefore can no more see itself clearly than we can see seeing—“you do *not* really see the eye” (*TLP* 5.633). That is, the use of subjectivity as a noun already generates a problematic conception, as if subjectivity were itself a thing that could be

described or perceived rather than an act and character of describing and perceiving themselves.

Of course, such problematic conceptions are not merely academic philosophical mistakes to be censured only for the sake of form—these ways of thinking have very real consequences. Jane is often the victim of such self-replicating ideologies, as her marginalization derives from falling outside systems of power that strive only to perpetuate themselves. Yet, while Jane manages to assert her own selfhood from this marginalized perspective, she is keenly aware of the static nature of dominant ideologies that replicate rather than become.⁸¹ Strikingly, the former angry child responds primarily with sympathy in these situations, forgiving her transgressors for the violence enacted in their attempts to maintain the illusion of their own superiority. For example, although Jane verbally resists Mrs. Reed early in the novel, the narrator later excuses Mrs. Reed's behavior, writing:

... in his last moments [Mr. Reed] had required a promise of Mrs. Reed that she would rear and maintain me as one of her own children. Mrs. Reed probably considered she had kept this promise; and so she had, I dare say, as well as her nature would permit her: but how could she really like an interloper, not of her race, and unconnected with her, after her husband's death, by any tie? (10)

Even while acknowledging Mrs. Reed's injustice, Jane rationalizes Mrs. Reed's behavior by arguing that it is the consequence of "nature." Similarly, Jane forgives Miss Ingram her class prejudices, writing:

... the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless,

⁸¹ Mitosis is still life, after all, but its stillness is of another order from human becoming.

from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed then, they had reasons for holding them, such as I could not fathom. (176)

In these cases, Jane extends forgiveness towards her transgressors, recognizing that they are as much (or more, for they can neither match Jane's becoming nor her eventual happiness) victims of their prejudices as she is. Just as Jane's own racialized and nationalized prejudices perpetuate a British cultural solipsism that defines itself against culture others it negates and excludes, the gendered and classed oppression that Jane struggles against confers no genuine internal advantage to its perpetrators. The philosophical danger of reflecting the self back upon self, authorized by the solipsistic illusion, is therefore united with the ethical danger—namely, that an inflated sense of one's subjective perspective can entail an unethical deprecation of all other perspectives.

We are now poised, therefore, to state how the privacy of the self-self relationship instigated by reading fiction can in fact positively influence self-other relationships outside the text. First, we must note that in itself no fiction can compel such a response, and in fact the privacy of the fictional experience can tend to encourage solipsism because the other in the dyad is fictional and therefore cannot truly respond to the reader as a fully-formed agent—there can be no truly reciprocal relationship between reader and fictional character. This means that the compassion directed towards the character has nowhere to latch onto—although in form the compassion is directed outside the self, in actuality the compassion is entirely within the reading subject. Thus, such literary solipsism engages a self-other relationship and the self-self relationship simultaneously. A more reciprocal other-directed relationship can come out of such fiction only when the reader transcends the self-self mirror in which fiction merely replicates the reading

subject and actively challenges his or her self to address otherness. This is possible because the solipsism of literature is not itself singular or private, but is a dialogic interaction between two subjective lenses, each of which is potentially solipsist when taken alone. First, solipsism is true in some sense of the fictional narrator, whose world literally exists only through his or her narration (other characters do not exist without the narrator). Second, solipsism is also true in some sense of the reader, within whom the fiction receives its reality (the story only signifies if it is read). Together, however, these perspectives develop in dialogue and can deconstruct their solipsistic tendencies. If the reader makes meaning within the text, it is in response to the subjective stance presented in the narration.

That the text functions to mirror certain aspects of the reader's subjectivity back upon him- or herself is itself an exercise in responding to otherness. Insofar as the reader is self-reflective, the reader sees the self *as* other (a necessary part of the therapeutic engagement). And insofar as the reader identifies with characters in the text, the reader exercises a capacity for sympathy and empathy that inherently applies to others. In fact, I believe a central theme of Jane's growth is a shift in this capacity to feel for others. Early in the novel she demonstrates the importance of self-other relationships by resisting her othering by her cruel adoptive family. In speaking out for the first time, Jane justifies herself in a telling way, saying "How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the *truth*. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity" (30). In a single breath, Jane claims the objective validity of "the truth" and asserts her right to be loved by expressing the

vulnerability of her subjective condition. In this way, Jane demonstrates that self and other are united both by generic reality (the truth of their material relation) and by care (the truth of their affective relation). She expresses this sentiment again when she rejects the security of moral martyrdom presented by Helen Burns: “No; I know I should think well of myself; but that is not enough; if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen” (61-2). Again presenting the importance of the self-other binary from the standpoint of the othered, Jane implicitly implores the reader to care for her by revealing her emotional vulnerability. The novel elicits sympathy by encouraging the reader to identify with Jane’s plight and exercise compassion in response. Thus, the reader is encouraged to follow Jane’s internal growth, as she develops over the course of the novel by learning to extend more sympathy towards others and demand less for herself. As the novel deconstructs the antinomy of the real by constantly equating the subjective conditions of emotional health with the objective manifestations of social interaction, therefore, it simultaneously encourages selflessness over selfishness by portraying the subjective struggle of an individual attempting to come to terms with self-other relationships through the refinement of the self-self relationship.

RENUNCIATION AND REBIRTH

To represent becoming, especially in the setting of contemporary social life favored by realism, evokes normative ethical questions about the desirability of the created personhood (which is why the moral protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* have

such a close kinship to the anti-heroes of cautionary tales). As literature for the masses, realism is therefore implicated as institutional knowledge production in the normative discourses that hold ideological sway within a culture. As we have seen, Jane's active becoming counteracts the death of the self implicit in the marginalization and control inscribed on her by authoritarian social institutions. Yet, death also lies in flight and rebellion, as without a nurturing social environment the completely isolated agent cannot survive as the subject is constituted through a network of reciprocal *interactions* that cannot take place without an operative context for agency.⁸² Thus, the *Bildungsroman* typically culminates in a simultaneously localized and networked subjectivity in which a harmonious balance is achieved between individual and society. This is certainly true for Jane, whose progress towards individuation is not merely a flight from the world into the self, but necessarily involves—especially towards the latter half of the novel—transformed relationships to others. There are as many perspectives on whether and how individual and society can be reconciled as there are *Bildungsroman* and as there are readings. Yet, so long as a reality of fiction exists through text, it is never neutral, always laden with the pervasive ethical dimensions that define lived reality. Once penned, these narratives of development become almost timeless, all the words of the text existing simultaneously. These narratives can therefore be read back to front, exchanging the perspective of a causal sequence unfolding in linear time for the perspective of a teleological fulfillment, events arranging themselves to produce a predetermined end.

⁸² This Spinozist idea draws on the reciprocity of physical as well as social interactions. More contemporary perspectives from physics, biology, and psychology support this by indicating that humans rely upon contexts in incredibly complex ways.

Whether this teleology exhibits the logic of senselessness of *The Stranger* or the religious affirmation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, narrating becoming opens up the ethics of development. *Jane Eyre* is an important study for the ethics of becoming, not because it presents any singular truth about the only desirable end of becoming, but because it is about the possibilities and necessities of becoming itself. Jane models not just one end of becoming, but the very process of becoming. Furthermore, Jane's intensely self-reflective first-person narration folds text and becoming, demonstrating the specifically textual dimensions of becoming. In her quest for individuation, Jane demonstrates that the becoming of the solipsistic self is a pernicious illusion and further shows how agential becoming eventually points to (ethical) relations to others. That is, we understand that becoming is neither exclusively by, of, nor for the self, but rather takes place within a complex ecology of self-other relations. With an ending that involves her forgiveness of her aunt, discovery of family, and eventual marriage, Jane enacts a becoming that counters the myth of autonomy proposed by solipsism, demonstrating that to reach the final stage of individuation, we must reach an end in ourselves, see and touch the point where we can do no more, be no more, so that we can make a space for transcendence—self moving beyond self, towards others.

To see this potential in *Jane Eyre*, however, we must first address one prevalent stereotype of realism—Victorian realism especially—namely that it is intrinsically socially conservative and functions to authorize existing power structures. This view is exemplified by the writings of Franco Moretti, who writes that “[c]ontrary to *Wilhelm Meister*, in the English novel the most significant experiences are not those that alter but

those which *confirm* the choices made by childhood ‘innocence’. Rather than novels of ‘initiation’ one feels they should be called novels of ‘preservation’” (182). He further argues that the *Bildungsroman* overwrites differences in favor of affirming a monolithic and conservative sameness:

If the *Bildungsroman* appears to us still today as an essential, pivotal point of our history, this is because it has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equaled again. We will see in fact that here there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification. One’s formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one’s social integration as a simple *part of a whole*. . . . The ‘comfort of civilization’: perhaps the *Bildungsroman*’s historical meaning can best be summarized in these words. (16)

While to some extent realist literature has historically had an impulse towards conservative re-inscription, from the perspective of realization, this view is extremely reductive, portraying a dynamic literary force as passive propaganda. Literature can familiarize but it can also defamiliarize; representation-qua-representation has insufficient agency to compel such social integration, even if countless historical writers and readers expressly employed literature with the intent of promoting social integration.⁸³ The *Bildungsroman*, like history itself, is an instrument of change acting within a complex network of shifting contexts and is therefore always halfway inside and outside of our control. In opening up the purposes, conditions, and mechanisms of change, the ‘novel’ promotes an essential newness that brings unexpected changes.

While differences in rhetorical strategy affect the degree to which the text attempts to

⁸³ Even Socialist Realism, with its thinly veiled or even overtly flaunted political agenda must raise the questions it attempts to answer, and thereby enables a nuanced range of possible becomings no matter how much it strives to narrow them.

compel particular conservative or radical responses, the becoming of the reader is to some extent a self-directed response that can always elude the text's control, even as it is always conditioned by the attitude of response. I argue, therefore, that the normativity of the *Bildungsroman* is the normativity of philosophical self-reflection, the faith that a well-intentioned and critically-astute reader will undergo positive transformations through the mediated reflection promoted by the text. The questions of "to become or not to become?" or "what to become?" are far too simple: the reader neither uncritically emulates nor disowns the particular values of the depicted characters and society, but undergoes a separate but linked becoming through a complex interaction with the narrative. Encouraging rather than compelling, this performative becoming requires the active realization of the reader to engender dynamic growth over moral stasis. In *Jane Eyre*, this is embodied in the dual normative roles of Christianity, which both contains the social institutions of inheritance, education, and marriage that situate Jane's marginalized self and inspires a teleological becoming aimed towards producing an ethical, reciprocal relationship between individuated agent and society.

Religion conditions becoming in the novel through a complex array of conflicting imperatives. As a social institution, religious dogmatism rationalizes Jane's oppression by maintaining a system of values that perpetuates the social imbalances that keep Jane ever marginalized. As a personal challenge towards directed self-discipline, however, religion provides both an end and a method for becoming, as Terry Eagleton notes when he investigates the dual nature of religious discipline in *Jane Eyre*:

Insofar as Evangelicalism sets out to crush the Romantic spirit, it is a tangible symbol of social oppression and must be resisted. Jane Eyre

rebels against Brocklehurst's cruel cant and St. John Rivers's deathly Calvinism, she also scorns Eliza Reed's decision to enter a Roman Catholic convent, viewing this as a falsely ascetic withdrawal from the world. But she is at the same time "Quakerish" herself, grimly disapproving of worldly libertinism; and in this sense she is torn between a respect for and instinctive dislike of stringent religious discipline, between pious submission and Romantic rebellion. Charlotte Brontë's attitudes to Evangelical discipline are, in short, thoroughly ambiguous. (59)

Whether externalized or internalized, Jane sees an implicit danger in the acknowledged transformative power of religion. While the religious values of humility and abnegation are a proven antidote to the solipsistic privileging of the self-self relationship over the self-other relationship, Jane recognizes that taking this tendency to the extreme results in the negation of the self. This is demonstrated explicitly in the parallel cases of Helen Burns and St. John Rivers, who both take Christian self-negation to the extreme of death. Jane is awed by their martyrdom and genuinely becomes more selfless through her interaction with these figures, but she ultimately rejects following them to self-destruction. Helen's self-negation is that of total passivity, intentionally accepting and internalizing the violence done to her, thinking already of the next life at the expense of the present one. Despite her spiritual purity, kindness, and active intellect, Helen is unable or unwilling to better the condition of herself or others. She is equally incapable of the studious activity required for her to succeed in her misguidedly rigid educational environment or of any resistance to its corporeal punishments. Helen eventually embodies the deprivation of the environment and succumbs to consumption. On the surface, the vigorous and willful St. John Rivers is the opposite of Helen, bursting with energy, discipline, and cold efficiency that contrasts Helen's calmness, disorganization, and kindness. Yet, ultimately St. John's activity represents an unchristian commitment to

deeds and a rejection of spiritual health. Insofar as St. John is capable of love—and there are indications that he may not be—his love is not for Jane. He would protect the women he has the greatest affection for, his sisters and sweetheart, from the rigors of his life, but has no compunction in inflicting these conditions on Jane, because he thinks she can absorb the abuse. Furthermore, he scoffs at the notion that the healthy self requires any more than physical nourishment, abandoning his own need to be loved and demanding that Jane do the same (and further demanding that they marry, a rhetorical assault on both their loves). We learn at the end of the novel that St. John perishes in his tireless pursuit of works, and we have every reason to believe that had Jane gone with him her fate would be identical.

Unlike Helen and St. John, Jane's Christianity is noticeably a religion of becoming, the central point upon which her relationship with Rochester turns. If the self-negation offered by Helen and St. John offer physical death in the impulse to give of the self without any form of support or nourishment for the self, Rochester offers spiritual death in presenting a static 'happiness' that precludes becoming. Although the social and religious injunctions against adultery are clearly at play in Jane's adamant refusal to give in to their shared desire, her deeper realization is that the cycle of desire-satisfaction—even when called 'love'—can offer a block to becoming. Thus, as we have seen, Rochester talks only of finding happiness as a contrast to the unhappiness of previous errors:

[Repentance] is not its cure. Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform—I have the strength yet for that—if—but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am? Besides, since

happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may. (127)

Asserting a right towards pleasure amidst fatalistic language that says “happiness is irrevocably denied me” and that there is no use to reforming, Rochester bemoans his current situation without taking any responsibility for it, seeking recompense rather than becoming. Later, he even goes as far as to bludgeon Jane with the veiled threat that if she removes her moral influence from him, she will be responsible for his dissipation, saying “Then you condemn me to live wretched, and to die accursed?” (301) Bravely sticking to her principle of becoming, Jane connects the presence of a higher power to self-self becoming when she says “Do as I do: trust in God and yourself” and the aforementioned “I no more assign this fate to you than I grasp it for myself. We were born to strive and endure—you as well as I: do so” (301). Unlike Jane, whose ability to forgive and become embody an ethical imperative to become other to one’s former self, Rochester attempts to make a virtue out of his complete stasis:

You make me a liar by such language: you sully my honour. I declared I could not change: you tell me to my face I shall change soon. And what a distortion in your judgment, what a perversity in your ideas, is proved by your conduct. Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law, no man being injured by the breach?—for you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear offend by living with me. (301)

Here, Rochester juxtaposes two closely related arguments, both of which assert the finality of the ‘fact of the matter’ over the possibility of becoming. Firstly, Rochester portrays his inability to change almost as a moral commitment, aligning his stasis with truth and honor. Secondly, criticizing Jane for a discontinuity between her ideas and conduct, Rochester demands that her compassion towards him overwrite the strictures of

normative morality or “mere human law.” In both cases, he fails locate or value Jane’s self and its reliance on becoming. He treats her refusal as an unfair upholding of social conventions, failing to recognize that Jane’s sees her refusal as a duty to herself, her becoming, rather than to rules. Or, rather, Jane’s duty is to herself through adherence to rules through her ambivalent relationship to Evangelical discipline, which comes out in a famous passage where she asserts:

I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. (302)

In claiming her complete commitment to the “law given by God; sanctioned by man,” Jane advocates a becoming—at once religious and secular—in which her care and respect for herself, her individuation or becoming-self, depend upon subsuming her desires to principles. While the particular principles she upholds are certainly in accord with the social conventions that Rochester assaults, her stand goes deeper than maintaining the principles themselves. Instead, what is important is Jane’s teleological becoming is neither the mere replication and extension of the becoming-self nor the mere replication and extension of social mores in the becoming-other, but is a nuanced becoming in which self regulates self for the sake of self. Neither in utter defiance nor uncritical acceptance of the law, Jane mediates herself through law in a becoming-principled that demands that the agent live out non-solipsistic principles that encourage active becoming that doesn’t merely replicate self or other.

Merely transferring the extreme privileging of solipsism from the self to another singular subject is known as worship; if the object of worship is not worthy, this is known as idolatry. Despite overtly Christian sentiments, what Helen and St. John offer is a kind of solipsistic idolatry of martyrdom, a philosophy of self-sacrifice that contradicts the Christian notion of the intrinsic value of everyone. Similarly, Rochester offers a solipsistic idolatry of love, a philosophy of self-indulgency that contradicts the Christian imperative to serve and become. Jane therefore resists Rochester's initial advances as a kind of reciprocal idolatry, a love that falsely worships the other in a way that damages the self. She explicitly dodges his attempts to elevate her beyond herself, eschewing his sugary language and pricey gifts and bringing him back to earth. For example, "I am not an angel," I asserted; "and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial from me" (246) and "There, you are less civil now; and I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a thing than an angel" (249). Drawing upon the rhetoric of Christianity used to elevate female morality to an otherworldly and unrealistic pinnacle, which is identified as the theme of the 'hearth angel' in Victorian literary criticism, Jane demands to be treated as an ordinary girl, a person of both strengths and weaknesses. Flattering or not, to be identified as an angel implies spiritual death, for the eternal stasis of angels is incommensurable with the perpetual transformation of humans. From Jane's perspective, Rochester needs to change himself, not enter a reciprocally static relationship in which Jane operated as a physical source of recurring pleasure and spiritual symbol of morality.

Jane further recognizes that the danger runs both ways, as her love for him could also overmaster her becoming, treading very close to violating the first of the Ten Commandments, that “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” when she writes:

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol. (260-1)

Comparing this idolatry to solipsism, we see that both perspectives are equally unbalanced, albeit in different directions in that one privileges other over self and one privileges self over other. In Christian terminology, both perspectives place a singular human subject above God, severing any humble relationship with God and thereby with one’s true essence. In philosophical terms, they are alike destructive because both positions embody an essential instability that will eventually dissolve the relationship and leave a singular subject. While Jane does advocate autonomy in the sense of its root meaning, ‘self-named’ (akin to Spinoza’s definition of freedom as self-caused, that is, proceeding from one’s essence), autonomy in the colloquial sense of self-reliant and disconnected leads only to death. Disconnected from the environmental context within which our interactive agency finds purpose, finite⁸⁴ creatures cannot exist. Solipsism and idolatry are therefore more than religious heresy or iconoclastic assaults on received dogmas, but are essential failures to recognize the tenuous and reciprocal connections that enable a self to be sustained in long-term relationships to others and environment. The becoming that is survival itself depends upon maintaining reciprocity in these

⁸⁴ Spinoza defines ‘finite-in-kind’ as pertaining to those whose activity is bounded where they intersects other of the same attribute, that is, anything but ‘God, or nature.’

definitional interactions, finding a productive balance between self and other. The becoming that is *Bildung* requires all this and the formation of a self capable of having satisfying and ethical relations with others, thereby uniting the good of the individual with that of society.

While the philosophical/psychological narratives of such becoming (cf. Hegel and Jung) typically do not require a particular social actualization of this internal development, the *Bildungsroman*, with its focus on character and plot traditionally culminates in a social position that reflects back this internal development. The most stereotypical metonym for this becoming, even more so than economic success, is marriage, as Moretti describes,

Let us recall our initial question: how is it possible to convince the modern – ‘free’ – individual to willingly limit his freedom? Precisely, first of all, through marriage – *in* marriage: when two people ascribe to one another such value as to accept being ‘bound’ by it. It has been observed that from the late eighteenth century on, marriage becomes the model for a new type of *social contract*: one no longer sealed by forces located outside of the individual (such as status), but founded on a sense of ‘individual obligation’. A very plausible thesis, and one that helps us understand why the classical *Bildungsroman* ‘must’ always conclude with marriages. It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that ‘pact’ between the individual and the world, that reciprocal ‘consent’ which finds in the double ‘I do’ of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation. (22)

Conceived from the perspective of society with its implicitly utilitarian ethics, as Moretti’s sociological approach tends to do, marriage becomes the most intimate of a large array of social institutions that interpellate individuals into the biopower reserve of

the socio-political hegemony.⁸⁵ Conceived from the perspective of the individual—that of Jane as both character and narrator—this renunciation of autonomy and freedom in the solipsistic sense produces autonomy and freedom in the Spinozist sense of the becoming-self. By relinquishing the self, by giving up her process of individuation, Jane models a Christian renunciation of the self that opens a space for otherness. Initially a radically egalitarian movement, the Christian ideal is absolutely founded on the principle that one's solipsistic power can never reach the true self—the mediation of the egoistic self in fact precludes knowledge of the true self. Instead, Christianity promises redemption through humility (the meek shall inherit the earth), through the giving of the self over to its maker and thereby others (the two greatest commandments). The ending of *Jane Eyre* is an oddly secularized version of this. On the one hand, spiritual redemption is almost the precondition for secular redemption; it goes without saying that Jane's oneness with herself is of a Christian nature. Yet, ultimately Jane gives herself over to man, not God (and a dubiously well-intentioned man at that). In fact, the very metaphysical structure of the universe authorizes her secular renunciation in the disembodied voice that brings her back to Rochester.

For the modern reader, immersed in the cult of individualism so strongly borne out through Jane's willful narration of her own bildungsroman, the ending seems forced if not outright disappointing. Brontë's use of the ethereal voice that speaks Jane and Rochester back together can read like an affront to our realistic and realizing sensibilities alike: it is as if she throws the forcedness of the ending in our faces. Jane has become an

⁸⁵ This very broad statement combines ideas from Moretti with the theories of Althusser (interpellation) and Foucault (biopower).

independent woman, and we moderns often feel betrayed when she seems to fall back into the traditional plot, running back to her love to nurse him through his suffering. Admittedly, part of our uneasiness may be the difficulty in accepting the asserted reformation of Rochester's character, a deep concern that he will remain a pompous, imperialistic, abusive tyrant. Yet, while we might rightfully question her choice, I suggest we think beyond the particulars of Jane's ending to the notion of teleological becoming it relies upon, so that we can respect her selflessness in relinquishing herself (and the social trappings of selfhood: her inheritance, autonomy, etc.) in love. While feminists rightly note the inequality in feminizing the virtue of selflessness, perhaps instead of consequently demanding Jane hold to her independent self, we ought demand more of Rochester and his patriarchal ilk (even today)—men who feel no need for the selflessness Jane models. Renowned feminist critic Adrienne Rich, for example, sees Jane's marriage as a provocative reimagining of the Victorian institution in terms of becoming:

Marriage is the completion of the life of Jane Eyre, as it is for Miss Temple and Diana and Mary Rivers; but for Jane at least it is marriage radically understood for its period, in no sense merely a solution or a goal. It is not patriarchal marriage in the sense of a marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman; but a continuation of this woman's creation of herself. (155)

As the final stage in a process of individuation, Rich portrays Jane's marriage as the fulfillment of her becoming-self rather than as the prohibition of becoming-self implicitly contained in the unequal marriage ideology of the period and explicitly offered by Rochester in his earlier proposals. Jane's refashioning of marriage requires a two-stage process of renunciation and rebirth—her initial “refusal to accept [Rochester's proposal]

under circumstances which were mythic, romantic, or sexually oppressive” (154) and instead marry only when she has acquired enough social and personal selfhood to not require it: “Coming to her husband in economic independence and by her free choice, Jane can become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity” (154). The uneasiness that we often feel about the resolution of the novel arises from focusing on the resolution of the plot—her marriage—as the end of becoming. Feminists are right to worry about a normative portrayal of becoming in which Jane’s progression is seen in terms of marginalized social roles: from orphan to student to governess to wife. Yet, if we focus on “Jane Eyre-ity,” the unique characteristics and strivings that make up our character/narrator, we can see the story as one of becoming-herself. The reciprocal relationship between agent and environment is therefore neither one of pure mastery or pure passivity, but is an ecological development in which the subjective self and the interactable world meet in a way that preserves and even magnifies essential Jane Eyre-ity. That is, since to either be completely severed from the world or to lack agency in dealing with it are both forms of death, Jane’s lived becoming involves achieving a privileged relationship with her environment. In this case, her religiously-inflected story resolves primarily through her marriage, which personalizes and actualizes this reciprocity. It is the reciprocity itself, however flawed its vehicle may be, that realizes Jane’s teleological becoming, the possibility of a self that can freely express itself through an environment that recognizes, appreciates, and authorizes its particular agency.

The primacy of the realization of reciprocal becoming over the particulars of the marriage itself are evident in the fact that the marriage—as it often does in Victorian

literature—is mostly relegated to the novel’s lacunae. The entire wedding is collapsed into a single sentence; their life afterwards briefly sketched in a final short chapter that reads like a biographical addendum. This marriage, despite following a very stereotypical set of social and literary conventions, is neither from nor for society, as we see in the famous opening to this epilogue: “Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present” (429). In this utter privacy, away from the prying eyes of both society and reader, their marriage is first and foremost for themselves—“he and I.” Yet, although we are not ourselves invited, it is clearly also *for* us, the readers, as we are the first friends notified. In the silences of the text, it is not the specifics of Jane’s becoming, but its very possibility that is given to and for us. As a narrator, Jane tells us that we are born to strive and endure: Reader, do so. Thus, we must see in Jane’s becoming not a only model to emulate (for we have essences of our own with more or less Jane Eyre-ity), but rather a lesson in becoming itself. Engaged in the reality of fiction, the reader must become in relation to the text and overcome the specific forms of solipsism that challenge the act of reading. The besetting sin of everything I have written thus far is this solipsistic danger, the self-centeredness involved in privileging realization over realism, a central philosophical temptation since Kant’s Copernican Revolution presented the human subject as the fundamental lens that makes reality sensible, relegating noumenal things-in-themselves to murky abstraction. In characterizing the reality of fiction, a textual reality of signifiers in a determined relation, as more an opportunity for individual becoming and self-development than an external realm this project may seem to overly valorize the self-centered virtues implicit in an

individualist take on agency and ethics. Self-centeredness—privileging self-self becoming—may more easily lead to selfishness than selflessness. The self-self relationship is far from an ideal, but is revealed as an impossible abstraction, a flight from lived reality that fosters dangerous illusions. The forms of flight exemplified by the textual fields of literature and philosophy must therefore not be flights from, but flights *in* reality. In this self-reflective moment of realization, the self-self relationship is revealed to be a highly self-reflective, self-aware moment in which the myriad self-other relationships we are always already implicated in turn reflexively in upon themselves, enabling active, ethical becoming. After a long process of individuation, a pursuit of self in-itself, this becoming ends in renunciation and rebirth, giving up the narrow, isolated notion of selfhood in order to achieve a contextualized, humble, interconnected subjectivity.

COLLAPSING THE ANTINOMY

Finally, the objective reality deconstructed in Chapter 1 and the subjective reality deconstructed in Chapter 2 meet, not as identical, but certainly as interdependent, twins. Subject and object, inner and outer, self and other, individual and society—all these paired concepts identify the paper thin margin upon which agency is written. These are points of contact or intersection, where actor and acted upon become blurry terms, for each acts on the other, they act together. In becoming, Jane discovers that it is her interactions with the world that bring transformation to who she is—instead of a static being (that is, death), she seeks dynamic becoming (that is, life), finding herself precisely

where her agency ends and she gives of herself. The autonomy she achieves is not only freedom from particular systems of oppression that damage her self through its ongoing interactions, but also immersion in systems of reciprocity that nourish her self and others at their point of contact. She finds this not exactly in the institution of marriage, but in the very concept of marriage, the notion of meeting and comingling. Heavily inflected with Christian spirituality, this teleological becoming suggests that one can only ever find oneself in the proper context, in an environment that catalyzes selfhood. It's not surprising that realizing this level of individuation, which requires transcending the self, also requires divine intervention of some sort. More than just the *deus ex machina* that reconnects Jane and Rochester, there is a miraculous element to their becoming itself. This portrayal, of course, is fictional and I leave it to my readers to decide whether such miracles are part of our everyday reality. Yet, with or without divine intervention, this text enables realization of the implicit potential of becoming, providing a site of transformation (the reality of fiction), a model of the process, and a recognition of its crucial ethical dimension.

In conclusion, although there are perfectly valid reasons for distinguishing the subjective and objective components of reality, in the end subjectivity and objectivity are inextricably intertwined. Literary experience is neither simply grasping an objective essence to the text nor formulating a fully autonomous personal connection to the text. In engaging the totality of our lived experience, literature represents and thereby evokes the intersubjective relations and normative constraints that permeate our everyday thought and action through moments of becoming that are always already part of what

Wittgenstein calls ‘going on together in a form of life.’ That literature does all this is to some extent obvious—even cursory self-reflection reveals how deeply reading alters who we are. Since the significance of literature is thus tied to the characterizability of our life and behavior, at their core the literary and ethical are one and the same. It matters how we read and how we respond to what we read. Thus, Jane’s exploration of becoming overreaches itself, resolving in the recognition of an ethical mandate to become in a way conducive to reciprocal relations with others. In the next chapter, we shall more fully explore the nature of this ethicized becoming, but for now I hope that I have said as little as possible, but shown that when we meditate properly on our reading practices, we will know what we already know and do what we already do—but more reflectively. After all, when we reflect better on our actions, our actions reflect better on us.

Scholium 4

The Dialogic Word

Becoming, the productive, transformative re-formation of the new self out of the old is born of a series of tensions, not the least of which is the confrontation between objectivity and subjectivity. If one could imagine either perfect conformity or perfect autonomy, one would picture a ‘person’ who might change but could never *become*. Becoming is necessarily adaptive in creating a new self always in response to a developing relationship between inner and outer. Similarly, it is the constant negotiation between the individual and society, between self and other, that drives the developmental narratives of realist literature. Yet, this is not just a central theme of realism, but is built into the structure of fictional language itself. We have already seen in Chapter 2 how Bakhtin hinges the novelistic depiction of the self in psychological realism on the fundamentally dialogic structure of fiction. We shall see in the next chapter how Andrew Miller hinges literary ethics on a dialogic comparison between the narration and a host of alternate possible narrations. Here, I wish to turn to the philosophy of language to show how these fictional dialogisms draw upon an essential linguistic dialogism in how the notion of opposition drives meaning itself. Rather than meaning being an absolute,

determined, static entity which can be understood in a vacuum, meanings are always understood in relation to one another, through an infinite series of contrasts.⁸⁶

This dialogism of the world is built into how we learn from the earliest age, which is a dynamic meaning extrapolated from specific instances. That is, we are not initially taught a set of visual or biological criteria that define a category like ‘dog,’ for example, but are shown examples that fit into the category and more importantly, we are corrected when we use the term inappropriately. Important regulative social notions like truth, morality, and normality, furthermore, are learned primarily as part of the learner’s total immersion within society, which places constant normative pressure on the individual, a process which Wittgenstein characterizes as follows:

We must begin with the mistake and transform it into what is true. That is, we must uncover the source of the error; otherwise hearing what is true won’t help us. It cannot penetrate when something is taking its place. To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the *road* from error to truth. (*RF* 1)⁸⁷

This construction of an ideology of truth, not by positively building a complex notion out of simpler pieces of knowledge but by dynamic regulation and negation, demonstrate the importance of arriving at an understanding by moving away from misunderstandings. In Wittgenstein’s musings on certainty—our ability to believe and act with confidence—Wittgenstein finds that no stable articulation of certainty can be made, although certainty

⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida calls this the ‘trace.’ He likely developed this concept at least in part through the lines of inheritance traced in this section—from Wittgenstein to Austin to Derrida.

⁸⁷ This passage, which opens his “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*,” is complicated by the fact that it at least partially represents Wittgenstein’s parroting of Frazer’s fundamental assumptions, which Wittgenstein subsequently critiques. For Wittgenstein, this view is too simple in that it posits a clear distinction between error and truth employed in order to paint so-called primitive cultures as in error relative to his own cultural assumptions. Yet, although Wittgenstein finds Frazer’s views too paternalistic, he does think that the inarticulable notions of truth or right are generally defined in opposition to more articulable concepts of error or impropriety.

is a (necessary) part of action. He employs certainty as a way of expressing the regularity of human activity, despite the difficulty in theorizing it:

If, however, one wanted to give something like a rule here, then it would contain the expression “in normal circumstances”. And we recognize normal circumstances but cannot precisely describe them. At most, we can describe a range of abnormal ones. (*OC* §27)

This passage shows in what we come to a recognition or *realization* of certain features of human experience, such as rule-following or our engagement with realist novels.

Wittgenstein makes two important observations here, namely (1) that inarticulateness lies at the heart of human activity and (2) that we build understanding of this inarticulate basis through *articulating the failure of* such articulation. That is, the concepts of normality and normativity that drive everyday life exist only in contradistinction to much more easily recognizable conceptions of abnormality or transgressions of normativity.

Despite the textuality of both the Wittgensteinian philosophical tradition and the realist novel, both forms are forced to confront the limits of articulation (the inarticulability) in their task of characterizing human experience, whose essential nature and/or deep structure transcends words. In *Anna Karenina*, the significance of events continually exceeds the limits of language and words fail to capture or express the heart of the matter. This is seen in numerous examples, ranging from the wordless communication that occurs in all the meaningful relationships of the story—Anna and Vronsky, Levin and Kitty, Levin and his brother Nikolai, Kitty and her father, and so on—to the negative portrayal of characters who require words to do what they cannot—the sophistries of Russian intelligentsia and Anna’s fevered insistence on attributing the

unsaid to Vronsky⁸⁸. Compare also the wordless love in the proposal scene of Levin and Kitty, in which they seamlessly communicate in code to the failed proposal of Levin's intellectual brother Sergei Ivanovich, in which he fails to articulate his feelings because he cannot find the proper words, although it is intuitively clear to both parties that any actual expression would formalize feelings which were already kindled.

Furthermore, in the novel, words are inadequate to address the richness and complexity of life, or to resolve questions of life's significance. Levin is repeatedly frustrated by his intellectual friends, who spin fine words but fail to address his deep concerns, and fails himself to express his own concerns to himself, either when reading philosophy or when thinking through his life on his own. Even at the end, when he has his revelatory moment, words fail him. His initial response to the words that inspired him is virtually inarticulate: "How's that? Remembers God? Lives for the soul?" Levin almost shouted" (794). Upon reflection, the revelation is no more expressible in words, and as the novel concludes he chooses not to speak of his new-found understanding, calling it "inexpressible in words" (817). Although the realist novel is by definition conducted through articulation, its narrative and literary form speaks to a view of representation in which core ideas are not simply explained, but are demonstrated through the unfolding of the story.

Inarticulability is therefore an essential component of the literary form, not because literature abandons words, but because literature requires that words be starting points which cannot themselves contain or describe the totality of their significance.

⁸⁸ Tolstoy writes: "remembering all the cruel words he had said, Anna also invented the words he obviously had wished to say and might have said to her" (751).

Even explicitly aphoristic expressions of life, such as the famous first line of *Anna*, gain novelistic significance only through their relation to the story as a whole. Literature is performative because it is participatory, because the words are not merely read and understood, but engaged in a dynamic way in which the reader produces significance from the process of reading itself, which is expressed in and engages with language, but which also exceeds its literal linguistic content.

For similar reasons, Wittgenstein adopts a somewhat literary and highly performative style in his own writing, which consists almost exclusively of fragmentary thoughts which unfold as a process of active thinking, with the repetition, digression, contradiction, and development of a mind coming to an understanding which it cannot definitively express. Thus, Wittgenstein employs the failure of linguistic expression as the basis for understanding activity—language is an activity whose performance does not describe, but *shows* what it means to act. That is, he works through problems from within. Wittgenstein thus directs us towards further examination of linguistic practice (both inside and outside his own investigation) by deliberately not stating the point he seems to get ‘closer and closer’ to: “Am I not getting closer and closer to saying that in the end logic cannot be described? You must look at the practice of language, then you will see it” (*OC* §501). There is a crucial ambiguity in the referent of the pronoun “it” at the end of this passage. It could mean that we will understand the nature of logic itself (and its significance) or it could mean that we will see the fact that logic cannot be described. I believe that it is both—better still; I believe that they amount to the same thing. The failure of description enables a self-reflective moment that engages directly

with our practices—in describing logic, even if “logic cannot be described” we *enact* logic and thereby comprehend our activity. In describing the inarticulable basis of our activity, we likewise expose our activity as practice. Thus, by simultaneously marveling at our competence and describing our inability to articulate it, Wittgenstein establishes a critical method that draws on the performativity of literature—his method of examples enables us to approach the basis of our activity through itself, using our competence to explore our competence.

Conducting this literary mode of exploring from within, however, requires more than striving to express the inexpressible. Negation, the rejection of certain ways of formulating the inexpressible, is an essential part of this task. This recognition is a common methodological concern in Wittgenstein, who writes “The feeling of ‘familiarity’ and of ‘naturalness’. It is easier to get at a feeling of unfamiliarity and of unnaturalness” (*PI* §596), and more generally in ordinary language philosophy, such as that of Austin, who writes:

In two main ways the study of excuses can throw light on these fundamental matters. First, to examine excuses is to examine cases where there has been some abnormality failure: and as so often, the abnormal will throw light on the normal, will help us to penetrate the blinding veil of ease and obviousness that hides the mechanisms of the natural successful act. (*PFE* 5-6)

Austin’s repeated emphasis on ‘infelicities’⁸⁹ and mistakes fully embodies this methodological imperative. He argues that we employ language functionally in response to situations that arise in life, and that language is best understood in the contexts that it is

⁸⁹ Austin writes, “And for this reason we call the doctrine of *the things that can be and go wrong* on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the *Infelicities*” (*HTD* 14).

adapted to. Thus, when we draw a distinction between two things, it is because there is some utility in making the contrast, not necessarily because we perceive two essences as dissimilar. The “abnormal will throw light on the normal” because in recognizing where we employ linguistic distinctions we recognize where we require explanation of our actions. Thus, we do not need to characterize certain actions at all. To use Austin’s example, we understand what it is to ask whether spilling a glass was inadvertent, but we do not say that picking up without spilling it is *advertent*—we merely say we picked it up. This singular, narrow focus on particular moments of mistake in particular contexts is a recurring theme in Austin’s work. Although this is sometimes characterized as being the totality of its philosophical value, this reduces Austin’s work to its result or output, failing to acknowledge his fundamental concern with philosophical methodology. Austin thus extends Wittgenstein’s method of working from within, demonstrating how to turn language in upon itself, to generate self-reflective moments, not out of introspection or abstraction, but out of living language and everyday concerns.

This approach, found by Austin at the center of ordinary language, also permeates literature. In some styles, textual meaning is primarily conveyed through such negation. For example, the two most compelling characters in *Oliver Twist* are generally thought to be Nancy, the ambivalent half-rebellious half-crazed fallen woman who aids Oliver to her own detriment, and Fagin, the wily avaricious Jew who attempts to convert Oliver to his criminal ideology. As a whole, the novel’s portrayal of evil is far more convincing than its portrayal of good, as Oliver and Rose Maylie end up seeming rather flat. Thus, the entire moral center of the novel depends on the negation of negative qualities—Oliver’s

primary mode of agency is of rejection, of not conforming to the brainwashing of Fagin. Even Nancy's own moment of redemption is one of negation, she resists on Oliver's behalf without hope of personal freedom, rejecting evil action and negating herself in the (ultimately self-destructive) process. In most realist novels, the strategy of negation is more subtle, as in *Anna*. The two central narratives—those of Anna and of Levin—both engage this methodological imperative. Both characters embark on journeys, seeking happiness and personal satisfaction. Yet these narratives are properly characterized as *flights*, as movements away from elements of life that terrify and disgust them. Whereas Anna, with her unique inner and outer beauty, finds nothing in life that can affirm her full vitality, Levin, with his commitment to hard work and living well, is tormented by his inability to find his life meaningful. Early on, both do establish ideals to guide them, to run towards—Anna pursues love and Levin pursues family life—but these ideals prove insubstantial. Confronted with the actualization of their ideals, they find them wanting. Yet, they remain driven by their inner dissatisfaction, and attempt to flee the conditions they think are responsible. Anna turns her back on her husband and society and Levin on religion, politics, and society.

Of course, Anna's flight becomes unhinged, artificially extended, and leads to her eventual destruction. Levin, on the other hand, is fortunate to achieve a revelation at the end of the novel, not attaining his ideal precisely, but learning to find satisfaction in his life nonetheless. The fates of both characters, however, depend less upon an affirmation of some ideal form of life, but upon constant negotiation and negation of the forms of life that they constantly engage in. They differentiate themselves as individuals through

continually differential interactions with the world. Even the famous first line—“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (1)—indicates this process of differentiation. The theme of happiness is primarily related through a multiplicity of perspectives which surround an unspoken ideal of family life. The single happy family—Levin and Kitty—develop only in relation to the constant swirl of unhappiness surrounding them, bounding them, giving their happiness definition. The multiplicity of human activity, of the real, is at the core of the realist novel, which develops general principles only through engaging with examples that either miss the mark entirely or find the mark by struggling with the always present possibility of error.

Why does this work? Why is negation often easier to grasp than positive explanation? Why are some of our actions inarticulable while mistakes and mishaps are so easy to characterize? On a deep philosophical level, these questions may themselves be impossible to answer, as they are at the very core of the human experience. Yet, there is a partial answer available. Roughly put, language arises out of needs and desires; it aspires to help us do things we could not have otherwise. When everything goes perfectly, when our competence takes over, we have no need to carefully examine our actions (the frequent inability of athletes and musicians to effectively characterize their immense skill attests to that fact). We need detailed linguistic descriptions when things go awry, partially for forensic purposes—in an effort to live and act more effectively, we need to understand where we can go wrong—partially for explanatory purposes—we need to articulate our role with respect to mistakes to grasp our social responsibility—and so on.

Furthermore, we are attuned to differences and deviations in a way that we are not attuned to the essential character of our actions. Because we can only observe ourselves from our own vantage points, it is impossible to provide a purely objective characterization of our vantage point itself—a great deal of what goes without saying cannot be said because we are always within our own frame of reference. Yet, differences and contrasts are evident even within a reference frame, just as in physics an object may be alternately stationary or in motion depending on one’s frame of reference, but relative motion is perceptible from any frame of reference. This is evident in a wide range of cases. Learning how to pronounce a certain sound in a language, for example, can neither be accomplished by achieving familiarity with all the ways in which the sound can be uttered nor by learning a rule or principle that governs the acceptability of the sound. Instead, we learn a sound by learning its limits, by drawing distinctions. We cannot fully describe what counts as a ‘b’ sound except with respect to other related sounds—there are countless valid ways to pronounce ‘bat’ so long as they do not slip into ‘pat’ or ‘cat.’⁹⁰ Differences, therefore, are essential as we are often more able to understand something through grasping a range of negations and exclusions that bound the concept than by directly grasping the concept itself. In this vein, Wittgenstein writes that “To say ‘This combination of words makes no sense’ excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various reasons” (*PI* §499). Thus, the negations and exclusions that we make to comprehend language are themselves part of another language game. The distinctions

⁹⁰ The same, of course, can be argued for the written language—as the coherence of a letter depends solely on a special distinctiveness from other letters.

we draw or classifications we employ—the way we bound concepts—need not be absolute, but instead relate to our purposes in using them. We find language bounded, not as it were, by an external force of logical necessity that forces human thought and expression into tidy packages, but by internal forces, strategically deployed in order to enable the regularity of linguistic functions. Whether or not we would wish to, we cannot merely identify and explicate an ideal mode of being or course of action from scratch. We can only make differential claims, developing being or action with respect to our recognition of when things go awry.

Chapter 4

Performative Ethics:

The Reader-as-Narrator in *A Hero of Our Time*

It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed.

Ethics are transcendental.

(Ethics and aesthetics are one).

-Ludwig Wittgenstein (*TLP* 6.421)

Understanding the reality of fiction not as a mimetic representation of an existing truth (either objective or subjective reality) but as a realized impact on the reader as a becoming subject raises a number of ethical questions. Becoming is, by definition, directional—to become is to undergo a concrete movement from where one was to where one will be. Because ethical considerations arise whenever people act or interact and becoming is a direct intervention into one's 'power of activity,' becoming is always ethical. If becoming is both directional and ethical, it matters both how and what one becomes. Furthermore, the intersection between becoming and ethics is inherently normative because both becoming and ethics are dependent upon *interaction* rather than mere action. Normative questions of what one ought be and become are, of course, some of the most fraught questions we have. We have seen how becoming integrates the subjective and objective into a dynamic transformative process. In the previous chapter, I traced one ethical problem of becoming, namely the problem of solipsism in which one employs a normativity derived from the self to apply to the self, ultimately reinforcing

and rationalizing the self. In this chapter, I will trace the converse ethical problem of employing a normativity derived from overly objective standards that cannot account for variances of context and personhood. This danger is called *moralism*, which I define as a form of normativity in which the ideal ethical subject (and all ideal ethical actions) is in some sense predetermined by the moral norms and becoming is merely the disciplined conformity of the self into this ideal subject. Well-intentioned or not, moralism is dangerous because it has totalitarian undercurrents that present a singular perspective. In this chapter, I will argue that even while moralism is an always present danger of realist literature, which *can* always be read for such moral norms, realism is more fundamentally grounded in performative ethics which transcend moralism by being always best read dialogically.

Realist literature has often been accused of moralism because (1) its emphasis on representing a world conceived as realistic from an almost scientific viewpoint presents itself as objective, and (2) depending heavily on the heritage of fairy tales and conduct novels and laying the ground for Socialist realism, nineteenth-century realism often explicitly portrays and advocates contemporary mores. Yet, while these normative elements of form and content do attempt to direct becoming, I argue that realism is not intrinsically moralizing because it directs becoming through a performative ethics that does not simply mandate or impose its ethical system but rather presents ethics as an internalized process of becoming largely enacted by the reader. Thus, even an explicit moral claim in realist literature is not to be interpreted as a literal moral injunction which must either be blindly accepted or blatantly rejected. Instead, explicit moral claims must

be interpreted, weighed, and applied through a dynamic internal process of becoming through literary reflection. Of course, the extent to which realist novels explicitly relate moralizing claims varies greatly. The purpose here, however, is not to examine whether any particular text, author, or period errs on the side of too proscriptive moralism, but rather to examine the ethical possibilities of fiction insofar as it enables realization. To do this, I turn to a text that is not typically characterized as a realist novel, but which is predicated on moral realization as and in lived reality, namely Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, which I will read in conjunction with Kant's notion of the connection between ethics and aesthetics and Andrew Miller's work on moral perfectionism in the realist novel. The only 'novel' written by a poet killed in a duel at the age of 26, this text consists of a series of linked short stories which narrate various moments in the life of the text's anti-hero, the brilliant and cruel Pechorin. Thus, rather than developing a single moral theme out of these differing stories, which vary widely in content and tone, I will examine how the stories employ multiple narrators to model interpretation itself, portraying the narration as reading. Furthermore, I will use this form of fictional narration to characterize the moral weight of literature as a performative ethics that engages the reader and elicits an ethical response, but which cannot be reduced to propositional content because the activity of generating the response is itself the ethical content of the work.

MORALISM

At least since Plato, it has been recognized that the particularly illusory nature of fiction—its *unreality*—complicates its ethical stature since it is ‘real’ life and actions rather than fictional ones that are typically subject to moral constraints. At the same time, every realist text depicts characters, interactions, and events that raise questions of real-world morality. Every such text, therefore, *can* be read as a commentary on moral issues or even as presenting and advocating certain moral norms or perspectives. As a *possible* way of reading, this moral focus can be applied to any text—realist or not—because literature is a human activity and such activity is always already ethical. With realism, however, there is a strong tendency to view realist literature in moralizing terms due to the often explicit moral language that permeates these novels and nineteenth-century society itself. There are compelling reasons to analyze the moral content of realist texts—for example, a critical historicist perspective on how certain nineteenth-century social values were implicated in realist literary discourse teaches us both about the particulars of an important historical period and about the general relationship between normative morality and popular culture. On the other hand, I believe that overemphasizing the moral doctrines of a text requires abstracting content from form and therefore misrepresents how the ethics of literature is thoroughly implicated in literary performativity. Literature, I argue, more ethical method than moral doctrine and as such has significance that exceeds all characterizations of its related content. Certainly, the reality of fiction has strong affinities with the real, normative discourses of law, religion, psychology, ordinary language, etc. Yet, the reality of fiction is at the same time a

performance that refers to these instances without being such an instance itself. Thus, asking whether realist fiction *is* moralist or *can be* read in moral terms to some extent misses the point. One could easily answer ‘yes’ to both questions without understanding the unique ways in which literature generates ethical significances. In this section, therefore, I shall begin by taking realist literature’s moralizing claims at face value in order to unpack what moralism truly entails, a performative basis for ethics that in fact undermines the literal claim of moralism.

To demonstrate this, I turn to the notorious moralist Leo Tolstoy, even though Lermontov’s 1840 novel predates Tolstoy’s emergence as a representative figure for the nineteenth-century realist novel. In his extended essay *What is Art?* Tolstoy explicitly argues for a moralist interpretation, not only of his own writing, but of literature in general, arguing that the highest purpose of art is to preach a message of religious edification.⁹¹ This message is clearly one of becoming, but of singular becoming—Tolstoy wants literature to help all people strive together towards their truer, better selves. While on the one hand, Tolstoy’s vision, which values unity, brotherhood,⁹² and love, seems at least benign if not noble, on the other hand, modern readers will likely—

⁹¹ Even though the ‘death of the author’ (cf. Barthes) signals the birth of the critic, it is somewhat surprising that Tolstoy would understand his own masterfully performative writing in these terms. I suspect this may be what Kant calls a ‘necessary illusion,’ a structuring principle that has practical utility independent of its actual truth. For example, Thomas Kuhn argues that scientists need to operate within paradigms that structure their notion of truth, and even though the discourse itself generates its own conditions of truth, scientists may benefit from simply assuming that the conditions of truth are absolute so they can focus on the task at hand rather than getting bogged down in the work of philosophy (Kant also believes that philosophy is the meta-discipline and need not be operative in the actual work of other disciplines). This is speculation, but as an author, Tolstoy may be describing a moralist illusion that reflects the strong sense of purpose that guides his performative writing. His critical work misrepresents his actual work, in this view, not because he analyzes it incorrectly but because he is describing operative assumptions that guide his authorial process.

⁹² There are elements in Tolstoy’s vision that foreshadow the rhetoric of the revolution in Russia.

and probably should—rankle at Tolstoy’s confidence in assuming that his own moral doctrine can serve as a standard for the all the practices of art present in his time.

Whether one approves his particular vision or not, we ought take issue with the very fact that he implies that *any* moral doctrine ought to be the guiding principle of all art. Even though Tolstoy at times complicates and softens this claim by recognizing the situated and relative nature of his own imperatives, there is a clear moralist strand that organizes his argument. Take, for example, his characterization of the impact that the artist has on the reader (through art as communicative medium) as ‘infection:’ “And not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the degree of infectiousness is also the sole measure of excellence in art” (140). The unidirectionality of Tolstoy’s metaphor for describing the “sole measure of excellence in art” portrays art as invasive, an influence that masters its subjects by occupying and controlling. The optimistic overtones he uses to describe this infection when he writes that “Art, like speech, is a means of communication, and therefore of progress, i.e., of the movement of humanity towards perfection” (142) are grounded in a faith in a single teleology, a definite direction for human becoming. That is, the very hopefulness of this language replicates the moralist view that literature merely participates in an already determined single direction of progress. Tolstoy’s language here is almost paradigmatic of the moralist stance because he characterizes the value of literature entirely in terms of its moral content, treating literature merely as the expression of a moral doctrine to be either praised or censured.

The very present yet certainly unintended danger in Tolstoy’s moralist account is that of humanist essentialism. In defining moral perfectionism as an imperative directed

at becoming more like a particular model of the proper human subject, this view precludes the possibility of multiple ethically viable perspectives. Thus, such a view presents a singular norm for what counts as human, while characterizing all deviations as not (less, or less perfectly) human. This in turn can create a position of moral authority that rationalizes the exertion of control over others. Certainly, one would not like literature to further racial, classed, or gendered violence. In fact, one of the most compelling reasons to perform moralist interpretations of texts is to uncover and subsequently resist the dangers of their embedded moral content. At the same time, we must recognize that such criticism operates as a moral objection and therefore cannot break free from the moralist paradigm. Essentially, we are arguing that Tolstoy's particular version of morality expressed in this essay is itself *immoral*, which assumes a different and better set of moral norms. This is by no means a critique of criticism—as literature is always already ethical, discussing and challenging the moral claims of literary texts is absolutely essential. I simply want to point out that such criticism, while absolutely indispensable, is also focused on the social consequences of literary reception. By responding to the non-literary critical paradigm of moralism in kind, we can temper the possible negative consequences of passive reception of ideologically-inflected text. This type of response is important, but it is not the ethical plane enacted by literature itself—it evaluates moral claims abstracted from literary experience rather than examining the ethical performance immanent in literary experience itself. I will leave the former to politicians, ethicists, and social critics, while pursuing the latter further. What I propose is that understanding how moral perfectionism works in literature enables us to

see how the ethical imperative can be distinguished from any simple assertion of ideology (either conservative or revolutionary). Because any particular way of characterizing the moral content of literature invokes its own purpose-sensitive context, I argue that the ethical potential present in the experience of reading itself must be understood as an activity whose value depends on a transformative interplay between text and context (Cf. Gadamer).

If Tolstoy's reduction of literature to moral content fails to account for the literariness of literature, even of his own work, we must attend to his literature rather than his commentary on literature to discover the performative elements that undermine his moralist claims. While he explicitly acts as a moralist in writing about art in the abstract, he recognizes that however his moral stance leads him to *evaluate* art, the *method* of artistic communication is such that it is not reducible to proscriptive moral content. We can see this in the following summary, which are almost the final words of his tract:

The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbor, now attached only by the best members of society, the customary feeling and the instinct of all men. By evoking under imaginary conditions the feeling of brotherhood and love, religious art will train men to experience those same feelings under similar circumstances in actual life; it will lay in the souls of men the rails along which the actions of those whom art thus educates will naturally pass. And universal art, by uniting the most different people in one common feeling, by destroying separation, will educate people to union, will show them, not by reason but by life itself, the joy of universal union reaching beyond the bounds set by life. (190-1)

In this passage, there is a tension between his rigid expression of art's moralizing function and his more nuanced understanding of art's performative nature. For example, although he describes the reader's progress as being laid on 'rails' which direct the exact

pathway of development, he also uses the language of ‘training,’ ‘educating,’ and ‘showing’ to provide an almost Wittgensteinian emphasis on art-as-process. Combined with his occasional moves to characterize his moralist claims in the context of the religious spirit of the age, this deconstructs any purely moralist interpretation of Tolstoy’s text. If his language is overly proscriptive, it is not because he has uncovered an absolute, humanist truth, but because he is speaking in overly general terms about a narrow segment of social meaning. In fact, the type of ethical/religious transformation he advocates cannot be accomplished by proscriptive morality, which is precisely why he places it in the realm of art. In his novels, moreover, such proscriptive morality is often disparaged, as it is in *Anna Karenina*, where Anna is buffeted between competing social pressures to ignore the void in her life by unquestioningly submitting to a loveless marriage and to drown out the void in her life with the false gaiety of meaningless affairs and where Levin must learn to overcome his initial judgmental character and embrace a somewhat ambiguously valued world of continual struggle and striving instead.

Even explicitly moralist literature is still literature and therefore cannot achieve its effect by merely stating proscriptive moral doctrine, instead enacting its purpose through an imaginative, narrative performance, whose very nature complicates any simple moralist reading of the text. Thus, when Andrew Miller writes about the specific narrative form of moral perfectionism (particularly in the context of Victorian fiction), he carefully distinguishes its purpose and method:

As I conceive it, this moral perfectionism is a particular narrative form (rather than a concept, theory, or disposition) capable of great variation and extension. At its heart is the complex proposition that we turn from our ordinary lives, realize an ideal self, and perfect what is distinctly

human in us—and that we do so in response to exemplary others. How exactly do we become better? Certainly we often imagine ourselves improving through following rules, commandments, laws, guidelines. Without denying this, moral perfectionism stresses another means of improvement, one in which individual transfiguration comes not through obedience to such codes but through openness to example—through responsive, unpredictable engagements with other people. (3)

That is, the mechanism by which literature enables a person to become better need not presuppose any singular ideal of perfection. Rather than relying upon a teleological notion of development that privileges the moral ideology tied to a single essentialist perspective, Miller suggests that ethical development can occur through a series of situated, differential interactions. Thus, while realist literature is often considered inherently conservative in that providing detailed descriptions of a society seems to replicate the society's moral norms, in developing this set of emulative, critical, interactive engagements, realist literature can also be radical, as Miller also argues:

Because our tendency is to assume that responsiveness to exemplary figures must be conservative, it is important to stress this point: the attraction of others—enchaining and converting—is pictured here not as encouraging conformity to the past or the present but as spurring their transformation. (12)

The non-committal phrase 'is pictured here' importantly dissociates this statement from an assertion that realism is inherently revolutionary. Both conservative and revolutionary—neither conservative nor revolutionary—the ethical significance of realism as a literary period and fiction in general insofar as it is realistic is contained within the activity of ethical response generated in the reader's relation to the text. Thus, having argued that the moralist perspective on literature passes the question of literature's

ethical *process* by, I shall in the next sections examine how ethical development can be structured by the interpretive interaction between reader and narrator.

NARRATION AS READING

If the ethical significance of literature was exhausted by its moralizing tendencies, there would be fundamental unidirectionality to literature as a communicative medium: narration would merely be the presentation of content and reading would merely be the reception of said content. To understand the essential performativity of literary ethics, conversely, requires understanding the reciprocity between narration and reading. I argue that narration, the frame of words through which every literary text is encountered, is inherently interpretive and evaluative and as such does not merely transmit content but demonstrates how to critically engage with its content. This idea structures *A Hero of Our Time*, which reveals much about the nature of fictional narration by using four distinct narrators to tell a series of linked stories that present its central figure of Pechorin through a discrete series of moments and narrations. These narrators (the implied author from the preface, the unnamed narrator who I call “the Traveler,” Pechorin’s friend and commander Maxim Maximych, and finally Pechorin himself) in turn interpret and retell the events through a series of narrative lenses that spiral closer and closer to Pechorin’s narration. I will treat these four narrators as exemplars of what I call the *narrator-as-reader*, an implied figure that models critical engagement with the story within the narration itself. The story, built of these independent yet interrelated fragments, is therefore as much about the production of significance as much as anything else. Similar

to Kant's investment in uncovering how the very existence of multiple differing standpoints towards the world demonstrates the fundamental interconnectedness of all possible standpoints, *A Hero of Our Time* juxtaposes differing and sometimes contradictory narrative standpoints as a representation of the multiplicity of perspectives that must be navigated in order to actively engage with ethical questions. Even when the narrator-as-reader uses the objective voice of realist literature to relate the skeleton of the story, as we saw with Boz, the narrator-as-reader constructs the significance of the story as the performance of critical becoming with respect to the story. In this way, every story is not about something that is to be read, it is about how and why to read.

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, from a theoretical standpoint narration is a blend of objective and subjective perspectives, since the uniqueness of any particular expression contains an implicit perspective which is conveyed in a medium of generally available parts. To narrate, therefore, is both to draw upon the commonality of shared experiences, interests, and discourses, and to generate new significances that capture an individual standpoint. This aspect is crucial for seeing narration an intrinsically ethical form, since it renders any narrative frame a non-neutral lens that always evaluates and judges what it describes. This ties narration to linguistic representation and thought more generally, according to Kant, who writes: "Thus the purposiveness of a thing, insofar as it is represented in perception, is also not a property of the object itself (for such a thing cannot be perceived)" (*CPJ* 5:189). That is, our very ability perceive objects—to narrate sensory images *as* objects to ourselves—and to represent them to ourselves as having certain characteristics is (at least in part) a manifestation of our own perspective of the

world. Furthermore, that we see objects as purposeful (cf. Heidegger) means that we always already have our own purposes which color our perception of and engagement with the world. That all narration—fictional or otherwise—is such a lens means that narration is always already ethical, the reason I often choose to bracket the word ‘ethical,’ since the particularity of our engagements in the world is always already inflected with intersocial purposes. Thus, explicitly or otherwise, narration necessarily models reading in that the act of narration depends upon the interpretive elements of language itself, which functions as a form of reading the world.

In the novel, the function of the narrator-as-reader is particularly evident in several interrelated narrative techniques in which the different narrators model reading practices. In particular, the novel goes to great lengths to create an affinity and parallelism between the reader and the narrator-as-reader, who takes an evaluative stance towards the narrated events that is strongly analogous to that of an engaged reader. Lermontov, therefore, demonstrates how narration is essentially an act of reading by showing the narrators as engaged in the process of reading their environment and renders this sense more powerful by facilitating a close identification between the narrator-as-reader and the reader. The text overtly does this overtly through two primary means. First, it portrays the narrators-as-reader as having a personal interest in discovering how the narratives in which they are embedded will play out, linking the narrator to the motivations of reading. These narrators express interest and anticipate upcoming events based on conventions of storytelling, using their fluency with literary concepts as a way of interpreting their world. Second, the novel creates an implicit bond by restricting the

narrator-as-reader to the same temporal and spatial viewpoint as the reader.

Demonstrating how the narrators themselves must continually process a linear sequence of details, the novel shows how narration makes sense of a story, even a purportedly objective one, through a dynamic, performative process. As we shall see, through both this affective investment in and performative processing of the story, the narrator-as-reader engages in but does not merely present moral content.

The myth of the objective, omniscient narrator is that of utter disinterestedness. These narrators employ objective language to present a realistic story free from the feeling of bias. This ultimately unravels, however, as the very fact of narrating the story, and all the subordinate facts about what scenes are narrated and how, all point to an enormous investment of the narrator in the story. Lermontov takes this a step further, explicitly demonstrating how his narrators are personally invested in the reading and telling of the story. In particular, the Traveler repeatedly expresses a desire to learn more about the story, asking Maxim about his adventures “spurred by curiosity” (25) and “with curiosity” (28). As a reader himself, the Traveler finds an inherent value in relating his experiences. He expresses this philosophy when he writes:

Anyone who has chanced like me to roam through desolate mountains and studied at length their fantastic shapes and drunk the invigorating air of their valleys can understand why I wish to describe and depict these magic scenes for others. (44)

As a reader, the Traveler is fascinated by the world, displaying a strong aesthetic affection for nature in this passage. As a narrator, he desires to relate his experiences and perceptions. Thus, he happily plays the role of mediator, enthusiastically looking for stories to relate: “I was most eager to get some kind of yarn out of [Maxim] – a desire

common to all those who keep travel notes” (26). As engaged readers, who also approach the story with interest, we easily relate to the Traveler. He shares our curiosity even while strengthening it in that the Traveler’s descriptions of his curiosity actually create moments of suspense that delay the fulfillment of the curiosity. Far from disinterested, this narration demonstrates all the affective hallmarks of active reading, showing how narration requires an investment in the story it portrays and is therefore more akin to being a reader within a fictional world than an omniscient deity who encompasses and understands the totality of the world.

Lermontov employs another closely related move when he has the narrator-as-reader engage in anticipation, another characteristic of an engaged reader. The Traveler is constantly invested in his expectations of where the story is headed. Maxim’s admission to having interesting adventures “raised great hopes in me” (27) and his hopes fall at the prospect of an uninteresting tale: “There was I expecting some tragic end only to have my hopes dashed in this unexpected fashion!” (42) Whereas interest and curiosity demonstrate engagement rooted primarily in the present, hope and anticipation are forward-looking. The Traveler’s anticipation is, furthermore, conditioned by literary expectations of genre and convention, as when he points out that “An unusual beginning must have an unusual end” (48) as an expectation of the unexpected. Lermontov not only use these literary conventions, but also exposes them, which accomplishes two critical objectives. First, he creates a stronger bond of association between the reader and the narrator-as-reader, who both share a literary mode of interpretation. Second, by exposing conventional expectations, Lermontov creates a moment of self-reflection for both the

Traveler and the reader, breaking the “willing suspension of disbelief” and creating the possibility of unconventional narration, preparing the way for his depiction of Pechorin, a character that subverts traditional notions of the “hero.” Together, this creates a sense of narration that does not unilaterally relate content, but which is thoroughly implicated in reading and interpreting that content through a critical performance.

This temporal structure, in which interest and anticipation structure investment in the stories in which one is embedded, is reminiscent of the basic temporality that Heidegger, drawing upon the Kantian tradition of German Idealism, sees as constitutive of agency. *Dasein*, or the type of being which we are, structures experience and action according to the interconnection between remembered pasts, immediate contexts, and projected futures. Put another way, we are the type of creatures who experience and act in the world not as mechanical responses to immediate stimuli, but as moments within a temporally extended narrative. This is reflected in the linear structure of literature, which is read and understood precisely in terms of the interconnection of past, present, and future immanent in the reading experience (even though the entire published text exists simultaneously). Interest and anticipation accomplish this by affectively engaging the reader in a fictional context that reflects the fundamental care with which we all engage our own situated contexts. In many realist texts, the role of the narrator in this affective immersion is obscured by the retrospective past tense of the omniscient narration, which conveys a sense of a story always already finished. Yet, this retrospective narration is not atemporal—it simply presents the interconnected temporal relations from an artificially abstracted standpoint rather than an explicitly first-personal one. *A Hero of Our Time*,

which makes explicit the tension between first-personal and retrospective narration, demonstrates that the temporality of human experience, reading, and narration are all intimately connected.

The Traveler is able to share the reader's interest and anticipation through an unusual presentation of narrative time in which the past and present elements form an intriguing duality. Although the retrospective tense of the narration indicates that the narrators had access to the entire story before relating any of it to the readers,⁹³ the Traveler restricts his narration to the temporality of the writing process when he writes: "Little did I think it would be the first of a whole series of tales (62). The Traveler willfully restricts himself to describing his impressions at the initial moment of hearing the story, expressing his curiosity and anticipation as if it were in the present. Thus, instead of simply relating a story, the narrator-as-reader relates his experience of hearing or perceiving the story. This places rhetorical emphasis on his act of reading itself. He expresses this focus again in an unusual passage:

But perhaps you want to know how the story of Bela ended? First, though, I must remind you that I am writing travel notes, not a story, and so I cannot make the captain tell his tale before he in fact did so. You must therefore wait or, if you prefer, turn on a few pages – though I would advise you not to do this, for the crossing of the Krestovaya (or Mont Saint-Christophy, as the learned Gamba calls it) is well worth your attention. (45-6)

This humorous passage plays with the notion of linear narration. Certainly the Traveler cannot make Maxim tell the story sooner, but his seeming obliviousness to the authorial

⁹³ This temporal feature is familiar for our contemporary book publishing industry which requires fully completed manuscripts to be written and revised before being sent to the presses. In serial publication, on the other hand, it is possible for an author to develop a story as its sections are released.

power of editing and arranging the story is striking. In refusing to retell the story to us in any way except the way he himself heard it, he also restricts himself to the same temporal viewpoint as the reader, encouraging the reader to identify with the narrator-as-reader's parallel experience. This foregrounds the interpretive components of narration by showing how the narrator operates from a situated context in which the story gains significance through a performative reading. Furthermore, the suggestion is that even if the narrator had chosen to present this experience retrospectively, such reflection would still be based on a performative reading experience and directed towards a similar performative reading experience. While the immediate, first-personal narration of *A Hero of Our Time* produces a closer affective contiguity between the reading of the narrator-as-reader and the reading of the reader, retrospective narration only effects the temporal *distance* between these readings which are still both temporal and performative.

Lermontov achieves a similar effect through the restricted spatial viewpoint of the narrators. He is careful to make each narrator privy only to information that would be available through first-hand observation. He avoids the partial omniscience that comes with hindsight by ensuring that the narrators have no omniscient knowledge of unseen events, relating only what was directly seen and heard. The Traveler can only gain knowledge through Maxim's narration, and Maxim only through his personal observation, which he is keenly aware of: "So I crouched by the fence and listened, trying to catch every word. I was intrigued, but missed some of it because of the singing and talking in the hut" (31). This has the effect of placing the narrator-as-reader and the reader on the same informational plane, which encourages identification as informational

peers. Lermontov's emphasis on restricting information to personal observation is so strong he often relies on chance witnessing as in the above passage. He combines this technique with very physical rhetoric, such as: "I'll never forget one scene – I was walking by and happened to glance through the window. Bela was sitting on the bench by the stove, her head bowed down on her chest. Pechorin was standing in front of her" (40). The gaze is the dominant element of this passage, as it is in many instances in the novel. Lermontov not only places Maxim at the scene, he restricts the narration to those physical elements that are directly observable. Here, the objectivity of the realist gaze is challenged by the recognition of the subjectivity of the gazer. Visual detail, considered particularly objective, is shown here to be essentially interpretive, constitutive of reading. Observation, like its articulated counterpart description, is a performative act. The narrator-as-reader, at once observer and describer, blends reading and writing by pursuing and generating significances.

Together, these literary techniques all emphasize the close parallelism between narration and reading, eroding the traditional hierarchies between the narrator and reader. The use of interest and anticipation show that Lermontov's narrator-as-reader has the same approach and attitude as an engaged reader. The time and space restrictions show that the narrator-as-reader has the same informational content. While this identification is part of the richness of the experiencing the text, a technique used to make the story more compelling, it also encourages the reader to engage performatively in the ethics of the text. That is, by highlighting the performativity of the narration, this reciprocally highlights the performativity of the reading. Moralism, which depends upon a

unidirectional view of the transmission of literary content, is therefore undermined by the performative ethics of literature in which the narrator-as-reader models ethical interpretation and judgment thereby encouraging the reader to exercise parallel interpretations and judgments. Such judgment is more than seeing whether certain actions fit into predetermined moral precepts. Instead, ethical judgment is portrayed as a performative ethical engagement with one's situated context, an act of simultaneous reading (the response to the related situation) and writing (the generation of significances from the interpretive moment of reading).

This performative ethical stance is neither as the unidirectional application of existing moral norms to a given situation, nor the unidirectional deriving of norms from the given situation. Instead, this fundamentally speculative impulse involves a dialogic interaction between the situation and one's value-laden response. This is demonstrated in one instance when Maxim relates Pechorin's reaction to Bela's death:

All this time, though, I never once saw a tear in his eye. Perhaps he couldn't cry, perhaps he controlled himself, I don't know. As far as I was concerned, I'd never seen anything so pathetic in my life. (58)

This passage opens with an objective statement of fact—Maxim's observation that he never saw a tear. The narrator-as-reader's interpretive act occurs in the next line, in which he admits to two possible explanations. By stating his own uncertainty, Maxim creates a transcendent moment where the reader-as-narrator is compelled to consider the interpretation itself. Once this mindset is created, Lermontov has Maxim make a polarizing statement that Pechorin's act is "pathetic." The rhetorical force of the statement should provoke a strong reaction in the reader, who (even if he tends to agree

with the narrator-as-reader) will have to elevate his contemplation into the ethical realm. The very notion of considering if the act is “pathetic” has two component parts. First, the reader must consider how the act is described within the text, employing standard textual analysis. Second, the reader must consider his own concept of pathos, which creates a metacognitive moment in which the specific judgment—Maxim’s judgment of Pechorin—stands in for ethical judgment as a whole—the reader now considers *what it is* to judge something as pathetic. This notion, that literary ethics is not the mere application of judgment but reflects on the nature of ethical judgment itself makes literary ethics always more dynamic than static because even when the fiction relates explicitly moralizing content, that content is not to be passively accepted or rejected but to be interpreted through the lens of judgment itself.

This demonstrates that ethical judgment is not an absolute comparison to static moralizing content, but is a dynamic application of human faculties to shifting circumstances. Every moment of ethical judgment is rooted in a performance, and every performance is rooted in a context. The nested narratives of *A Hero of Our Time* demonstrate the self-referentiality of judgment by showing the endless regression of judging judgment itself. The Traveler, for example, directly addresses the reader and encourages us to judge the judge: “Don’t you agree, though, that Maxim Maximych is a sterling fellow? If you do, then I shall be amply rewarded for my – perhaps too lengthy – tale” (61). Here, we move from practicing ethical judgment of characters and actions to responding to the act of judgment itself. We now see how Maxim’s act of judgment reflects on him, and thereby how it reflects on us, since at the moment we were

encouraged to make a parallel judgment of Pechorin. Recontextualizing the attribution of ‘pathetic’ as reflecting as much on the interpretative stance from which the judgment is made as it does on the character the judgment is applied to, we uncover an ethical ambiguity in the phrase. Conceived as a slight on Pechorin, ‘pathetic’ implies an unforgivable weakness of character. On the other hand, once we read Maxim’s character into the statement, we see that ‘pathetic’ might be better understood as ‘eliciting pathos,’ as Maxim’s sympathy for Pechorin permeates the narration. This enables us to deconstruct any purely moralist reading that simply judges the narrated actions according to proscriptive moral norms because as the text moves from a simple value-judgment about the character to an emotionally-inflected value-judgment that extends sympathy while judging, Maxim’s narration models a bidirectional intersocial relationship rather than a unidirectional moral judgment.

In treating Pechorin as an end-in-himself even as he interprets Pechorin’s actions and judges his behavior, Maxim demonstrates how Kant’s categorical imperative ought to function. While Kant is often mislabeled a moralist because he proposes some duty-driven, rule-based strictures on behavior in his examples of ethical judgment, he demands that rather than merely generating moral strictures, that we treat the act of constructing moral maxims⁹⁴ as a self-discipline that ensures that we value others as ends-in-themselves. Thus, *valuing* itself is not a merely taxonomic notion that discriminates between the valuable and worthless, but is the act of attributing ethical weight to the lives and opinions of others. Just as Kant therefore concludes that care for others entails

⁹⁴ I have no idea whether Lermontov was aware of this play on Maxim’s name, but it’s not beyond the realm of possibility.

holding moral principles that identify the value of self and other, Maxim models this for the reader in a simple statement: “If I’d been in his place I’d have died of grief” (60). While recognizing their differences through different expected responses to the same situation, Maxim uses this to strengthen his empathy towards Pechorin, demonstrating what it is like to consider—even if it is just in this moment—what it is to truly conceive the other as an end-in-itself. As we have seen implicitly, the ethical character of *Sketches by Boz*, *Notes from Underground*, and *Jane Eyre* all hinge on moving beyond the restrictive abstraction of moral norms to a deep, affective connection to others.⁹⁵ While any or all of these texts can certainly be read for and as a definitive moral content, to do so is to misrepresent the literary qualities of their performative ethics, which is aligned with particular moral stances only insofar as the expected and hoped for result of the reader’s performative engagement with the text points to a particular direction for becoming.

Although the issues raised are initially about events contained in the fictional world of the text (like analyzing the ethics of a narrated act or speculating how a character would act in a particular situation), what develops out of the identification between reader and narrator that the text both models and elicits ethical evaluation (applied to both the content of the text and the narration itself). This parallels Kant’s primary thesis in his *Critique of the Power of Reason*, namely that the ostensible arbitrariness of aesthetic judgments connected with a sense of the universal validity of

⁹⁵ Dickens employs Boz in way that resemble the narrators in *A Hero of Our Time*, as a model of such reflection designed to elicit sympathy for previously unrecognized classes of society. Dostoevsky presents this view through its contrast, showing how the underground man’s inability to give and accept love and insistence on a primarily intellectual ethical privileging over the self ultimately unravels itself. And Brontë uses the intensely personal narration of Jane to both elicit and model genuine sympathy.

such judgments forces individuals to participate in a communal basis for value-judgments. That is, to develop one's capacity for value-judgment in a narrative context—which, as I have argued, is at once subjective and objective—is also to exercise one's capacity for being a moral agent within a society. Yet, while Kant argues this in the abstract, he provides very little to suggest how literature is more than a neutral environment to safely exercise our capacity for judgment (and empathy). *A Hero of Our Time* takes this further by presenting the narrated events ambiguously, requiring the reader to generate meanings and considerations. Responding to the narrator-as-reader as a set of possible models for value-judgment, the reader not only practices such judgment, but reflects metaphilosophically on what such judgment ought entail. At this level of readership, therefore, the reader-as-narrator mentally writes himself into the text and becomes the object of his own interpretation, blurring the distinctions between the reader and what he reads. This is a true metacognitive moment where the separation between reading and narration is obscured and there is nothing left but a person alone with his or her personhood. And, of course, a person alone with his or her personhood is perfectly poised for (ethical) becoming.

READING AS NARRATION

If literary experience is going to engender genuine ethical development, it must go much deeper than we have heretofore seen—it must be lived rather than merely perceived. Just as realism is impoverished as a purely mimetic relation to the world, reading realism is impoverished as a purely mimetic relation to modeled performative

ethics. If the reader merely replicates the stance of the narrator, even when this stance is dynamic and performative, the literary text becomes mere propaganda, building conformity to a particular moralist ideology. And if the reader merely exercises preexisting moral faculties, the text becomes nothing more than a practical instrument and has no capacity to induce transformative becoming. Thus, to take the next step in our investigation, we must see how the reader can individuate him- or herself by becoming a reader-as-narrator, who constructs a new ethical text out of what Gadamer calls the “fusion of horizons” between the textual environment and the person the reader brings to that environment. This process of self-individuation is not the promise of any fictional text because it requires a certain activity on the part of the reader that cannot be forced. In essence, the textual gesture is what Wittgenstein describes as ‘hand-waving,’ that physical embodiment of a leap of faith when a teacher waves a student forward, intending him or her to proceed in the activity without further instruction. Literary texts—by their mere fictionality—allow and encourage such a response (even when they actively resist it) because their very unreality grants interpretive power to the real reader. A novel that is dominated by a multiplicity of narrative voices, *A Hero of Our Time* use specific techniques to encourage the individuation of the reader-as-narrator as Lermontov also strives to break the affinity between the narrator-as-reader and the reader that he worked so hard to establish, using temporal, spatial, and grammatical distancing to force the reader to dissociate his or her subjectivity from that of the narration. This opposition is

not so much a contradiction, but an *alternation* that will eventually lead to a synthesis⁹⁶ between narrator-as-reader and reader-as-narrator.

As we have seen, Lermontov wields multiple narrators-as-reader to set up a subtle and compelling structure of oppositions that performs a series of self-referential engagements. Initially, he attempts to create a close bond between the reader and the narrator-as-reader. At the same time, however, he tries to distance them. Distancing the narrator-as-reader from the reader can even occur at the same moment as they are brought together as when, for example, Lermontov complicates the Traveler's time-restriction. When, as we saw, he calls his story "the first of a whole series of tales" (62), he breaks the time-restriction and reveals future knowledge, creating a double bind. Restricting the narrator-as-reader to the same time as the reader creates affinity. But by deliberately exposing the fact that the narrator-as-reader does this, Lermontov shows that this affinity is forced and artificial. Also, by raising the issue of when events are recorded, Lermontov undermines the factual authority of the narrator, who recounts the events from memory. Even if we trust the narrator to tell the "truth," we realize that he is only capable of relating his subjective interpretation. This is characteristic of Lermontov's technique—to establish and expose a convention and then subvert it. He juxtaposes moves that draw the reader closer to the narrative-as-reader with moves that push him away. This oscillation has ensures that we never get too close or too far from the narrator's perspective and keeps the narrator-reader relationship in constant focus.

⁹⁶ I have avoided using the language of the Hegelian dialectic throughout most of this project because the oppositions I have been more concerned with have been more like Kantian antinomies, self-deconstructing characterizational oppositions. Here, however, the opposition between narrator-as-reader and reader-as-narrator is a productive tension between two positivities that leads to a generative meaning that transcends either one. Thus, I believe the language of the Hegelian dialectic is warranted in this case.

Lermontov seeks an active reader who does not passively imbibe the story. Instead, he creates a strong dialogism in which the engaged reader is always moving beyond the story and reflecting metacognitively upon story itself and the distinction and overlap between the roles of narrator and reader.

Moreover, Lermontov's use of physical observation contains another move towards distancing the narrator-as-reader and the reader. The spatial restriction that keeps the narrator-as-reader on the same informational plane as the reader also exposes a subjective viewpoint. Visual limitation breeds subjectivity, which in turn leads to interpretation. Following the earlier scene when Maxim observes Pechorin and Bela, Maxim reveals his subjectivity: "He turned away and offered his hand in parting. She didn't take it or say anything. But from where I was behind the door I could see her face through the crack. I pitied her to see how deathly pale that sweet little face had gone" (41). Maxim moves from restricted visual narration to visually-based interpretation. He begins with neutral descriptions of what he sees, but soon uses value-laden modifiers, such as 'deathly' and 'sweet' to represent his own interpretation. The mixing of objective and subjective elements by the narrator-as-reader alludes to the inherently ambiguous nature of narrative mediation. We, as readers, not privileged with the events themselves, but are given only the narrator's interpretation. We are restricted not only by *what* the narrator sees, but also by *how* he sees. Lermontov again pulls the reader in different directions with respect to the narrator-as-reader. By making the narrator-as-reader share the same information as the reader he creates unity of view. By revealing the subjective nature of the narrator-as-reader, on the other hand, he forces a distancing

almost like wariness that causes the reader to perform more interpretation because he or she is increasingly skeptical of the received narration. This also occurs when Maxim employs a simile: “It’s really funny to look back on – there was I fussing over her like a nursemaid” (51). The exact nature of the ‘fussing’ is hidden from the reader, but Maxim’s embarrassment over his former sentimentality is clear. The psychological content of the narration becomes the basis for interpretation, supplanting factual content. Temporal distance allows Maxim to judge himself as he both reads and narrates his former actions. The distance of readership allows us to perform a similar act. Lermontov aligns Maxim’s spatio-temporal situatedness with his individuality to open a space for the reader’s interpretation and also use’s Maxim’s self-analysis as a model for proper reading. In general, because the narrative is so self-reflexive, it provides the reader with both interpretive content and examples of interpretation. This interpretation in turn provides both ideas for the reader to dialogue with and a model of how to read.

Another element that further distances the narrator-as-reader is the acknowledgment of the situatedness of the narrator-as-reader with respect to particular audiences. Pechorin directs his narrative to himself, Maxim to the Traveler, the Traveler to an imagined community of readers, and the implied author to actual readers. As the core story is filtered through successive mediations, the narration is less explicitly directed towards us, although as the reader becomes narrator, the reader is perhaps more involved in the latter parts of the text. Instead of an omniscient narrator and a detached audience, there is a fluid continuum of narrator-reader mediation. Since there is no objective narrative ground, each narrator is exposed as subjective, constantly exhibiting

the peculiarities of personality that emphasize them as independent, actualized individuals and thereby forcing the reader to confront them from the outside. For example, Maxim often demonstrates his subjectivity as a reader, like when he says “Believe it or not, but I wept myself as I stood there behind the door. Well, not exactly wept, you know – oh, just an old man’s silliness!” (42) This relatively simple account actually contains a complex series of reversals that try to translate a moment to the reader. Maxim prefaces this account with the words “believe it or not” which already places the reader in an ambivalent space between belief and disbelief. “Believe it or not,” of course, operates under the assumption that statements are either true or untrue. In this mode a narrator is always objective albeit potentially untrustworthy. Maxim’s next move introduces an alternative way of approaching narrative by making a simple objective statement (“I wept”) and immediately contradicting it (“Well, not exactly wept”). This duality goes beyond the “believe it or not” mentality. Here it is the perception, not the truth of the narrated action that is in question, as the contradictory statements provide information about Maxim’s psychological state, a place unlike logic where contradictions are actually quite telling. The move is complete when Maxim calls the act “an old man’s silliness,” which is an overtly subjective interpretation. Whether or not Maxim wept remains factually ambiguous, but this fact becomes unimportant. Instead the reader-as-narrator is free to interpret Maxim as a subjective narrator-as-reader, creating a space of evaluative distance where the reader performs ethical reflection both with and against the text.

Combining this sense of critical distance developed between the reader-as-narrator and the narrator-as-reader with the notion of exercising judgment discussed above, we can move towards the synthesis of ethical individuation. The transcendent step here is when the reader, learning to recognize, critique, and navigate the multiple situatednesses of the narration (paralleling the multiple possible situatednesses which, according to Kant, the external world consists in), responds to the text by developing an ethical stance with respect to the multiplicity of situatedness itself. That is, rather than align with any singular perspective provided by the text (as moralism would have it), the reader takes a perspective on perspectives. This is not to say that in the face of moralism readers must embrace moral relativism. On the contrary, precisely by recognizing that since one's own way of relating (ethically) to the world is a *way* (which parallels the recognition that narration is also a way of relating to the world), one situates one's own way within the totality of ways that form the condition of possibility for social interaction. Ethical individuation thereby entails contextualizing one's own stance as related to all other possible stances, an interconnectedness behind Kant's seemingly paradoxical attribution of objective validity to subjective aesthetic judgments:

For since it is not grounded in any inclination of the subject (nor in any other underlying interest), but rather the person making the judgment feels himself completely **free**⁹⁷ with regard to the satisfaction that he devotes to the object, he can discover as grounds of the satisfaction any private conditions, pertaining to his subject alone, and must therefore regard it as grounded in those that he can also presuppose in everyone else; consequently he must believe himself to have grounds for expecting a similar pleasure of everyone. (*CPJ* 5:211)

⁹⁷ All the bold text in these quotations is placed there by the editors of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

That the individual feels ‘free’ in making a subjective aesthetic judgment means that the development of the reader-as-narrator is an essential component to transcending moralism with performative ethics. Yet, the fact that exercising such judgments always already pertain to social *inter*-action (through the generic nature of the medium as well as the a priori nature of the judgment), this action of becoming always has (ethically) normative consequences. That all exercise of judgment is connected with social and ethical possibilities in this way make performative ethics an essential component of fiction.

Therefore, it is impossible to treat Lermontov’s multiple narrators as (ethically) isolated from one another—as becoming-narrator participates in the reader’s becoming-ethical, the reader must treat all presented perspectives as ethically suspect (and thereby grounds for potential development). This too is modeled by the narration, as in the following instance where the Traveler takes Maxim’s failure to interpret Pechorin as an opportunity to exercise his own judgment. Maxim is exposed as an imperfect reader when he here admits that “What [Pechorin] said made a deep impression on me, for it was the first time I’d ever heard such things from a man of twenty-five, and God grant it may be the last. It’s quite beyond me” (54). Here Maxim is inadequate as a narrator-as-reader—he tries to read the situation but cannot. Maxim expresses surprise (“it was the first time I’d ever heard such things”), followed by rejection (“God grant it may be the last”), and finally abandons the interpretive act altogether (“It’s quite beyond me”), creating a void in the narrative. The reader may already be prepared to fill the void himself, but is immediately given another alternative by the Traveler:

I said there were a lot of people who did talk like that and very likely some of them told the truth, but disenchantment, like any other fashion, having started off among the élite had now been passed down to finish its days among the lower orders. I explained that now the people who suffered most from boredom tried to keep their misfortune to themselves, as if it were some vice.

The captain could not understand these subtleties. (54)

Instead of definitively solving Maxim's interpretive dilemma, the Traveler creates one of his own, painting the issue as a larger issue of the complicated relations between people and social groups. This explanation doesn't satisfy Maxim and it shouldn't satisfy an engaged reader. This didactic explanation, even if correct, at most provides a historical account of similar thinking. Furthermore, by using phrasing that expresses communication and interpretation ("I said" and "I explained"), Lermontov makes the Traveler's reading—as only one standpoint within the multiplicity of all possible standpoints—suspect. The move from the event itself (Pechorin's statement) to the first narrator-as-reader's interpretation to the second narrator-as reader's interpretation leaves the issue unresolved. Confronted with three successive moments that open up an interpretive space, the reader will likely be compelled to provide an interpretation of his own. More importantly, in making several possible modes of explanation and interpretive acts themselves the subject of the discussion, a space is provided for the reader to develop as narrator, exercising his or her (ethical) judgment upon the ambiguities revealed in the text. Whether or not the reader is inclined to assert any particular moral principles as the result of such an engagement, the engagement itself is a transcendent moment that establishes the reader as an emergent voice within a social interplay of interpretive discourses. That is, in responding ethically to the inherent

multiplicity of textual significance, the reader is individuated as a subject precisely by developing a set of active critical responses to the multiplicity of other standpoints and thereby establishing him- or herself as an moral agent (and end-in-itself) within a community of moral agents (treated as ends-in-themselves).

PERFORMATIVE ETHICS

Although literary performativity is exemplified in specific deployments of literary techniques, such as those employed by Lermontov, the distinction between moralist and performative readings of fiction goes beyond technique into the reader-narrator relation itself. Moralist readings, which abstract content from performance, move towards an objective standpoint that elides the interplay between narrator-as-reader and reader-as-narrator. Performative readings, on the other hand, are based on such interplay and therefore develop ethical becomings that are categorically different from the intake of moral content. Active, performative ethical reflection is not, therefore, merely a more effective version of moral instruction the way, for example, working out under the supervision of a trained professional can be more effective than working out alone. Whereas moralist readings produce an ethics that relates individuals entirely to principles or moral norms, performative ethics relates individuals first and foremost to other individuals. Just as Kantian ethical philosophy seems highly objectionable when reduced entirely to a set of particular maxims,⁹⁸ morality seems unethical when reduced to the

⁹⁸ In fact, Kant argues that one can never assert a moral maxim. The tests of the categorical imperative can at most show that a principle is *un*ethical. Thus, his use of maxims are not intended as absolute, normative rules but as performative examples of ethical reflection.

static rules of moralism. Only performative ethics offers a dynamic contextual engagement with the ever-changing world in a way that can demonstrate care for others. Having examined the frame narrations of Maxim and the Traveler as instances of a narration-as-reading that grounds performative ethics, we are now prepared to confront the other two narrators—the implied author and Pechorin himself—in order to see how such performativity enables more dynamic ethical content. The text argues, as does much realist literature, that in order to establish a truly reciprocal (that is, ethical) relation to others, ethical individuation must be performed as a communal endeavor. This is not always explicitly stated, as Pechorin serves as a negative example more often than a positive one. The figure of Pechorin, however, as a self-justifying ethical agent provides a site for the reader-as-narrator to practice performative ethical responses that lead towards the development of a reciprocal ethical stance towards self and others.

Although performative ethics is nonverbal to the extent that it is engaged affectively, inscribed in the individual's character, and enacted in everyday life, linguistic articulation is essential to an ethics that is performative because it is literary. Part of the human condition is to have identity and becoming be intertwined with our linguistic characterizations. Therefore, although moralist rhetoric is not equivalent to performative ethics, it is in fact a site for performative ethics. As ethical individuation is enacted in dialogue with social—and in this case textual—environments, linguistic characterization is necessarily connected with becoming as personal growth. And, as moralism is a critical stance towards the morality of certain expressed contents, this process of individuation will necessarily invoke moralist concerns. However, precisely because we

acknowledge that the verbal manifestations of performative ethics are inseparable from their ethical becoming (especially when we talk of becoming in literary contexts), we must regard any moralist claim about literature that disregards its performative method as lacking. Part of performative ethics, like Kantian ethics, is to engage and deconstruct these claims, to promote an ethical development unconstrained by moral misconceptions. We therefore turn to the implied author, a narrator whose critical preface explicitly reflects on the moral significance of the text, in order to see how moralism is thus deconstructed:

You may say that morality will not benefit from this book. I'm sorry, but people have been fed on sweets too long and it has ruined their digestion. Bitter medicines and harsh truths are needed now, though please don't imagine that the present author was ever vain enough to dream of correcting human vices. Heaven preserve him from being so naïve! It simply amused him to draw a picture of contemporary man as he understands him and as he has, to his own and your misfortune, too often found him. Let it suffice that the malady has been diagnosed – heaven alone knows how to cure it! (20)

While this language employs elements of moralist rhetoric to suggest that the value of the text consists in moral consequences applicable beyond the scope of the text, the implied author attempts to undermine this by asserting the text as realistic. Implying that the text merely describes and diagnoses the society as it already is, this passage encourages the reader-as-narrator to relate to the text as an ethically-inflected world rather than an allegorized moral doctrine. The vitriolic language of moral degeneracy, moreover, combines with a stated refusal to “dream of correcting human vices” and an acknowledgement that “heaven alone knows how to cure it” presents a call to action that leaves the precise nature of the action as yet undetermined. That is, while directly

avoiding taking any particular moral stance, this narrator demands that some moral stance be taken by opening up a space where the reader cannot look away from ethical problems. The acts of looking, describing, interpreting, and judging are all conceptual endeavors that link the philosophical ethics of Kant with literary ethics. Words matter as the site of (ethical) reflection in which literary representation functions as a cure for social blindness by spurring its readers to direct a persistent social critique to their own environments.

This moral rhetoric is generalizing as, indeed, Kant argued that all ethics must be, in that an entirely particularized ethical system would have no normative power over the impulses of the individual and could therefore authorize anything. That is, to act ethically is to have care for generic life, to value life not entirely according to one's own solipsistic impressions but as a value one shares with others. At the same time, this moral rhetoric does not embody the generalizing tendencies of moralism, which define moral action entirely according to moral principles or norms. Instead, this generality pertains directly to a shared society, as demonstrated when the implied author writes that "*The Hero of our Time* is certainly a portrait, but not of a single person. It is a portrait of the vices of our whole generation in their ultimate development" (19). Resonating with the phrases 'contemporary man' in the previous quotation and 'our time' in the title, Lermontov constructs a particular kind of generality based on a shared historical situatedness rather than essential humanist characteristics. The fact that his generalizations point to an ever-shifting context consisting of the interaction between countless possible standpoints demand that ethical individuation is the only possible

solution. For an ethical agent to make a genuine difference to the degeneracy the implied author laments, he or she must be able to critically navigate the flow of historical perspectives, neither maintaining a singular doctrine that cannot adapt to shifting context nor simply following and reinforcing the trends of the moment.

This point is a touchstone between literary and philosophical performativity. Tolstoy expresses a similar sentiment in *What is Art?* when he talks about the religious feeling of an age and Kant invokes a similar idea when he argues that aesthetic judgment (as the paradigm of ethical judgment) essentially ties individuals to community:

The propaedeutic for all beautiful art, so far as it is aimed at the highest degree of its perfection, seems to lie not in precepts, but in the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*, presumably because **humanity** means on the one hand the universal **feeling of participation** and on the other hand the capacity for being able to **communicate** one's inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals. (*CPJ* 5:355)

Looking beyond the unsubstantiated humanist assumption that some essential biological difference enables such social capacities in humans but not animals, this passage connects aesthetic judgment to the establishment of a universality that embraces differences, since it enables each person's inmost sense to be expressed and participate within community. That is, the distinctiveness of individuals is enabled by the set of reciprocal and communal relations in which personalities can be expressed in dialogue with and in contrast to others. Thus, Kant's paradoxical view that the individual subjective aesthetic judgment maintains a universal or objective validity despite obvious differences in taste is akin to the paradox between individual and society. In this view,

the one and many are never wholly distinct, requiring a mutual and reciprocal sphere of interaction within which 'one' and 'many' both make sense.

That such an ethics has its basis primarily in the establishment of an ethical community and only regulates particular actions insofar as those actions influence certain aspects of communal development is enough to demonstrate that the moralist rhetoric does not obtain here. For any doctrine of appropriate and inappropriate action or belief that is not grounded first on the mutual engagements of beings (ends-in-themselves) contains the form of ethical judgment without its purpose. Thus, the Traveler ultimately bases his moral interest in his narrated story on the observation of a man, a being who is valuable as an end, not as a mere lesson or allegory. He thus avoids making a strong moral claim about Pechorin, saying instead: "Some readers might like to know my own opinion of Pechorin's character. My answer is given in the title of this book. 'Malicious irony!' they'll retort. I don't know" (76). His ambiguous treatment of an ambiguous title dispels the possibility of the novel having a clear moral. The only truly "right" thing the reader can do is deeply engage in the story. The Traveler hopes for this when he writes:

The story of a man's soul, however trivial, can be more interesting and instructive than the story of a whole nation, especially if it is based on the self-analysis of a mature mind and is written with no vain desire to rouse our sympathy or curiosity. (75)

This novel is not a moral tale or allegory that merely instills a particular viewpoint. It does not merely manipulate our emotions or "rouse our sympathy." It is only not a plot-oriented thriller that rouses our "curiosity." However, it demands engagement on all of these levels. Lermontov creates a strongly reader-oriented novel that attempts to give the reader a deep multidimensional engagement. The story is meant to be "interesting and

instructive,” but the narrative-as-reader (both by compelling further interpretation and creating a readership model) allows reader to create, not discover, the meaning.

While foregrounding Pechorin the man as the central investment of the story, the irony in the title *A Hero of Our Time* paints Pechorin as neither hero nor anti-hero, as his story (as the ‘hero’) gives way to the relationship between the reader and the reader’s world, flagged by the phrase ‘Our Time.’ The use of the plural pronoun our not only directs the reader to consider the story as impelling self-commentary on the reader’s own (historical, ethical) situatedness, it also brings the community of readers and authors together in a common concern. This draws out a crucial element of Kantian ethics—the demand the community-grounded ethics involve a reciprocity that does not unilaterally privilege one member of the community over an other.⁹⁹ This claim ensures that ethically-loaded decisions be made on the basis of ethical principles rather than on how advantageous the decision is to us over others. Thus, just as Kant’s categorical imperative demand that one conceive of any other possible subject occupying one’s own subject position as a rhetorical ploy to help us differentiate between asserting a moral claim based on our moral principles or our personal investments, in his first definition of the beautiful, he writes that “**Taste** is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction **without any interest**. The object of such a satisfaction is called **beautiful**” (*CPJ* 5:211). While positing taste as disinterested seems odd, in that the beautiful and the experience of perceiving it have value to us, what Kant means here is that the value contributed by the beautiful cannot be

⁹⁹ This is a philosophical rather than a political claim, so it doesn’t imply anything like communism.

equivalent to its practical value in our lives. For example, when Silas Marner strokes his secret horde of gold pieces as if they were a child, he is not engaging in genuine aesthetic appreciation but rather reveling in his sense of his own power imbued onto fetishized bits of metal. Thus, the purpose of aesthetic judgment is not just to create community, but to participate in the feeling that the created community is generally reciprocal and thereby ethical. Fulfilling Kant's imperative that we treat every person as an end-in-itself, aesthetic judgment entails finding genuine value not defined as subordinate to another practical value—literature and performative ethics are ends-in-themselves.¹⁰⁰

When we finally arrive at Pechorin's own accounts of his adventures—through manuscripts of his personal diary related by the Traveler—the reader-as-narrator is prepared to engage with Pechorin in a complex, transformative way, rather than read Pechorin as a symbol of a particular moralist doctrine. Having gone through three preparatory narrators already, we encounter the enigmatic character of Pechorin, a man whose honest reflections on his own nature form his primary mode of thought. He is the only narrator with full agency, a narrator-as-reader-as-narrator who drives the actions of the story while simultaneously reflecting on them and creating a parallel psychological narrative. This self-interpretation serves both as a model for the reader-as-narrator to imitate and as the raw material for the reader-as-narrator's contemplation. We cannot and should not unquestioningly accept his self-analysis. In fact, Lermontov constantly

¹⁰⁰ Why would ethics be an end in itself when the imperatives are clearly directed towards a treatment of *others* as ends-in-themselves? I believe that because performative ethics is defined by becoming, the becoming-ethical has its own value, even in situations where there is little or no social engagement to necessitate ethical action. This is, perhaps, a contentious view, but I believe that if others are ends-in-themselves, then so too must we be ends-in-ourselves and individual becoming is thus valuable in its own right.

pushes the engaged reader to move beyond Pechorin's arguments and consider him through the lenses of society and the self. On the other hand, Pechorin serves as the ultimate model for the reader-as-narrator who is meant to admire and imitate his incredible self-analysis and complexity. The reader-as-narrator in essence becomes a Pechorin, forced into self-reflection that transcends the text. In a way there is a simultaneous empathy and distancing that occurs between the reader-as-narrator and Pechorin that transcends any simple relationships that typically describe subject and object, reader and text. The reader-as-narrator is abstracted from himself in the same way that he is abstracted from the text as he contemplates both in a detached manner. This very moment of abstraction, however, leads to a synthesis in which the reader is confronted with himself in an infinitely personal way, possibly even leading to a formative moment in which the reader deconstructs and recreates his very notion of self.

Internalizing and externalizing ethical concerns simultaneously, the reader reads Pechorin reading himself as a way to re-read the self the reader brings to the text. While this performative engagement does not fit the rigid account of moralism I have criticized thus far, it enables us to see how moral perfectionism, a teleological notion of becoming, can be enacted through literature. Andrew Miller describes realist literature in this vein, writing:

That mode [of moral perfectionism], which I will call the "optative" (following a remark by Stuart Hampshire), conceives of one's singularity—the sense that one has this particular life to live and no other—by contrasting it with lives one is not living. If moral perfectionism is inclined to the future, and to entertaining the life one might have in that future, the optative is a complementary mode inclined to the past, and to all the tracks down which one's career might have gone but did not. That this mode is fundamental for the aesthetic, ethical, and

emotional power of realistic fiction is one claim in the pages to come . . .
(191-2)

This notion of the optative as a complex comparison between the actual unfolding of a personal history and all its unlived contrasts is not only a structural feature of the realist novel (196), but is a performative element that can be enacted by the reader in relation to the text. The reader is perfected by developing the self in response to other, non-lived selves, be they fictional characters such as Pechorin (who are emulated or not as the result of the reader's application of an evaluative framework which is simultaneously developed by the exercise of judgment in the text and used to exercise judgment upon the text) or the reader's other selves conjured in the imaginative space evoked by the reader's conceptual engagement with fictional reality. It is this imaginative possibility, the ability to (ethically) consider possibilities that deviate from the actuality of one's lived experience blur the lines between fiction and reality by recognizing that our actual world is dominated by the omnipresent influence of alternate possibilities. Fictional thinking, that is, cuts to the heart of Kant's notion of criticism, which philosophizes the connection between possible standpoints on the basis of the systematic relations that seem to govern an individual standpoint. Arguing an ethics of transcending the self and the self's position in order to encompass the otherness of world and community, Kant sees poetry—Lermotov's art—as perhaps the clearest expression of such thinking:

The **art of poetry** . . . expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting, within the limits of a given concept and among the unbounded manifold of forms possibly agreeing with it, the one that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate, and thus elevates itself aesthetically to the level of ideas. It strengthens the mind by letting it feel its capacity to consider and judge of nature, as appearance, freely, self-actively, and

independently of determination by nature, in accordance with points of view that nature does not present by itself in experience either for sense or for the understanding, and thus to use it for the sake of and as it were as the schema of the supersensible. It plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without thereby being deceitful; for it itself declares its occupation to be mere play, which can nevertheless be purposively employed by the understanding for its own business. (*CPJ* 5:326-7)

Put this way, it is hardly surprising that fiction can play such a large role in ethical individuation, the becoming of the reading subject. Becoming subject, becoming ethical, becoming agent, becoming narrator—all these transformations and more are developed through the self-directed critical faculties exercised in responding to performative literary ethics. Furthermore, becoming-self and becoming-other, the complementary processes of ethical individuation in dialogue with a community are what make improving the already extant activities which make up individual and social life—including moralist rhetoric—possible. The (ethical) reality of fiction is the possibility of (ethical) realization, a teleological becoming inscribed on the self by the self as it grapples with its always already relational nature. Always a response, the performative reality of fiction renews the self-other relation through the (ethical) becoming of the reader as the reader becomes both reader and narrator of his or her own life in relation to the interconnected fictional and real worlds.

Scholium 5

Ordinary Language and the Everyday

As we have seen, realist literature is consistently and almost definitionally focused on the ordinary—the name itself indicates an emphasis on reality as a concrete, lived, everyday experience. At the same time, all of the central characters we have examined—Boz, the underground man, Jane Eyre, Pechorin—are exceptional figures in one way or another. The resolution to this apparent contradiction lies in an understanding of the ordinary that encompasses both the exceptional and the unexceptional, which are, after all, two sides of the same coin. The ordinariness of realism is a resolve to relate the form and content of literature to the everyday concerns, values, and expressions of everyday life. This is present in many facets of realism, including its subject matter (more likely of everyday folk than Kings and Queens), distribution (more likely mass-marketed than targeted to an elite), and setting (almost always in and about a world that closely resembles our own). Here, however, I will focus on the use of ordinary language, which is important because it spans both the form and content of realism. That is, realism is both woven from ordinary language and about ordinary language. This also creates an affinity between realist literature and the philosophical inclinations of ordinary language philosophy, derived here through Wittgenstein and Austin, that drive this project. Few would deny that ordinary life is shaped by ordinary language and vice versa. This fact is a point of contact between realist literature and philosophical reflection, both of which

are able to be in and about the world because they are both in and about language. While this is true to some extent of all literary and philosophical work, what distinguishes realist literature and ordinary language philosophy is an overt insistence on working with discourses from within by taking forms of expression as one finds them: within their full, living contexts, with their myriad connotations, implications, and raw emotional content. This is what Wittgenstein and Austin mean by ‘ordinary’—not mundane, but part of everyday human experience and activity.

The most obvious connection between realist literature and ordinary language is that the realist novel—in direct contrast to Romantic poetics—is almost always narrated entirely in prose and in the vernacular. Moreover, it often but not always employs slang and regional dialects to give language the full shadings that would be present in analogous scenarios in the real world. Thus, realist literature employs particular forms of expression not only because they convey the proper meaning or have a desirable sound, but also simply because some real person might put it that way. The idea is that any full, holistic understanding of life must embrace the minute details, variations, and quirks found in everyday life. Just as realist novels defend plain description over poetic flourishes, Wittgenstein defends ordinary language, writing that “Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it” (*TLP* 4.022). Just as realism must overcome the elitist assumption that lower class life simply isn’t rich, complex, or important enough to sustain true art, Wittgenstein argues that ordinary language is complex enough to sustain philosophy.

For both realism and ordinary language philosophy, it is not merely that ordinary life *can* sustain artistic or philosophical attention, but that it *should*. This inherently ethical claim is found in closely related criticisms of the flight from the ordinary. In realist literature, this criticism often takes the form of exposing the destructiveness (both to self and others) of living a life abstracted from the real relations of life (especially care). Striving to be extraordinary, as in Pip's 'great expectations' and Raskolnikov's desire to become a 'super-man,' is often destructive as the ideal they hold before themselves is an inhuman one, utterly divorced from the center of significance of everyday life. Similarly, living for abstractions or ideals is often demonstrated as cruel and dehumanizing, as when St. John's legitimately selfless desire to do missionary work is undermined by his inability to demonstrate personal care for Jane. Wittgenstein considers a highly similar tendency to be endemic in the philosophical tradition. He relentlessly attacks philosophical theories and truths as artificial constructions that confound us so much with the inarticulable subtleties of abstract concepts that they lose their relevance. Wittgenstein describes this through the metaphor of drowning in a sea of abstraction:

Here it is difficult as it were to keep our heads up,—to see that we must stick to the subjects of our every-day thinking, and not to go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties, which in turn we are after all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal. (*PI* §106)

In this way, a philosopher who goes too far astray from the ordinary develops "deep disquietudes" whose "roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language" and yet entirely arise "through a misinterpretation of our forms of language" (*PI* §111). In this way, abstraction can

create rather than discover problems and can subsequently impose these created problems upon situations in which they really shouldn't arise. For example, the inability to create a stable, universal definition of the meaning of a word in the abstract seems to challenge meaning itself, which in turn can lead one to question the entire basis of our communicative practices. And yet, for Wittgenstein, the fact that we find our practices useful is sufficient evidence for their value and the inability of philosophy to inadequately capture how this works reflects poorly on philosophy rather than ordinary language. Thus, his therapeutic philosophy depends on breaking us free from the trap of such abstractions, leading to a radical redefinition of what counts as a philosophical discovery: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question" (*PI* §133).

In the end, Wittgenstein advocates a philosophy in which "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (*PI* §116). That is, he argues that philosophers must resist the tendency of abstractions in all discourses to overwrite what they describe and instead develop a method that draws out, reflects upon, and enhances the purposes of everyday life. Thus, in contrast to the danger of abstraction, realist literature and ordinary language philosophy both make an implicit claim that ordinary language is best subject for art and philosophy precisely because it is connected with lived reality or, as Wittgenstein puts it here, 'the human organism.' Similarly, J.L. Austin makes a pragmatic argument for the study of ordinary language in philosophy demonstrating how ordinary language can reflect the patterns of thought and expression

that in fact condition our everyday reality. To this end, Austin provides nuanced analyses of everyday statements or words as having a range of meanings, appropriate contexts, and functions. He provides a rationale for this method as follows:

First, words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us. Secondly, words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realise their inadequacies and arbitrarinesses, and can re-look at the world without blinkers. Thirdly, and more hopefully, our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our armchairs of an afternoon—the most favoured alternative method. (*PFE* 7-8)

Thus, Austin praises the recognition that the significance of human activity is in its everyday occurrence and that we need investigate language that participates in this—neither for getting closer to absolute truth than other approaches, nor for being a completely unambiguous study. Instead, he makes a common-sense argument that we use language for a wide variety of functions and that we are personally invested in using language effectively in these cases. It therefore follows that any investigation of language that helps us to “forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us” or “re-look at the world without blinkers” is valuable to us.

For Austin, this type of philosophy requires a fair amount of innovation, because philosophy is traditionally not directed towards ordinary language. On the other hand, the realist novel is always fully immersed in ordinary language and is therefore well suited to perform a similar form of linguistic investigation. For Austin and realist

literature alike, to understand how we use language is to understand ourselves. Where realist literature departs from this generally philosophical project, however, is in making a much stronger normative claim. While the realist novel, called realist partially because of its reliance on realistic linguistic expressions, dialects, vernacular languages, and so on, certainly provides an understanding of the connection between ordinary language and everyday life, it does so within a narrative context that makes this understanding heavily value-laden. The realist novel almost unilaterally focuses on the minute details of the lives of characters, whose lives are presented as mattering deeply. Ordinary language philosophy, of course, does have implicit ethical claims, but the affective power of literary narration places a particular normative weight on our understanding not just the systematic structures of everyday life, but their particular, personal manifestations. More particularly, while characters in realist novels often attempt to escape a restrictive, mundane sense of ordinariness, most realist argue that everyday things are valuable simply because people value them (and people are inherently valuable).

Wittgenstein shares this view, arguing that the significance of philosophizing about language is not in-itself, but is linked to the significance that language has *for us*:

It is wrong to say that in philosophy we consider an ideal language as opposed to our ordinary one. For this makes it appear as though we thought we could improve on ordinary language. But ordinary language is all right. Whenever we make up 'ideal languages' it is not in order to replace our ordinary language by them; but just to remove some trouble caused in someone's mind by thinking that he has got hold of the exact use of a common word. (*BB* 28)

While Wittgenstein does not require that philosophy only be conducted in the vocabulary of everyday life, acknowledging that philosophers can and do construct 'ideal languages,'

he claims that these languages have significance only in their relation to the ordinary. Ordinary language may be “all right” in that it clearly demonstrates its utility, but as unreflective conformity is routinely disparaged in realist literature, Wittgenstein worries that unreflective confidence in everyday expression can lead to a lack of self-reflection, as he writes:

Our ordinary language, which of all possible notations is the one which pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position, as it were, and in this position sometimes it feels cramped, having a desire for other positions as well. Thus we sometimes wish for a notation which stresses a difference more strongly, makes it more obvious, than ordinary language does, or one which in a particular case uses more closely similar forms of expression than our ordinary language. Our mental cramp is loosened when we are shown the notations which fulfil (sp.) these needs. (*BB* 59)

Wittgensteinian philosophy may not occupy everyday language at every moment, but it always begins and ends in it. A large portion of his philosophical project may be characterized as a self-reflective moment made from within language, an investigation of what it is we do when we talk and act as we usually do. His work, like that of realist literature, is designed to be productive for the self-reflective individual who desires to better understand how he lives, not in order to live in a whole new way, but to live better. Wittgenstein therefore stresses the compatibility of his views with everyday language, writing “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. . . . It leaves everything as it is” (*PI* §124). Simultaneously, the other half of his philosophy centers on philosophical language, in an attempt to force it to come back to these considerations, to the source of significance within human activity. While admitting that the work done in this metaphysical sphere does *have* value, Wittgenstein chastises philosophers for not recognizing what (and where) that value is

and for thinking they have found an abstract value in-itself, disconnected from the flow of everyday existence.

This return to everyday value at the end of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophical method accords with a common purpose of realist literature, the demonstration that wholeness of being and happiness hinges on an acceptance of the ordinary, a realization that the everyday can be as unique and special as the extraordinary. The ubiquity of the marriage plot in the realist novel also embraces the ordinary, deriving intense personal significance from an externally common form. Levin's shifting views of marriage, for example, attest to the importance of the everyday, as follows:

As a bachelor, seeing the married life of others, their trifling cares, quarrels, jealousy, he used only to smile scornfully to himself. In his own future married life, he was convinced, there not only could be nothing like that, but even all its external forms, it seemed to him, were bound to be in every way completely unlike other people's lives. And suddenly, instead of that, his life with his wife did not form itself in any special way, but was, on the contrary, formed entirely of those insignificant trifles he had scorned so much before, but which now, against his will, acquired an extraordinary and irrefutable significance. (480)

This shifting of opinion from an objective, external standpoint to a subjective, internal one represents Levin's interpellation into ordinary life. Initially, Levin disparages the ordinary marriages around him, unrealistically idealizing his future as a transcendence of ordinary cares. Yet, once he is in it, Levin discovers that the incredible significance of his life is not in its objective deviation from the ordinary, but from his personal involvement in it, as "insignificant trifles" now "acquired an extraordinary and irrefutable significance." This is a dominant message of the text, extending from Levin's profound

involvement in the physicality of mowing the field with the peasants, to his being more inspired by plain as opposed to philosophical talk, and so on.

While Levin is initially and repeatedly irritated by the intrusion of such mundane details into his lofty thoughts, he eventually realizes that the trivial details do not inhibit life, but in fact constitute life, as the emphatic closing lines of the novel demonstrate:

I'll get angry in the same way with the coachman Ivan, argue in the same way, speak my mind inappropriately, there will be the same wall between my soul's holy of holies and other people, even my wife, I'll accuse her in the same way of my own fear and then regret it, I'll fail in the same way to understand with my reason why I pray, and yet I will pray – but my life now, my whole life, regardless of all that may happen to me, every minute of it, is not only not meaningless, as it was before, but has the unquestionable meaning of the good which it is in my power to put into it!
(817)

This long sentence, with its stream of linked clauses, represents life as a single continuous unit containing and consisting of a myriad of particular, sometimes trivial, elements. Life is represented as both a unified totality—"my whole life"—and a series of particulars—"every minute of it." Levin's repetition of 'same' and 'in the same way,' link his revelation to his former life, as he acknowledges that his own character, tendencies, concerns, and problems are equally all his life. Yet, the revelation lies in the new characterization of the ordinary, in his recognition that his life has *meaning* or significance. Although this revelation has a profound religious element represented by Levin's acknowledgment of the role of prayer, it rejects any overly idealized notion of spirituality¹⁰¹ in which significance is abstracted from the everyday.

¹⁰¹ Including, it seems to me, some of Tolstoy's later post-'conversion' spiritual doctrines.

This, in turn, parallels Wittgenstein's rejection of ideals or abstractions as anything more than conceptual tools to bring significance back to the immanent context of living, which he expresses metaphorically: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!" (*PI* §107) The ordinary, despite—nay, *because of* its roughness and friction, is the only context we can inhabit, and is far from trivial or mundane. To connect philosophy and literature to our lived experience, is also to address the ordinary, because even the loftiest or most complex abstraction is nothing to us unless it can be somehow grounded in our lives: "even the hugest telescope has to have an eye-piece no larger than the human eye" (*CV* 17).

Momentary Reflections

Explanations come to an end somewhere.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein (*PI* §1)

The attempt to articulate the significance of any meaningful activity, even one less holistic and complex than realist literature, is a potentially unending endeavor. And yet, as Wittgenstein notes, “explanations come to an end somewhere” (*PI* §1). In particular, explanations come to an end in the practice itself, or rather, in a return to the practice. Realism, likewise, ends where it begins: in a return to the ordinary. These returns, however, do not merely replicate the initial activity but rather transform it—just as realist literature enables new understanding of and relations to the ordinary, explanations enable one to be differently and better prepared to recommit to the practice. Now that we have followed a single purpose—to investigate the productivity of various ways of reading the realist novel from within—through many stages to get to this point we can begin again *in medias res*, aware of beginning within a purpose sensitive context from which we can analyze and evaluate the reading practices that arise from various notions of realism. This awareness, moreover, will allow me to reflect back on this project as a whole and comment on how this particular explanation fits into this purpose sensitive context and provides possibilities for continuing the pursuit of such purposes in the light of this new awareness.

The primary method of this project has been a Wittgensteinian strategy of ‘working from within’ a living discourse. This method provides one reason *why* we

read—in this case, to provide a productive philosophical (self-reflective) moment for the reader to investigate *how* we (do and ought to) read. Working from within entails adapting and integrating philosophical and literary method to the holistic context in which reading takes place and has significance. Thus, explanations come to an end in practice, namely the practice of interacting with (reading) realist literature. In a certain sense, therefore, this project is not even *about* realist literature in that its attempts to articulate the significance of realist literature themselves have no significance outside the practice of reading realist literature. This project explains what a text can do only in order to provide insight that affects the doing. Since this project is a necessarily limited approach to an infinitely rich subject, I shall close with a few momentary reflections that look back in order to move forward so that understanding where this explanation comes to an end will clarify the possibilities for treating this end as a new beginning.

My first reflection is that explanations not only come to an end, they have ends. That is, explanations are teleological and purpose-sensitive, driven by a desire to accomplish something significant. For Wittgenstein, explanations have value not because they merely state things that are true (which is why we don't spend our entire lives articulating the obvious),¹⁰² but because they address relevant, purposeful concerns that arise when we do things. Likewise, working from within existing philosophical and literary discourses has value only because of and with respect to the value of literary practice. Thus, what I have expressed here are neither moral strictures nor philosophical

¹⁰² When, as discussed earlier, Wittgenstein disparages explanation and instead promotes description, it is only explanations of this type that he is opposed to. That is, he believes that the drive towards explanations that try to capture the complete or absolute truth do violence to the underlying purpose-sensitive questions that can yield productive explanations.

necessities. Instead, I have described a way to literature that emphasizes the transformative potential of realization. This is a particular purpose that I, as a scholar, teacher, and reader consider extremely important. It is, however, certainly not the only purpose for literature generally or realist literature particularly. (Realist) literature can be entertaining, cathartic, informative, community building, propagandizing, language practicing, inspiring, and many more. All these, I believe, are implicit in any holistic literary experience. The transformative philosophical potential of realization is no different in this regard. Yet, while any of these purposes can be achieved entirely within the process of reading itself, because transformation of the self is always to some extent against the self in its re-formational tendencies, this kind of critical distancing and self-reflective stance is particularly apt. This philosophical project takes the fundamental structure of an explanation, therefore, because it seeks to suspend, reflect upon, and clarify the immanent, lived reality so that change can occur in how that lived reality plays out. Explanations come to an end here, because at the point of contact with life itself, they must give way to ongoing action. At the same time, explanations have their end here, because the very purpose of explanations is such a return.

If explanations are purpose-driven, they are also necessarily contextual, for purposes divorced from operative contexts are pointless. This indicates another limitation for this work, which has consequences for more contexts than it can account for. This project relies heavily upon my autobiographical interests and experiences of reading, as I wish to share meditations that are as fundamentally private in practice as they are public in significance. In treating fiction as a site of possible experience rather

than as an originary well of determinable meanings, I take it on faith that my literary experiences contain enough relatable content that these meditations can mean something to others. Yet, there is a danger in the deeply intuitive basis of this assumption, namely that what may be relevant in my own relationship to certain fictions is always already a product of particulars and therefore ought not be artificially universalized. I therefore map my own experiences to present *a* way to fiction, not *the* (only or best) way. When I talk about realization throughout this text, therefore, I am neither constructing a complete or definitive theoretical notion nor a personal reflection in an inaccessible idiolect. Instead, I am merely describing a way—out of potentially infinite possibilities—of making texts present in our lives. All readers make ways into fiction, and articulating such ways matters simply because we traverse them. I have articulated some ways that matter (to me) as a means of reflecting upon, challenging, and possibly transforming how we engage fiction. My hope, then, is that this autobiographical journey can create a space for a self-critical moment in our approach to fiction, an admittedly stilted articulation of an intuitive experience that will raise questions that force us to deconstruct and reconstruct our intuitive practices.

The challenge, then, is how to understand a singular explanation in the light of the countless possible purpose-driven contexts available. This leads to my third reflection, namely that explanations are fundamentally dialogic. Explanations are not typically presented in a vacuum, but are responses to questions, whether actual or implied. Similarly, while this explanation is limited in its content, it is not limited in the possible responses and relationships that can be developed out of it. This explanation can be the

point of departure for countless possible dialogues, both within this articulated way and between this way and countless others. Focusing more directly on realism, as we did in Scholium 4, “The Dialogic Word,” we can see that the realist novel itself operates within and through a multiplicity of discourses, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues when he writes: “The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls” (*DI* 261). Famously employing terms that speak to discursive multiplicity—such as dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia—Bakhtin claims that the novel, with its focus on the interactions of multiple characters in changing situations, fundamentally operates out of multiplicity. Thus, there is no single entity that defines the ‘realist novel,’ but rather a host of more or less related texts linked by what Wittgenstein calls ‘family resemblances.’ Moreover, within even a single realist novel, meaning depends on a fundamental dialogism that Bakhtin describes. The central questions and concerns of the text—such as the possibility of living a meaningful life, the tension between social norms and individual intuitions, marriage and adultery, politics and war, and religion—are all addressed from multiple angles, sometimes conflicting, sometimes agreeing, but always combining in interesting ways. And, as Bakhtin also argues, this multiplicity is conveyed through a wide-ranging array of voices that encompass varied styles and manners of expression—secular and religious, philosophical and intuitive, male and female, aristocratic and lower class, city and country, and so on. Multiplicity is part of the realist novel and, when working from within, must also be part of the method of exploring it.

Because purposes and contexts are both multiple and explanations are entirely driven by their purposes and contexts, it follows that explanations are never singular, but always multiple. As a fundamentally adaptive and contextual method, therefore, working from within never yields a unitary discourse—it never uncomplicatedly reinscribes or resists the discourse it occupies and interrogates. The necessarily multiple discourses developed through this method will interact and challenge each other, demonstrating a value that is performative and self-reflective. Certainly, multiplicity is itself a feature of discourse, as Wittgenstein points out:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “words”, “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (*PI* §23)

Simply put, multiplicity is a consequence of working within a living language, whose modes of expression are always varied and changing. To put it another way, “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about” (*PI* §203). More than a necessary feature of this project’s theoretical and critical form, however, I believe multiplicity to be a methodological imperative, a valuable goal towards which this project is directed.

This multiplicity, moreover, is not anchored in the theoretical possibility of various purposes and contexts, but rather in the actual, lived reality of multiplicity. Many real people read many literary texts and have many different responses. Similarly, for Wittgenstein, The value of philosophical or literary approaches is not proven by

employing a single objective approach that determines all values, but is demonstrated in the value that individuals do in fact find in doing philosophy or reading literature. Thus, Wittgenstein writes:

We might say “every view has its charm,” but this would be wrong. What is true is that every view is significant for him who sees it so (but this does not mean “sees it as something other than it is”). And in this sense every view is equally significant. (*RF* 11)

Here, Wittgenstein argues against the notion that an approach or view has value only in virtue of its absolute correctness. Even if we had a way of determining the absolute truth of each view, this determination would make it appear that some views are simply empty of significance. Yet, Wittgenstein argues, no view that is embraced and lived by humans is entirely devoid of significance—it is significant precisely because it is operative in people’s lives. Similarly, Wittgenstein indicates that methods or views do not merely have significance in-themselves, but significance because of their role in our lives when he writes “A clever man got caught in this net of language! So it must be an interesting net” (*RFM* 2.15). Thus, multiple approaches contribute value because *every* approach contributes a uniquely performative value irreducible to any other. While in certain circumstances, one may want to discriminate between different views or approaches, privileging one as most apt to a particular task, any possible view or approach is for Wittgenstein a valid object of philosophical investigation and having multiple views or approaches is a consistent desire.

Yet, the value of multiple approaches exceeds the simple additive result of maintaining many independent values that are adapted to particular purposes.

Multiplicity is also *multiplication*, the interaction and combination of otherwise separate

entities that often produces new and valuable insights born out of the act of combination. This argument contains both a negative and a positive form. The negative side demonstrates a contrastive value—multiple approaches avoid or negate the stasis of having a single monolithic viewpoint. Wittgenstein thus states that “We shall also try to construct new notations, in order to break the spell of those which we are accustomed to” (*BB* 23), indicating his repeated worry that philosophy that rigidly holds itself to a single approach is not only non-functional but actively destructive. Similarly, Bakhtin notes of the novel that “Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language” (*DI* 61). This view of multiplicity, as an antidote to the tyranny of a unitary worldview, is common, particularly in post-structuralist or post-colonial contexts. The essential point here is that the difference between one and two is not merely one of degree (as one might expect from a reductive picture of a continuous number line) but is in fact different in kind. Simply replicating singularity or oneness does not necessarily yield plurality or two-ness, as it may just reinforce the original singularity. Instead, the tyranny of the unitary one—the ideological and idealized notion of homogeneity that renders all differences deviations from the singular norm and thereby authorizes institutions of social inequality—can only be overthrown by multiplicity—the simultaneous interactivity that renders differences productive in combination yet equal in value.

Moreover, this negative view is often linked to a more positive notion of the productivity of having multiple approaches. Contrasting monolithic ‘authoritarian’ discourses with polyphonic ‘internally persuasive’ discourses, Bakhtin praises the

employment of multiple voices as a recognition of the fundamentally dialogic nature of language, writing that “The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in a dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way” (*DI* 279). For Bakhtin, the novel is persuasive because its reliance on dialogue—between individuals, discourses, ideologies, languages, etc.—brings it into the socially productive space of interactivity. This is a crucial emphasis, as the realist novel itself recognizes the multiplicity of human purposes and manifests this in its polyphonic construction. Levin, for example, despite his stubbornness, intensity, strongly intuitive nature, recognizes that he is/has only a single voice within a multiplicity of voices. Although he can never fully understand or approve of the contrasting mentalities of his friend Stiva or his half-brother Sergei Ivanovich, his love for these people means he constantly strives to respect and learn from their opinions. In so doing, he recognizes the inability of any single rational ground to encompass these differences, which are essential and personal. Yet, Levin’s fundamental commitment to love enables him both to value and respect views he does not quite understand and to see human experience as a differential field, containing numerous beings and modes of being.¹⁰³ Thus, despite his persistent refusal to simply conform to or sanction the ways of living he sees in the world, his own personal development is

¹⁰³ Tolstoy writes: “Levin had often noticed in arguments between the most intelligent people that after enormous efforts, an enormous number of logical subtleties and words, the arguers would finally come to an awareness of what they had spent so long struggling to prove to each other had been known to them long, long before, from the beginning of the argument, but that they loved different things and therefore did not want to name what they loved, so as not to be challenged. He had often felt that sometimes during an argument you would understand what your opponent loves, and suddenly come to love the same thing yourself, and agree all at once, and then all reasonings would fall away as superfluous” (396).

always defined dialogically, through his perpetually curious and critical interactions with others.

Thus, just as a society, relying on dialogic language, must be greater than the sum of its parts, the novel, with its internal dialogism, achieves a level of productivity only accessible from compounding the multiple, as Bakhtin notes:

In the novel, literary language possesses an organ for perceiving the heterodox nature of its own speech. Heteroglossia-in-itself becomes, in the novel and thanks to the novel, heteroglossia-for-itself: languages are dialogically implicated *in* each other and begin to exist *for* each other (similar to exchanges in a dialogue). It is precisely thanks to the novel that languages are able to illuminate each other mutually; literary language becomes a dialogue of language that both know about and understand each other. (*DI* 400)

Here Bakhtin notes that the multiplicity of voice characteristic of the novel is not a simply numerical expansion. Instead, he argues that these multiple languages exist ‘in and for each other’ as well as existing ‘in and for itself’ as a heterogeneous whole. He thus indicates the productive potential of multiplicity, showing that the interactions resulting from compounding languages creates its own special kind of meaning, which simultaneously illuminates self and other within a continuing dialogue. This result is highly valued both in the philosophical and literary discourses under examination here, as the productivity of these languages and texts resides in their ability to foster dynamic self-reflexive understandings that participate in philosophical, ethical, and otherwise human becoming.

If this work ends where it begins—in realist literature—it also ends where realist literature begins—in the ordinary. Realist literature is not only about the ordinary; it is part of the ordinary. This project is, therefore, also neither only about realist literature

nor only about the ordinary; it is part of the ordinary. That is, this attempt at explaining literature begins and ends in the ordinary practice of reading.¹⁰⁴ It is “difficult to begin at the beginning” (OC §471) in part because the beginning—the ongoing practices of reading literature—precedes the explanatory project, which must respond to a continually progressing multiplicity of practices. Yet, it is also difficult because the end precedes the explanatory project. The purpose of developing ordinary reading practices must already be there to structure the explanation, which is nothing more than a response to the questions already raised by the practice itself. This doubled temporality, which always looks both backwards and forward to the same practice, shares the simultaneously descriptive and transformative project of realist literature itself. This project takes the form of reflections or confessions because, as Wittgenstein writes, “A confession has to be a part of your new life” (*CV* 18). Again, the doubled temporality of the confession looks to what already is in order to reorient one to where one is going. What literature can do is therefore also what philosophy in general and this project in particular can do, namely to produce a moment of suspension in the infinitesimally small moment of the present that collapses the internalized experiences, understandings, and competencies of the past and the purpose-driven commitments to the future into a single point. This is a moment of realization—the reflective and transformative integration of past, present, and future into a singular moment of critical becoming.

¹⁰⁴ Certainly, it reaches the ordinary through a series of mediations through academic discourses and the scholarly and pedagogical spheres of circulation in which such discourses operate.

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