UC Berkeley
UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Visionary Mimesis: Imitation and Transformation in the German Enlightenment and Russian Realism

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7n67n9j8

Author
Lorenz, Sarah Ruth

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Visionary Mimesis: Imitation and Transformation in the German Enlightenment and Russian Realism

By

Sarah Ruth Lorenz

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Eric Naiman, Chair
Professor Niklaus Largier
Professor Robert G. Kaufman
Professor Irina Paperno

Spring 2012

Visionary Mimesis: Imitation and Transformation in the German Enlightenment and Russian Realism

© 2012
By Sarah Ruth Lorenz

Abstract

Visionary Mimesis: Imitation and Transformation in the
German Enlightenment and Russian Realism

by

Sarah Ruth Lorenz

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Eric Naiman, Chair

The dissertation examines the intersection and conflict of two aesthetic imperatives, one mimetic and the other didactic, in the literary culture of early eighteenth-century Germany and mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Describing a structure that I call "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism," I show how texts struggle to bridge the gap between imitation and transformation, the present and the future, or what is and what ought to be. I present this underlying contradiction as a defining dynamic of both Enlightenment and Realist literature.

First I analyze J. C. Gottsched's *Critical Poetics* (1729), showing how the text deploys multiple shifting understandings of literary mimesis in order to reconcile the "imitation of nature" with the demand for morally instructive portrayals. Then I examine how this conflict is worked out in a fictional text, C. M. Wieland's novel *The History of Agathon* (1766-67). After tracing Wieland's turn toward a more "earthly" aesthetic in his earliest writings, I demonstrate that his novel pushes apart the very antinomies that it ostensibly seeks to combine. I then examine how the contradictions of "visionary mimesis" are reworked in the cultural context of the "1860s" in Russia. I describe the strained yet wonderfully ingenious interpretations put forth by the radical realist critic N. A. Dobroliubov in his desperate attempt to find the revolutionary hero within Russian reality. I then examine how F. M. Dostoevsky pursues a religious version of the radical project. After turning to his correspondence and his *Diary of a Writer* for background, I show how *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80) creates a path from ordinary experience to spiritual transcendence.

The comparative angle of the dissertation places nineteenth-century Russian literature in a broader European context. Texts of this period are often viewed as precursors of twentieth-century socialist realism; I argue that they continue an Enlightenment project and, with the German texts, belong to the larger literary configuration of "visionary mimesis." An awareness of this configuration helps explain the complexity and instability of "progressive realist" texts. Because these texts often fail to span the contradictions of imitation and transformation, they mirror the perennial cultural gap between our objective perceptions and our subjective visions.

Contents

Acknowledgements iii
Note on Transliteration iv

Introduction 1
Chapter Overview 6

Competing Poetic Imperatives in Gottsched's *Dichtkunst* 11

Review of Scholarship 16
I. Poetry and the Didactic Function 21

II. Poetry and Imitation 29
1. Conceptual Entanglements 29
2. An Ontology of Morality and Order 33
3. Empirical Inclinations 37
4. Structural Verisimilitude 41
5. Subjective Verisimilitude 48
6. Heroes as Statistical Outliers 51
7. "Hypothetical" Verisimilitude 55
Conclusion 59

Impossible Virtue in the Mid-Enlightenment: C.M. Wieland's Early Work through *Geschichte des Agathon* 63

Review of Scholarship 65
I. Wieland's Early Publications: Between Heaven and Earth 70
1. Living Among the Seraphim 70
2. Coming Down to Earth: The Shift in Wieland's Concept of Mimesis 79
3. Recognizing the Earth: The Shift in Wieland's Concept of *Natur* 90
4. Routes out of Swiss Poetics 94

II. Irresolvable Tensions in *Geschichte des Agathon* 96
1. Delineating the Possible: The Preface to *Agathon* 97
2. Cultural and Personal Contexts 100
3. Theory Becomes Theme 104
4. A Swinging Pendulum: The Path of the Narrative 108
5. Papering Over the Tensions 121
6. An Unfinished Project 126
Conclusion 127

Realist Convictions and Revolutionary Impatience in the Criticism of N. A. Dobroliubov **131**

Introduction: Cultural Context 131
Review of Scholarship 143
I. A Theoretical Foundation for Progressive Realism 150
1. Chernyshevsky's Positive-Realist Hero 150
2. Dobroliubov's Earnest Ideal 153
3. Dobroliubov's Concept of Mimesis: Literature Follows Life 157
4. Reality as Aspiration 158
5. A Subjective Materialism 161
6. Reality as Historical Progression 162
7. The Ideal as a Social Vision 164
8. The Ideal as the "Natural" and the "Normal" 165
9. Dobroliubov's Concept of Literary Agency: Text Generates Thought 168
10. Summary: Realism and Progress, United in Theory 173

II. The Breakdown of the Theory: Desperation and Ingenuity 174
1. "Literary Trifles": Impatience, Attack, Frustration 174
2. "What Is Oblomovism?": A Positive Spin on Degeneration 176
3. "When Will the Real Day Come?": Perpetually "on the Eve" 180
4. The Positive Hero, *Pro et Contra* ("Spring," "Good Intentions") 183
5. "Characterization of the Folk": Village Girl as Positive Hero 185
6. "A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness" 186
Conclusion 189

The Strangeness of Reality and the Pursuit of the Golden Age in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* **193**

I. Dostoevsky's Aesthetics 197
1. Qualifying Dostoevsky's Realism: Review of Scholarship 197
2. The Strangeness of Reality in Dostoevsky's Aesthetic Statements 200
3. Dostoevsky's Utopianism: Review of Scholarship 208
4. The Golden Age in Dostoevsky's *Diary* 210

II. *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Path from the Christian Ideal to Reality 219
1. Formal, Thematic and Mimetic Readings: Review of Scholarship 219
2. Ivan's Unreasonable Ideal and the Ladder of Virtue 222
3. The Outer Limits of Possibility: Markel and Zosima 224
4. The Angel in the World: Alyosha 232
5. The Russian Everyman and His Inconclusive Epiphanies: Dmitri 238
6. Grushenka as Russian Everywoman 245
Conclusion 249

Coda **253**
Works Cited **255**

Acknowledgments

In writing this dissertation I enjoyed the support of a committee made up of excellent scholars who are also cordial, genuine and kind people. My chair Eric Naiman, a Slavist, patiently read through two long chapters on early eighteenth-century German literature before I got to the Russian chapters. I appreciated his warm support, generosity and responsiveness as well as the penetrating questions he is so good at asking. I could always rely on him for thoughtful advice on matters large or small. Irina Paperno is a model of ethical commitment to the profession. She spent many hours meeting with me and discussing nineteenth-century criticism while I was still preparing for my qualifying exam, and then carefully examined my chapters for intellectual and professional missteps. I was well mentored by her distinctive mix of rigor, humor, kind concern and an utter lack of pretentiousness. Niklaus Largier provided a thoughtful response to every one of my chapters, even when the topics I covered were far from his own areas of expertise. I always looked forward to our meetings and to the cordial, lively interest he showed in my work. Robert Kaufman challenged me with questions that got to the heart of my theoretical endeavor and pointed me to useful and relevant scholarship that helped me expand my concerns beyond the German or Russian context. I would also like to recognize Anna Mikhailovna Dotlibova, Laura Goering and Diane Nemec-Ignashev, who did an excellent job of teaching me Russian and introducing me to Russian culture during my four years as an undergraduate at Carleton College. Diane and Anna Mikhailovna put immense effort into organizing the off-campus program that brought me to Russia for the first time.

My research and writing were made possible in part through financial support from the Dean's Normative Time Fellowship and the Chancellor's Dissertation-Year Fellowship, both awarded from UC Berkeley. I am grateful to Vicky Kahn and the Comparative Literature Department for nominating me for the latter award.

In my personal life, my gratitude goes first of all to my parents, Richard and Rosann Lorenz, for their generous support throughout my education. Whether by reading to me as a young child or making it possible for me to attend my first choice of college, they have always been behind me in my educational pursuits. I would particularly like to honor the memory of my mother Rosann, an avid reader herself, who wanted to see me finish but did not live long enough. I also wrote the dissertation with many fond memories of Mr. Wayne Brix, who taught high school English in Litchfield, Minnesota until 1996. Mr. Brix was a widely respected teacher and kind person who had great faith in my abilities. He taught me many of the nuts and bolts of language and literature; it is because of him, first of all, that I can quote Shakespeare, distinguish between a gerund and a participle, or identify poetic meters. He lives on as well in the writing advice that I pass on to my own students. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Janet Brown, who gave me all the support an academic could hope to have. She never failed to provide the time and space I needed to work and was there to proudly celebrate with me as I passed each milestone. The last few years would have been much more difficult without her loving presence. Janet entered my life just as I was beginning to plan my dissertation, and I am happy to have her even more firmly ensconced by my side as I finish.

Note on Transliteration

Chapters three and four contain short passages transliterated from Russian to English. Here I use the Library of Congress system without diacritical marks. I follow this standard exactly for titles of works, quotations from texts, and in the works cited, but when rendering proper names within the chapters I make some adjustments for the sake of readability or convention, e.g. "Dostoevsky," "Chernyshevsky," "Alyosha," and "Grushenka" instead of "Dostoevskii," "Chernyshevskii," "Alesha," and "Grushen'ka."

Introduction

The term "mimesis," as applied to art and literature, spans both imitation and creation. Plato's aggressive attack on mimesis in book ten of *The Republic* casts the term as mere copying; Aristotle's *Poetics* emphasizes that mimesis involves the active construction of a plot. The ambiguities of the term are captured in its two most common translations, "imitation" and "representation," the former implying reproduction of an external model while the latter suggests a more freely expressive portrayal. The flexibility of the term has led the Classicist Stephen Halliwell to differentiate between two general approaches to mimesis, one that is "world-reflecting" and the other "world-creating" (23).[1] This dissertation will examine texts and theories that pursue both approaches at the same time, doing so because they are driven equally by an empirical version of imitation and by a didactic desire to promote transformation. The texts by J. C. Gottsched, C. M. Wieland, N. A. Dobroliubov and F. M. Dostoevsky discussed below aim to show the world both as it is and as it could be, and they unite a rigorous realism with a progressive moral or social vision.

The notion that literature both borrows from and transforms the material of the world is not remarkable. It is the basis of Friedrich Schiller's mature aesthetics or of Erich Auerbach's exploration of how literature represents reality in different ways during different eras; it can be seen in Georg Lukacs's distinction between realism and naturalism or in Vissarion Belinsky's call for a social "content" that is nevertheless processed through the forms of art. But in the texts I will discuss below, the processes of "reflection" and of "creation" do not coexist in an organic aesthetic balance; instead they pull the text insistently in two opposite directions, asking it to adhere to a rigorous standard of imitation as well as a radical vision of transformation, or to be true to the present while also prodding readers toward the future. In short, my analyses work at the intersection of two aesthetic imperatives, that of imitation and that of a visionary didacticism. I refer to the structure that results as "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism." The following chapters show how an awareness of this configuration helps explain the complexity and instability of texts that were created in this hybrid mode.

Of the four chapters below, two focus on theoretical writings and two on fiction. I perform close readings of Gottsched's *Critische Dichtkunst* (*Critical Poetics*, 1729), Wieland's early writings through his first major novel *Geschichte des Agathon* (*The History of Agathon*, 1766-67), Dobroliubov's many critical articles written for *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) between 1856 and 1861, and Dostoevsky's *Dnevnik Pisatelia* (*Diary of a Writer* 1876-77) and *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1879-80). These texts, drawn from eighteenth-century German and nineteenth-century Russian culture, grow out of historical moments in which demands for plausibility, or for correspondence with real human experience as it was generally understood, were particularly insistent; at the same time, this turn toward the empirical

[1] A similar distinction has been noted by many scholars of mimesis. Gebauer and Wulf's overview of the history of mimesis strongly asserts the "world-creating" or "representational" view of the term. Tatarkiewicz, a major Polish scholar of the history of aesthetic theory, also differentiates between a mimesis of "copying" and one of "creating"; like Halliwell, he associates the former conception with Plato and the latter with Aristotle. Auerbach's monumental work preserves the ambiguities in the concept of mimesis by not translating the word in his title, but his subtitle (*Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* [*The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*]) and the text of his work present reality as represented rather than imitated.

realm generated a desire to change that realm for the better, producing the reforming zeal characteristic both of the pedagogical Enlightenment in the German realm and the era of the great reforms in Russia. These two impulses combined in the ambition to articulate (in the case of theory) or to enact (in the case of fiction) a literary mode that portrays an *accessible* version of the ideal, or a model of human excellence that is also attainable. The texts I examine aim neither at absolute utopia nor at the status quo; they seek a middle ground that I call the "possible." In using this word I draw on both its broadening and its limiting connotations: the texts aim to open up the unrealized possibilities of the present while also avoiding forays into the absolutely *im*possible. They balance the ordinary and the extraordinary and seek a modest step toward an achievable future.

However, the middle ground of the "possible" is located at a difficult intersection, one that may not quite exist. The texts that I analyze hardly achieve the full integration of the imitative and the transformative imperatives. Theoretically, the bringing together of "what is" and "what might be" should not be so difficult to achieve in a world that is fluid, dynamic and full of variety. All a text need do is depict and promote the better-than-average aspects of the existing world, or the aspects of the present that already hold the seeds of the future. But most of the texts I analyze seem perversely to undermine the goal that they themselves set for themselves. Again and again, the imitative imperative ends up being too rigid, the world too hopelessly fallen, and the ideal too unbendingly transcendent, for the text to achieve the positive yet plausible portrayals that it had itself constructed as its aim. Although the texts ostensibly hope to find a way to embody the ideal in the real world, they avoid promising routes to this goal and end up only expressing universal frustration at the incommensurability of our progressive visions and empirical realities. The clash between aspirations and realities is certainly a defining feature of the human experience, and perhaps the greatest significance of "visionary mimesis" is that it not only depicts but also structurally enacts these tense dichotomies.

And so the analyses in my four chapters trace both the coming together and the drawing apart of the conflicting aesthetic imperatives of imitation and visionary transformation. In particular, in each of the four case studies, I analyze how the text constructs four parameters: a concept of "reality" or of "nature," a concept of literary imitation, a concept of the ideal, and a concept of literary agency, i.e. the means by which the text aims to promote its ideal. (I rely on four concepts to delineate a two-part dichotomy because the realization of an imitative poetics depends on how reality is understood in the first place, and the potentially successful evocation of an ideal depends both on the nature of that ideal and on the ways—abstract or more concrete—that it is to be embodied in the text.) These four concepts are the constitutive elements of "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism." In the texts by Gottsched, Wieland, Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky, the four concepts are manipulated and developed in ways that sometimes bring the imitative and the transformative poles of the text very close to each other, yet that eventually deny any common ground to the two divergent aims of the text. Both aspects of this process, the attempt to find the middle ground of the "possible" as well as the extreme or rigid stances that ultimately undermine any mutual accommodation, make up the complex and fascinating dynamic of "visionary mimesis."[2]

[2] Many scholars have pointed to the conflict of imitative and transformative modes in certain works of theory or literature, particularly from the Russian sphere, but have not focused extensively on its productive complexities as I do here. Wellek sees the conflict between description and prescription as a major trait of Realism ("Concept of Realism" 242); Todd, continuing an observation made by Melchior de Vogüé, notes that the Russian novel was

The concepts of mimesis and of literary didacticism that I am using here have an air of simplicity or even naiveté when compared to the many subtle ways that theorists have grappled with the complexities of literary realism and the ethics of literature. For example, the tension that I claim exists in the structure of "visionary mimesis" only makes sense if one assumes, first, that an objective reality exists independently of and in resistance to subjective, normative visions; secondly, that literary texts do in some way "imitate" or "copy" this reality instead of creating their own worlds; and finally also that the transformative vision of a text is concretely, directly embodied in literary characters and representations. More complex understandings of mimesis have already been alluded to above,[3] and more profound assessments of the ethical agency of literature are also plentiful. Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*, Theodor Adorno's comments in "Engagement," and recent conceptualizations by Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Derek Attridge or Robert Eaglestone see the ethical import or social engagement of literature as rooted in the very structure of the artwork, whether in the movement of narrative, the encounter with the "other," the imposition of form upon matter, or the radical social resistance of innovative form. Kant's third critique likewise claims that the aesthetic in its very mode of being creates a bridge from natural necessity to moral autonomy. These penetrating and subtle theories can seem much more compelling than the straightforward idea that a text provides a concrete moral example for readers to emulate. Meanwhile, the immediate, surface utilitarianism implied by my approach has also repeatedly been attacked as foreign and inimical to true art (most influentially in Kant's claim that art does not pursue any particular purpose, [4] and also, for example, in the "art for art's sake" approach advocated by the nineteenth-century Russian critic Alexander Druzhinin and his allies; in Richard Posner's objections to Martha Nussbaum's ethical criticism, or in the Russian scholar I. Kondakov's vigorous attack on the way that tendentious literary critics try to co-opt "true" art). All of these statements convincingly make the point that readers do not need to be given a literal embodiment of the moral ideal in order to be ethically engaged by literature; they suggest that texts naturally span the poles of imitation and transformation, terms which I set up as the intractably conflicting members of a dichotomy.

Nevertheless, an empirical view of literary history shows that the seemingly more "simplistic" concepts that I work with—art as a reproduction of reality and the concrete representation of moral and social ideals—have operated in and shaped many sophisticated texts, including the ones I analyze in my four chapters. For example, Virginia Woolf's brand of modernism, as expressed in the essay "Modern Fiction," was partially motivated by the desire to provide a more accurate depiction of "life," and more recent articles, such as Tom Wolfe's call for a new "social novel" based on reportage or James Wood's criticism of the way the exhausting vitality of "hysterical realism" evades reality, demonstrate that literature's role in portraying our lived experience is still taken seriously. Meanwhile, literary history is rife with texts whose heroes are deliberately created to be noble and inspiring—most of Schiller's dramas come to mind, and both Wieland and Dostoevsky clearly stated that they wished to portray a morally

---

interested both in objective truth and in moral values ("The Ruse of the Russian Novel" 401-2); Paperno has described the dichotomy of utopian intent and realist method in Cherynyshevsky's work ("La prose" 809).

[3] Other theories of realism that move beyond a direct, objective approach include Barthes's claim in "The Reality Effect" that the impression of realism is a conventional response to superfluous description or Jakobson's argument in "On Realism in Art" that realism relies on figures of metonymy. Both are leading examples of anti-referential theories that view realism as a matter of style.

[4] See Halliwell for a forceful rejection of the Kantian model, which he claims is "wholly inadequate" to account for the ways that philosophers and critics have actually conceived of art and literature through history.

beautiful person in their fiction. Thus, straightforward versions of didacticism or imitation must be taken into account in order to understand the creative impulses, ambitions and aesthetic imperatives that shape some if not all literary texts. Even if one argues that a theoretical "pure" art *should* be purely autonomous and creative, the varied history of literary production shows that literature frequently violated those standards. Literature is profitably studied with reference to the various ways it has creatively responded to and incorporated what might be seen as considerations external to the aesthetic project; powerful works of literature can embrace a more direct didacticism and objective copying without becoming vulgar or simplistic.

Moreover, the point of the current study is to investigate the imitative and the didactic-transformative imperatives not on their own but instead in their interaction with each other. In the confrontation with a competing impulse, the dual aesthetic imperatives of "visionary mimesis" adopt a complexity and changeability that rewards analysis. Initially straightforward ideas become interesting in their intersection. The point of the following chapters is not to retain simplistic concepts of literary imitation and didacticism, but precisely the opposite. The following close readings show how, in the attempt to accommodate each other, the concepts of imitation, didacticism, the real and the ideal engage in fascinating semantic play, undergo modulations and redefinitions, and generate unstable, hybrid representations as they try to exist at the difficult intersection of the imitative and the transformative impulses.

The project I pursue here often generates questions about the connection between the two periods and cultures treated in the individual chapters. I make no claims to direct lines of influence between Gottsched and Wieland and Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky, beyond the general way that the culture of the Western European Enlightenment left its traces on the rationalism and practical concerns of nineteenth-century Russia. The connection between the two halves of the project is structural or conceptual; in each chapter, I trace a new iteration of the same general configuration described above. Studying "visionary mimesis" in two different cultural moments has several benefits. First of all, if "visionary mimesis" really is a distinct literary configuration, it makes sense to analyze it in more than one context in order to gain a better understanding of its potential forms. Eighteenth-century Germany and nineteenth-century Russia have just enough in common to both fit the overall framework of "visionary mimesis," and just enough contrasting features to display the versatility of the configuration. The similarity of the two periods can be seen in the way that both included a strong current of rationalism and interest in the materialistic sciences, both were fascinated by projects of social reform, and both experimented with empirical, practical, everyday modes in art and thought. Both periods experienced rapid growth in the reading public, the proliferation of journals, and the advent of a literature that was increasingly created by and addressed to the middle class (the German *Bürger* or the Russian *raznochintsy*); finally, influential statements from each period claim that independent-minded, rigorous criticism is a defining trait of the culture, as seen in the similarly rousing openings of Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" and Belinsky's "Rech' o kritike." These similarities created the conditions for the "visionary mimetic" or "progressive realist" mode in both periods. Basic contrasts between the two periods, however, ensure that each followed different paths in pursuing the project of creating plausible ideals. For example, as I will describe in more detail in the individual chapters, nineteenth-century Europe had come to view history as developing and directional rather than static, and this perspective opened up new routes for the union of the present and the ideal future; on the other hand, the radical realists of the nineteenth century adopted a rigid and literal concept of literary imitation that contrasted with the more stylized, flexible concept of mimesis available to the early eighteenth century and particularly to

Gottsched; finally, the ideal of each period shifted from the eighteenth century's tendency to focus on personal sexual morality to the nineteenth century's stronger interest in broad social and political reformations. Thus, engaging with two different periods allows "visionary mimesis" to be viewed in a variety of configurations.

The other reason to cover two different periods is to demonstrate that "visionary mimesis" is a recurring literary phenomenon, not the passing aberration of a peculiar historical moment. This point is particularly relevant for our view of nineteenth-century Russian aesthetics. The radical Russian realists have often been read as precursors of Soviet socialist realism, and some of these readings suggest that socialist realism is a not fully literary product of totalitarian coercion[5]; thus some Slavists are tempted to see this whole line of criticism as a peculiar product of the Russian cultural tendency to use literature for sociopolitical debate. But if we look backwards from the nineteenth century rather than forwards, we see that the combination of an empirical aesthetic and a reforming utilitarianism were also found in eighteenth-century European literature. Thus the work of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov (and of Dostoevsky, who, I will argue, pursues a project that parallels that of the "radicals") can be viewed as a continuation of the Enlightenment project.[6] This view integrates their work into a broader European and historical context and allows us to appreciate it as something more typically "literary" than is sometimes assumed. Meanwhile—looking at things from the opposite direction—the pragmatic pedagogical culture of the Enlightenment is also seen to have lived on and reemerged after the intervening exploration of Classical or Romantic modes.

Besides describing the distinctive genre of "visionary mimesis," another aim of this project is to add to the contemporary understanding of and appreciation for the complexities of literary mimesis, that founding term of literary theory that still causes as much uneasiness and dispute as it did in the days of Plato and Aristotle. Poststructuralist or postmodernist theory often casts mimesis as naïve, deceptive, or based on false assumptions. Certainly, any discussion of the imitation of reality treads on shaky epistemological ground, but it is ground that should be explored nevertheless, and that should be embraced in its difficulty and indeterminacy. Scholars such as Stephen Halliwell, as mentioned above, or Catherine Gallagher, a scholar of the early English novel, have written eloquently of the benefits of turning our attention to the complex workings of fictionality and referentiality in literature. Gallagher has argued that a cultural understanding of fictionality developed only with the rise of literature that looked as if it *could* be true; she focuses particularly on the way that proper names in the English novel came to refer to types rather than particulars. Lydia Ginzburg, another scholar who has reflected thoughtfully on the workings of realism, makes the contrasting point that objects are named in realist texts precisely in order to generate a feeling of particularity ("Literatura v poiskakh real'nosti" 13). These comments briefly suggest the confounding challenges that arise when we attempt to describe the status of fictional texts that make claims to a certain kind of truth. My own approach in investigating mimesis has been to examine the ways that the imitative principles of a text

[5] See Mathewson's *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, which ties twentieth-century developments to the nineteenth-century critics, and Katerina Clark's *The Soviet Novel*, which suggests that socialist realism might be best read from an anthropological perspective (xiii).

[6] In fact the radical critics have often been described as "enlighteners" in the secondary literature (Walicki 183-86, Lampert 6) and often used the term "Enlightenment" (*prosveshchenie*) themselves, e.g. in Belinsky's famous "Letter to Gogol" (*PSS* 10:213), in Druzhinin's article on the Gogol period (203), or in Dobroliubov's criticism (1:108, 4:51, 4:229), by which time it has acquired a derisive tone and is used to mock the ineffectual reforming visions of the liberal gentry.

change shape under the pressure of the conflicting demands of the visionary, didactic imperative. In the texts I discuss, an initially simple principle of imitation is not allowed to remain stable but is pushed to explore new conceptual ground within the intense and unstable dichotomies of "visionary mimesis." The chapter on Gottsched in particular shows how these pressures generate a display of the many different ways that mimesis can be theorized. Thus this project aspires to contribute to a growing contemporary interest in the intricate contours of literary and artistic mimesis.

Chapter Overview

Alongside the theoretical considerations outlined above, this dissertation is also intended to contribute to the discussion of the texts and writers for their own sake. In each case, I show how attention to the conflicting underlying aesthetic imperatives of the texts helps make sense of their volatility, instability and radicalism. The discussions are aimed at a comparative audience, so I provide more contextual explanation than would be necessary if I were writing only for specialists. I provide an overview of the key points of each chapter here.

Chapter one treats Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Critische Dichtkunst* (1729). Here I describe how Gottsched's poetics revolves around a struggle between his bedrock principle of *Nachahmung der Natur* (the imitation of nature) and his equally firm insistence that literature should convey a moral lesson; in the process I reveal a theoretical liveliness that is not often associated with this text. The first part of the chapter focuses on Gottsched's didactic principle, which strains the limits of mimetic plausibility both because literature is expected to present exceptionally noble models of human behavior and also because an effective pedagogical literature, from Gottsched's perspective, needs to include elements of the marvelous in order to achieve a strong rhetorical effect. Gottsched is particularly concerned, at several moments throughout the treatise, to justify the inclusion of talking animals—essential elements of the Aesopian fable—within the "imitation of nature." The second and longer part of the chapter then analyzes both terms of that formula: Gottsched's concept of "nature" and his concept of literary imitation. If Gottsched had a purely conventional and stylized understanding of "nature," his poetic theory would have little trouble accommodating the marvelous and exceptional images found in didactic literature. However, the scientific and philosophical textbooks that Gottsched wrote display a moderately empirical and materialist view of "nature," and his optimistic Leibnizian metaphysics does not stop him from acknowledging the definitely imperfect aspects of human life. Thus Gottsched must find a way to explain how the imitation of this potentially amoral nature can lead to the directly moral literature he desires. In the attempt to reconcile his competing poetic principles, Gottsched has recourse to a fascinating series of ever more abstract re-conceptualizations of mimesis. The *Dichtkunst* opens by presenting literary imitation as a straightforward, empirical process. Whenever the didactic imperative comes to the fore, however, the text puts forth much more abstract formulations, in the process abandoning the terminology of "imitation" (*Nachahmung*) for the more flexible notion of "verisimilitude" (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*). I analyze how Gottsched moves through several distinct formulations in the opening six chapters of the *Dichtkunst*. At times Gottsched deploys a "structural" approach derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* and from the possible-worlds theory of Leibniz and Wolff; this approach suggests that verisimilitude depends on the internal coherence of the text. Later Gottsched turns to a "subjective" version of verisimilitude in which literary convention and the

expectations of the audience replace the objective world as the measure of plausibility. Later still, Gottsched revives his call for literature to imitate the "nature" of the external world, but now he focuses on the extreme, exceptional aspects of nature rather than the typical phenomena he had stressed earlier. Gottsched moves freely through these different formulations without ever acknowledging that he has departed from the supposedly simple and undeniable principle of the "imitation of nature." Overall, the chapter uncovers and delineates multiple different ways that imitation can be theorized and verisimilitude measured.

Chapter two turns to the popular eighteenth-century German novelist Christoph Martin Wieland; I show how his novel *Geschichte des Agathon* collides spectacularly with the conceptual contradictions that Gottsched had tried to evade. One of the recurring patterns of the dissertation is the way that the practice of literary fiction exposes the weaknesses of theoretical models. Theorists do occasionally find ways to span the contradictions of "visionary mimesis," but their promising constructs fall apart in actual works of fiction. This disintegration is on display in Wieland's novel. Before turning to the novel, in part one of the chapter, I describe the process whereby Wieland gradually arrived at the poetics of "visionary mimesis." I analyze numerous compositions and pieces of personal correspondence from the earliest part of his career, tracing how the moralizing "seraphic" outlook of the young Wieland is problematized by a growing orientation toward the earthly realm. Wieland's turn to the earth occurs in two steps. First, his mimetic orientation shifts from heaven to the earth and from spiritual truths to the dramas of the human world. Secondly and even more importantly, Wieland's concept of "nature" itself changes as he realizes that the human world is not as attractive or spiritually elevated as he had hoped. Wieland's disillusionment occurs in both the sexual and the civic realms: he recognizes the insistent demands of physical sensuality and also encounters the pettiness of human society through his job in local government. Wieland's newly robust and grounded approach to mimesis emerges prominently for the first time in his verse narrative "Araspes und Panthea" (1760), in which the main characters are portrayed with human fallibilities unknown in Wieland's earlier work.

Wieland's turn toward the earth then comes to full fruition in his first major novel, *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766-67), which I analyze in the second part of the chapter. In this novel, Wieland's newly empirical outlook collides with his abiding idealistic and moral aspirations. The hero Agathon, initially an effusive devotee of Platonic ideals, confronts the fallen aspects of both the sexual and the sociopolitical realms while struggling to retain at least some of the nobility and moral elevation of his character. Wieland's preface explicitly declares that the goal of the novel is to present an accessible model of human virtue; the narrative, however, does not succeed in constructing such a character. The representation of Agathon repeatedly veers between greater and lesser levels of virtue; finally, in the culmination of this playful text, the narrator admits failure and deliberately switches the novel into a purely utopian mode. Along the way, certain stylistic features of the text mitigate the contrasts of the real and the ideal. The narrator's ironic tone blurs the lines between normally opposed concepts. The novel also cleverly exploits ambiguities in the concept of verisimilitude when the narrator suggests that literary plausibility is deceptive and that the implausible adventures of Agathon are actually are based in a historical, non-literary truth. Ultimately, however, the novel fails at its ostensible goal (although it succeeds as an aesthetic creation) both because Wieland adheres to an exacting sexual morality and also because the novel avoids the narrative paths that might have allowed Agathon to find a life that is both morally respectable and sexually and socially satisfying. The hidden motive of the text apparently works against the explicit motive of the

preface: instead of providing a plausible depiction of virtue, the novel shows how frustratingly *im*possible it is to live virtuously within the existing world.

Chapter three transitions to mid-nineteenth-century Russia and describes the short but passionate and influential career of the radical critic N. A. Dobroliubov, who wrote for the "thick" journal *The Contemporary* in the late 1850s. Dobroliubov was one of the main representatives of a critical faction that promoted an extremely literal, objective version of literary realism while also fervently hoping for revolutionary sociopolitical transformation. Although these impulses pulled them in conflicting directions, the radical realist critics seemingly solved the problem of "progressive realism" by exploiting several shifts that had occurred in intellectual culture since the eighteenth century. The first part of chapter three describes how this new conceptual configuration made it possible to reconcile objective imitation and progressive vision in the theoretical type of the "positive person," as introduced by Chernyshevsky and propounded by Dobroliubov. The radical concept of reality, for example, includes the assumption that history is dynamic and advancing; thus the present world always already contains the seeds of the future in some small circle of avant-garde "new people." By depicting these people, realist literature can be true to the world while also pointing to the future. I further describe how the radicals speak of "reality" more frequently in terms of subjective aspirations than objective realities; such a focus on human desires does much to lessen the gap between realist literature and grand visions of reform. The radical concept of the ideal also exhibits idiosyncrasies that help bring it theoretically closer to the real. For example, the radicals regularly insist that their ideal, i.e. their vision of independent, pragmatic human characters living in a free society, is not in the least extraordinary; instead it is the normal, natural mode of human life. This point of view, likely influenced by Rousseau, allows them to cast their ideal as almost more real than reality. In sum, the radicals adhere to a rigidly objective understanding of literary imitation but then modulate their concept of reality and their concept of the ideal in ways that offer many routes for reconciling progressive visions with strictly realistic literature.

However, as already observed in Wieland, theory does not work as well in practice. Dobroliubov reiterates the concepts mentioned above in numerous articles from the first few years of his career, but he increasingly confronts the weaknesses of the theory in his works of practical criticism. As he surveys contemporary Russian literature, Dobroliubov fails to find any depictions that satisfy his increasingly urgent desire for a positive hero. Russian reality is apparently in such dire condition that realist writers cannot find even the slightest trace of positive developments; meanwhile Dobroliubov grows impatient with a merely "critical" realism and becomes eager to see the concrete portrayal of a revolutionary hero. In the second part of this chapter, I show how several articles from the height of Dobroliubov's career represent ingenious, versatile and desperate attempts to reconcile his strictly imitative poetics with his thirst for progressive images. In "Chto takoe oblomovshchina?" ("What Is Oblomovism?") Dobroliubov manages to twist the lazy, ineffectual hero of Ivan Goncharov's novel into a grand sign of the maturation of the Russian social consciousness; in "Kogda zhe pridet nastoiashchii den'?" (When Will the Real Day Come?") he argues that a young woman's mere desire for an active life, even though her yearning is unfocused and unrealized, is a sign that the genuine hero is just around the corner; finally, in "Luch sveta v temnom tsarstve" ("A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness"), Dobroliubov makes the greatest leap of all, declaring that an oppressed young bride who drowns herself in the aftermath of an adulterous affair represents the nascent revolutionary spirit of the common people. My interpretations suggest that Dobroliubov's literary reviews

should be viewed not as tendentious misreadings but as the creative results of a lively intellect battling the antinomies of a "progressive realist" aesthetic.

Chapter four analyzes Dostoevsky's aesthetic views and the way that they shape his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. I start by asserting that Dostoevsky was engaged in a project very similar to that of his opponents in the radical camp. Like them, he used the realist mode to project a grand vision of transformation—but in his case the transformation was spiritual rather than social and political: Dostoevsky expected Russia to lead the world into a harmonious Christian brotherhood based on ideals of universal love and forgiveness. The job of *The Brothers Karamazov* is to prod the reader toward that destination without losing the connection to contemporary Russian reality. The first part of the chapter provides conceptual background. I analyze several well-known pieces of personal correspondence in which Dostoevsky reflects on his idiosyncratic brand of realism; here I suggest that the most significant aspect of Dostoevsky's aesthetics is his assertion that reality is strange. Although his fiction can be read for its more abstract, profound, spiritual truth, Dostoevsky frequently insists that his supposedly "fantastic" portrayals are true and ordinary on the immediate, surface level. A major goal of his creative project, I argue, is to expand the range of phenomena that the reader is willing to admit as verisimilar—and thus to expand our understanding of the heights to which human character can rise. Dostoevsky pushes readers to recognize extremity as truth, and therefore to admit that human character, although it can fall to terrible depths, can also attain a sublime morality that the reader might formerly have rejected as impossible.

After discussing Dostoevsky's brand of realism I examine his attitudes toward the ideal as revealed in the *Diary of a Writer*. I focus particularly on a short piece called "The Golden Age in Your Pocket," which—together with several other pieces that touch on the "golden age" theme—displays an ambiguity about the feasibility of his utopian visions. On the one hand, Dostoevsky insists that the golden age would arrive immediately if we simply decided to follow our own best instincts; on the other hand, he acknowledges that this vision of change is probably an unrealizable utopia. *The Brothers Karamazov* aims to shift the reader from the skeptical to the hopeful view of the golden age by demonstrating that even the average person can partake of the sublime Christian ideal. But the ambiguity about the feasibility of the golden age remains, since many aspects of the novel do seem to present unattainably lofty visions.

The second part of chapter four analyzes precisely how the *The Brothers Karamazov*, pursuing the goal of "progressive realism," tries to anchor Dostoevsky's lofty spiritual visions in Russian reality. Ivan's spiritual rebellion poses the problem of the novel: he claims that God has granted humans a moral freedom that they cannot handle. The rest of the novel aims to demonstrate that God's moral expectations are in fact plausible and attainable. *The Brothers Karamazov*, unlike *Geschichte des Agathon*, partially succeeds at this task because it spreads the hero function out into multiple characters who are arranged in a sort of ladder of virtue. Those at the top of the ladder are full of sublime love and forgiveness—but are also distanced from the regular world. Markel, Zosima's brother and the original source of the Christian ideal, dies in his youth, while Zosima spends his entire adult life in a monastery. The novel attempts to humanize Zosima as much as possible, for example by noting that he was not ascetic in matters of food or drink or by denying him the miracle of an odorless corpse; nevertheless, Zosima's abolutist ideal of humility and love makes nearly impossible demands on ordinary human character. I then describe Alyosha as the attempt to bring Zosima's moral out into the world. Although Alyosha does manage to show how mundane deeds can bring positive results, overall he is an underdeveloped character, the ostensible hero whose actual story is postponed to the never-

written next volume. He is also labeled as an "angel" by other characters; thus he fails to truly realize the ideal in a realistic mode.

The most significant integration of the Christian ideal into ordinary human experience occurs in the characters of Dmitri and Grushenka. Even though the narrator tells us to read Dmitri's story as just the *external* plot of the novel, Dmitri is actually the center of the novel's moral and philosophical aim as well. He demonstrates how an average person can occasionally access the Christian ideal and become a slightly better person without transforming into a saintlike figure similar to Alyosha or Zosima. I describe how Dmitri and Grushenka are set up as the Russian "everyman" and "everywoman," and I trace the way that their multiple moral epiphanies always recede and let their human fallibility reemerge. Thus Dmitri and Grushenka anchor the ladder of virtue in the world of real human experience; by identifying with them, the reader is drawn to at least begin the ascent that eventually leads to the heights of Christian love. Ultimately, however, an air of implausibility lingers in all of the epiphanies in the novel, whether that of Alyosha, Zosima or Grushenka; it may be the case that the only way to believe in the novel is to already be a believer.

Implications

In sum, the dissertation describes how texts explore paths for making ideal visions work within the real world. The immense difficulty of that project in all four cases illustrates the intensity with which humans cling to unworkable ideals even as we claim to be interested in engaging with empirical experience. By thus faltering at the task of "visionary mimesis," perhaps the texts end up being even more deeply mimetic than expected: the intractable conflicts of their structuring poetic principles mirror the way that humans live intensely and often disharmoniously in incommensurate worlds. These texts portray humans caught between objective perceptions and subjective visions, between what is and what we hope might be.

Chapter 1

Competing Poetic Imperatives in Gottsched's *Dichtkunst*

The first edition of Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (*Attempt at a Critical Poetics for the Germans*) appeared in 1729. It was the work of an ambitious Leipzig academic who had arrived in the city five years earlier (in flight from Prussian military recruiters), had quickly established connections to the university, and was now energetically endeavoring to bring a systematic clarity to all major fields of humanistic inquiry. Gottsched would eventually go on to write textbooks, standard works in their fields, on philosophy (*Erste Gründe der gesamten Weltweisheit*, 1734), grammar (*Deutsche Sprachkunst*, 1748) and rhetoric (*Ausführliche Redekunst*, 1736), all of which, like the *Dichtkunst*, were reprinted in multiple editions. Gottsched's interest in poetics, meanwhile, was in evidence as soon as he arrived in Leipzig. He had quickly installed himself as the leader of the local German language society that under his direction became the "Deutsche Gesellschaft" (German Society), an organ that according to Gottsched's vision was to become a German counterpart to the French Academy. He had also recently become known throughout the region as the publisher of *Die Vernünftigen Tadlerinnen* (*The Intelligent Female Critics*), a moral weekly modeled after the *Patriot* of Hamburg and ultimately after Addison's and Steele's English weeklies. Gottsched's writing of the *Dichtkunst* was spurred by the fact that he had begun teaching a course on poetics at the Leipzig university; his goal was to create a comprehensive, methodical exposition of the nature of poetry and a guide to composing in the various genres. Gottsched hoped to promote a Neoclassical poetic theory and offer an alternative to what he saw as the confusing proliferation of poetic handbooks from the previous several decades. Although Gottsched relied heavily on the French literary tradition, his ultimate aim was strongly patriotic: he worked with remarkable zeal throughout his career to further the development of a robust, serious and respectable literary culture in his native land. His *Dichtkunst* was one of the most influential pieces of that project. Although Gottsched's efforts were ultimately marred by his stubborn inflexibility and his narrow, pedantic understanding of literature, his *Dichtkunst* reigned as the most usable, practical and widely disseminated guide to poetry until about the middle of the century. It established his reputation, launched his career as a prominent and formidable academic, and won him a position as *außerordentlicher Professor* (adjunct professor) of poetry and oratory at the university.[1]

[1] For biographical information on Gottsched: The monographs by Gustav Waniek and Eugen Wolff are over a hundred years old, but have not been replaced. P. M. Mitchell's book offers a limited amount of information for the English-language reader. Werner Rieck's book gives quite a bit of solid detail. Katherine R. Goodman offers a brief but very useful sketch of Gottsched's career in historical context.

The *Dichtkunst* is centered around two core principles: imitation of nature and moral utility. As such, it is remarkably typical of the general cultural atmosphere of the early Enlightenment as described in many scholarly descriptions of the period. Peter-André Alt's *Aufklärung* presents as the four overarching tendencies of the Enlightenment the celebration of reason, the interest in education and in pedagogical pursuits, the flourishing pursuit of scientific inquiry based on empirical observation rather than divine revelation, and a gradual secularization marked by a greater engagement with earthly existence as opposed to the eternal afterlife (11-13). Similarly, Rolf Grimminger, writing in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, highlights above all the eighteenth century's pursuit of a utopia of happy earthly life, which generated the period's utilitarianism and its interest in practical reason and personal virtue (16-26). Of course, these are sweeping generalizations, but in its broad outlines the Enlightenment combined a worldly, empirical orientation with an interest in practical, pedagogical activity. Particularly in the early Enlightenment, this outlook led to a poetics that privileges imitation over invention and that promotes the didactic function of literature—particularly a very direct, straightforward, and concretely embodied sort of didacticism, in which literary texts provide clear examples for emulation or very obvious lessons about the consequences of bad conduct. In this sense, the *Dichtkunst* is an exemplary artifact of its time, and Gottsched is a leading representative of the foremost attitudes and concerns of his era.

The above-mentioned characterizations of the early Enlightenment wonderfully describe the cultural milieu that generated the *Dichtkunst*, but they also occasionally provide strongly-worded value judgements on the supposed limitations of early Enlightenment poetic principles. Bluntly negative assessments come out in several major late twentieth-century interpretations: Rolf Grimminger, for example, blames the "Vorschriften der aufgeklärten Mimesis" 'the rules of enlightened mimesis'—that is, the dual demand that narrative texts be both 'true' and didactic—for the retarded development of the Enlightenment novel ("Roman" 641). Gerhard Kaiser is even more categorical: "Eine Epoche, die wie die Aufklärung ursprünglich vernünftig, praktisch und moralisch eingestellt ist, kann keine wesentlich künstlerisch gestimmte Zeit sein" 'An epoch with the fundamentally rational, practical and moral attitude of the Enlightenment cannot, in any essential way, be an artistically inclined period ' (62).[2]

These judgments arise from a traditional, and probably still somewhat ingrained, normative and developmental interpretation of eighteenth-century German literature, according to which the literary culture of the end of the century is (not without reason) seen as a golden age of modern German literature, producing the works that brought German culture the lasting international recognition that Gottsched had dreamed of. As a result, everything in the preceding decades comes to be read in terms of how it contributed to the genius and creativity of *Sturm und Drang*, Weimar Classicism or Romanticism, with the implication that the early Enlightenment works are inferior to these later developments. The practical and rational outlook that defined the early Enlightenment may be recognized as intellectually remarkable and acknowledged for its achievements in the areas of science, philosophy or politics, but the attitudes of the period are seen as an inauspicious incubator for an emerging national literary culture, as they are overly determined by the practical, rational and didactic tendencies that generate a poetics based on imitation and moral usefulness. Only later in the century, according to the value-oriented, developmental point of view, does a more "authentically" literary outlook emerge, when for

[2] Even Alt's more recent treatment of the period perpetuates the idea that a true aesthetic can be obtained only via rejecting imitation and rhetorical goals.

example the genius cult of the *Sturm und Drang* finally "frees" art from the aesthetics of natural imitation and Kant's philosophical aesthetics provides insight into the supposed essentially autonomous nature of the artwork. The principles of imitation and morality are then left behind as vestiges of an immature literary culture, replaced by the celebration of a creative and autonomous art. In the eyes of the literary critics of the later eighteenth century as well as more recent scholars, the poetic inclinations of the early Enlightenment are unnecessary and even harmful to genuine literary production; early Enlightenment literature is therefore praised when it shows flickers of promise but in the overall assessment appears flawed and primitive.[3]

Gottsched's work, since it is such an exemplary expression of early Enlightenment approaches to poetics, fits well into the normative progression outlined above. Besides the fact that he places imitation and didacticism at the core of his poetics, his views are most famously expressed in categorical formulations that only exacerbate the impression that he has a hopelessly retrograde attitude toward literature. Nor does his own literary production (several formulaic, mostly translated tragedies, and a large amount of occasional poetry) offer much to refute the notion that, although he was an energetic and well-intentioned promoter of German literature, he nevertheless propelled it in a fruitless direction overly reliant on an already outdated French Neoclassicism. And so Gottsched is easily interpreted as the starting point in a development from a primitive poetics of imitation and didacticism to a sophisticated aesthetics of autonomy and creativity. Non-specialists are still likely to view Gottsched primarily in the context of his literary "quarrel" with the critics Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger in Zürich. For Bodmer and Breitinger, the principles of verisimilitude and didacticism were still important, but in their view the chief aim of poetry is the portrayal of "das Wunderbare" (the marvelous). Although Gottsched also viewed the marvelous as a key component of poetry, he kept it within stricter rational limits than did the Zürich critics and ultimately objected stridently to their championing of Milton's and Klopstock's Biblical epics, whose profuse fantasies of demonic and angelic activity violated the rational regulations of Gottsched's verisimilitude. Bodmer and Breitinger were the supposed victors in the Leipzig-Zürich dispute: their poetics of affect and imagination won more successful adherents than Gottsched's poetics, and their brief protégé Klopstock[4], the most widely celebrated poet of the period, contributed to the poetics of *Empfindsamkeit* (Sentimentalism), which influenced the young Goethe, and so the line can be traced on to the heights of the German *Klassik*. All of this makes it easy, in a common traditional interpretation, to present the step from Gottsched to Bodmer and Breitinger as a step forward in the inevitable progression toward a more creative and autonomous German literary culture.[5] From this point of view, Gottsched is important only as a launching point; his views are seen as backward and sterile, considered in terms of what they were not rather than what they were.

Recent work on the German Enlightenment has done much to counter the traditional developmental approach with an approach that examines the literary configuration of the

---

[3] Jochen Schmidt's *Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens* is a major example of this approach. Christopher Siegrist also adopts the standard trajectory toward "freedom" for art, as does Wolfgang Preisendanz ("Mimesis und Poiesis").

[4] Klopstock lived only briefly with Bodmer in Zürich; his lack of discipline and sobriety greatly disappointed his host. Nevertheless, the Swiss critics found his poetic approach agreeable, and Klopstock was influenced by their work. See Bender ("Nachwort," 22-23).

[5] This standard view of the progression from Gottsched to Bodmer and Breitinger can be found for example in Siegrist, Kaiser (*Aufklärung* 62-71), Preisendanz ("Mimesis und Poiesis"), Jochen Schmidt (31-60) and Zeller ("Developments" 135).

Enlightenment for its own sake. Barbara Becker-Cantarino, for example, in her introduction to a 2005 volume on eighteenth-century German literature, advocates the dismantling of all teleological systems that culminate in the "Age of Goethe." Nevertheless, the desire to avoid goal-oriented narratives is not always forceful enough to dislodge entrenched views, so the impression persists that the moralizing and imitative poetics of the early eighteenth century is not particularly interesting. Despite the currently flourishing inquiry into literature and ethics, the sort of direct moral pedagogy of the early Enlightenment is not a favored model, since it lacks the right kind of theoretical subtlety. And "imitation of nature" seems even more naïve in light of the many justified twentieth-century deconstructions of the concepts of "nature" and of "reality." Thus, even if a teleological model is rejected, the comparative valuation persists—later eighteenth-century developments such as *Sturm und Drang* or Romanticism are generally preferred to, and therefore implicitly seen as advances on, early eighteenth-century poetics.

The point here is not to argue about whether an imitative[6] and didactic poetics is more or less interesting, or more or less genuinely literary, than a Kantian or a Romantic or any other approach to literature. The important thing is simply not to let such comparative valuations blind us to the interesting aspects of whatever literary approach did actually prevail at a given time. If early Enlightenment culture was, as outlined above, rational and practical, then the imitative and didactic principles that grew out of this should be analyzed for their own sake, not lamented for their supposed drawbacks. Early eighteenth-century poetics is not just a stepping stone to something better, but is in fact a particularly interesting alignment amid the variable history of literary principles. The confluence of mimetic and didactic imperatives, which some would dismiss as anti-literary and uninteresting, actually generates intricate problems of literary representation that demand to be better understood. The key move is to examine the two principles together and to specifically investigate the way they interact with each other. To look at each principle alone cuts a literary text into isolated pieces and makes it impossible to understand what really matters, which is the distinctive configuration produced by a confluence of interacting poetic impulses. Even if the imitative inclination and the moral utilitarianism of the early eighteenth century were uninteresting when viewed separately, the fact is that they usually occur as a pair, and when brought together they interact in complex ways, alternately conflicting with and reinforcing each other as they shape the production of a text.

The productive aspect of their dynamic is that the two principles are not fully compatible: the most morally effective portrayal is not necessarily the most verisimilar. A tension arises from the gap between our understanding of reality and the conclusions we draw about how to respond morally to that reality. The gap is not absolute, since every imitation is itself a subjectively and culturally conditioned interpretation, a creation as well as a copying of a world; the structure of imitation is therefore not absolutely different from the structure of normative morality.

---

[6] I have chosen the term "imitative" to refer to a poetics that could be called "realistic," "objective," "mimetic," etc. The terms "mimesis" and "mimetic" would be more elegant, but scholars of mimesis (Halliwell, Tatarkiewicz, Gebauer/Wulf) have convinced me that the term is too inexact—and "realism" is too anachronistic for the eighteenth century. It is very hard, and theoretically dangerous, to define just what an "imitative poetics" is, but as a broad working definition I mean a poetics that asks literature to approximate the sorts of situations, people and events that tend to occur in the "real" world, whatever that is agreed to be. This chapter, however, is certainly not based on the assumption that we have a clear understanding of what imitative literature looks like. Instead, my intent is to take a small step toward improving our understanding of this complex concept by discussing in detail a few of the specific ways that it can be construed. Each of my chapters will take the notion of imitative poetry not as a given, but as a concept to be investigated, and for each case I will discuss the distinctive view of reality and understanding of mimesis held by the writer in question.

Contemporary philosophy implies as much when it argues for the "enmeshment" of facts and values.[7] Yet the two modes do nevertheless point in separate directions, mimesis toward the present condition and didacticism toward a future desideratum. This divergence emerges especially clearly when the didactic strategy of a text is to provide a concrete model for emulation—and this happens to be a favored model during the early Enlightenment. A text whose premise is to provide a portrayal of how humans *should* act necessarily distances itself from an empirical imitation of how humans actually *do* act; the resulting representation necessarily exhibits a flexible notion of imitation. The tension between imitation and didacticism also emerges in a second way even in texts that do not aim to directly present an exemplary model: the rhetorical-moral intention demands that a text incorporate devices that play on the emotions of the audience or maintain lively interest—and these striking devices are often precisely those that depart from "nature's" model. This conflict is apparent in the way that early eighteenth-century texts present the marvelous as necessary for capturing the attention of an insufficiently philosophical public, and then labor over how to reconcile the marvelous with their commitment to imitation of nature.

If moral didacticism and empirical imitation were completely in conflict, it is unlikely that they would occur together as part of a unified poetic approach. But in fact the descriptive and the prescriptive approaches seem to have an affinity for each other: a poetics of imitation often occurs together with a didactic intention. There are several plausible explanations for this link: one might expect that an engagement with empirical reality would lead to a desire to change that reality, and conversely that normative visions would seek to ground the truth and the relevance of their claims by appealing to a given understanding of the existing world. So idealistic visions and faithful imitation, despite their divergent orientations, tend still to approach each other and meet in a middle zone that partakes of both impulses. However we explain their convergence, the fact that mimetic and transformative-idealistic intentions often occur together asks us to study the two principles in tandem in order to understand how they fit together despite their potential discord, and how texts that profess allegiance to both approaches manage to occupy ground that satisfies both at once.

Gottsched's *Dichtkunst* is an excellent entry point into this inquiry, since it provides a prime theoretical example of the collision of the mimetic and didactic principles in the early Enlightenment milieu. In fact I contend that the *Dichtkunst* cannot be properly understood unless one reads it as the product of the two conflicting principles at its foundation. Too often, interpreters seek to extract a unitary poetic stance from Gottsched's work, when in actuality the text is dynamic and unsettled. The *Dichtkunst* is the record of an unresolvable commitment to the two incompatible principles that Gottsched asserts from the outset. The mistaken assumption that Gottsched's poetics must be based around a holistic and self-consistent viewpoint leads readers to overlook the actual fluctuating structure of the *Dichtkunst*. Gottsched never succeeds in unifying his imitative and his moral principles, but his attempt is an instructive failure, as it illuminates many of the avenues toward a partial reconciliation of the two imperatives. Over the course of six key chapters in his *Dichtkunst*, Gottsched deploys multiple notions of verisimilitude that vary depending on the degree to which he is emphasizing the moral aim of literature. As this chapter teases apart these unspoken distinctions, it will establish a useful set of concepts that will enable greater clarity in the analyses of imitation and transformative vision in later chapters.

[7] See Putnam.

Finally, I would like to return to the question of teleology, and suggest that the most effective antidote to a narrow teleology might be the recognition of multiple concurrent teleologies. The genius and autonomy-oriented teleology described above, if we recognize the actual range of literary concerns during the eighteenth century, becomes just one trajectory among many. For the imitative and didactic approach of the early Enlightenment was not abandoned as decisively as the mid-century rejection of Gottsched (expressed most famously in Lessing's "17. Literaturbrief") would suggest. Even though Gottsched's poetics failed to provide a compelling literary model, this fact does not constitute a general eighteenth-century indictment of the entire mimetic-didactic approach to literature, but merely of the inconsistent and reductive way that Gottsched elaborated these principles. The interest in both the moral and mimetic aspects of literature survived and developed markedly not only in Christoph Martin Wieland, who is the subject of the next chapter, but also certainly into Weimar Classicism, as evidenced by Schiller's treatises on aesthetic education or on "naïve" art, or in Goethe's reflections on a stylized form of aesthetic imitation. Jochen Schulte-Sasse has convincingly asserted this point with respect to ethics in an essay arguing that the interest in practical moral effect was a constant in eighteenth-century German literature; only the methodology changed from Gottsched to Lessing ("Poetik und Ästhetik").[8] Even from a teleological point of view, then, the poetic views of the early Enlightenment should be investigated in terms of the positive place they occupy in an ongoing engagement with problems of mimesis and didacticism in art during the rise to prominence of modern German literature.

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

The approach I have proposed above builds on work that has already been done to reevaluate the roles of ethics and of mimesis in literature and to move beyond a Kantian aesthetics of formalism and strict nonutilitarian autonomy. Starting in the 1980s, the now-flourishing subfield of ethics and literature recognized that there is no reason to sever literary study from the moral and ethical interests that have shaped the production and reception of literature since antiquity. Many of the earlier works in this field focused on the content of the literary representation, i.e. on the ethical implications of the plot, characters and situations. Wayne Booth or Martha Nussbaum, for example, discuss the potentially positive emotional and cognitive effects of the representations of human experience in narrative, and in the wake of their work the disciplines of law and philosophy began to consider the way literature elaborates concrete and specific instances of general legal or ethical claims. Many recent treatments of ethics and literature, on the other hand, evince a more abstract approach that brings out the broad ethical implications rooted in the fundamental structure of literature, or at least of narrative (since lyric literature is often unconsidered).[9] Both approaches develop similar ideas that had been explored already in earlier centuries; Schiller, for example, sometimes discusses the morality of literature from a simpler plot-based perspective (e.g. "Was kann eine gute stehende

[8] And Horst Steinmetz ("Nachwort") makes the same point about imitation—that later German literature turned back to *Nachahmung*.

[9] E.g. Michael Eskin ("On Literature), Derek Attridge ("Innovation"), Geoffrey Galt Harpham (*Shadows* 33-37), Eaglestone ("One and the Same?").

Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?", but also, in his *Ästhetische Briefe*, famously grounds the ethics of art in deeper structural features such as the union of form and matter and the effect of semblance (*Schein*). The latter, broader approaches are remarkable for the way they push the investigation of literature and ethics beyond the superficial, challenging us to broaden our understanding of the scope of literature's ethical import. But they also tend to obscure the specificity of different types of literature and reading experiences as they theorize an ethical effect embedded at a deep level in all types of literature. The approach of Booth or Nussbaum, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on the reception of literature and, while it certainly offers valid analysis of the real experience of reading certain texts, tends to shut out poetic problems such as the fictionality of texts, the difference between aesthetic and real life experience and the way that the ethical imperative interacts with other elements of literature.

The approach I take in this dissertation does not focus on the deep ethical structure of literature, but on the morally or socially progressive message of the plot and characters. This approach may seem simplistic, but the complexities of the project will emerge when I examine the way that the moral aim intersects with the mimetic principles of the text in a configuration that I call "visionary mimesis." I will not therefore be examining deep ethical functions that are present in all of literature, but instead will focus on a particular configuration that has arisen at particular moments in literary history. My analysis will also be oriented more toward artistic production than reception. In other words, I will examine the way moral, didactic and socially transformative interests shape the creation of literary texts, rather than the way those texts induce an ethical response in readers. Many major figures in literary history had a real interest in the social and moral function of literature, and we can understand their texts better if we understand how that interest shaped the final result. Finally, the current approach will take better account of how the socially transformative ambition of literature fits in with other literary imperatives, in particular with the mimetic mode of the text. In sum, this dissertation will examine the particular problems and solutions that result when a creative orientation toward empirical, imitative modes of literature intersects with moral aims.

Scholarship on literature and mimesis has also paved the way for this investigation, although the field is not as established as the discourse on ethics and literature. The sweeping treatments by Auerbach and by Gebauer/Wulf exist independently of an active, defined subfield focusing on mimesis as a general literary problem. Barthes's criticism (in *S/Z*) of the supposedly conservative, uncritical, epistemologically naïve mimesis of nineteenth-century Realism still produces a defensive tone in those who do take Realism seriously.[10] But a recent book by the classicist Stephen Halliwell offers, by way of an analysis of Plato's and Aristotle's poetics, an excellent treatment of the multiple versions of mimesis as well as its constant relevance throughout the history of aesthetics. Halliwell attacks the fallacy of accepting Kant's aesthetics as the ultimate "correct" answer to art[11] and asserts that an autonomous, disinterested formalism is "inadequate to cope with art forms" (10). In the process of "rehabilitating" mimesis he analyzes the far from straightforward semantics of words like "mimesis," "imitation" and "representation." Halliwell's attention to terminological complexity partially motivates this dissertation's

[10] Beaumont ("Reclaiming Realism"), Bowlby ("Foreword"), Halliwell (*Mimesis*, vii), and even Prendergast to some degree (*Order*, 4) all feel the need to adopt this defensive tone before tackling their subjects.

[11] The following quotation from Halliwell fits well with the aims of this dissertation: "We ought to find it wholly inadequate to suppose that we could treat a concept of a self-sufficient domain of 'disinterested contemplation' as a profitable basis on which to tackle the many different styles in which philosophers and critics have tried to think about the experience of such things as poems, paintings, and pieces of music" (12).

exploration of the many meanings of imitation in the early Enlightenment. In general, the present investigation will enhance the work that Halliwell and others have done to highlight the (somewhat neglected) literary relevance of mimesis and add to our understanding of how the notion has been employed at various cultural moments.

However, the dissertation's main contribution to the discourse on literary ethics and mimesis will be the move to examine the two principles in their interaction with each other. Although scholarship on mimesis or realism has occasionally noted that mimetic/realist texts often have a concomitant ethical interest,[12] that link has not been explored in any depth; academic discourse usually pursues the one or the other aspect in isolation.[13] This dissertation will demonstrate that both theoretical and literary texts can be effectively elucidated when we view them as growing out of a productive conflict between the ambition to promote an ideal and the demand to remain true to a principle of verisimilitude or empirical imitation.

In addition to the larger theoretical implications sketched above, the current study, in taking a fresh look at the *Dichtkunst*, contributes specifically to Gottsched scholarship. After decades of interest in Gottsched's poetics, current academic work tends to focus more on his broad achievements as a general cultural mobilizer. Gabriele Ball (*Moralische Küsse*) offers a useful study of Gottsched's work as a publicist, popularizer and correspondent, particularly as a publisher of literary and philosophical journals.[14] Katherine Goodman likewise sees Gottsched's significance more in his rational activism than in his poetics; she suggests that his works on linguistics (*Deutsche Sprachkunst*, 1748) and rhetoric (*Ausführliche Redekunst*, 1736) as well as his rigorous promotion of German theater and his energetic revival of the Leipzig "Deutsche Gesellschaft" were of greater significance to the later development of German literature than was his poetics. P. M. Mitchell's general monograph also grants only limited space to the *Dichtkunst* and remains quite vague in its conclusions. Gottsched's wife Luise Adelgunde Gottsched née Kulmus, a writer and an active and valued collaborator in Gottsched's publishing and translating, is another major interest of contemporary Gottsched-related scholarship.[15] Although the de-emphasis of Gottsched's poetics is well warranted in light of the breadth of his cultural activity, the *Dichtkunst* should not be neglected. It was the leading comprehensive German-language manual of poetics for more than two decades; its four editions from 1729 to 1751 attest to its popularity (as Gottsched triumphantly notes in the self-satisfied prefaces to each new edition). Goethe's comments in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* attest to the influence of Gottsched's poetic manual (*Sämtliche Werke* 16.278, 285-6, 291; sect. II.6 and II.7). Admittedly, Goethe's assessment of Gottsched's contribution is mixed: he wavers between mocking dismissal and a more even-handed recognition that Gottsched did at least disseminate some basic poetic and stylistic concepts. But Goethe is decisive in his description of Gottsched's enormous and penetrating influence: he compares it to a "wahre Sündflut" 'true Great Flood,' whose waters will be long in receding.[16] Literary figures of the eighteenth century clearly sensed the looming

---

[12] E.g. Stephen Halliwell (16), René Wellek ("The Concept of Realism, 242).

[13] Studies of Soviet socialist realism are an exception; see my comments on Katerina Clark and Andrei Siniavsky in chapter three.

[14] Ball follows Wolfgang Martens's *Botschaft der Tugend* (1968), which was the first major work to direct attention to Gottsched's journalistic activity in particular.

[15] E.g. Ball/Goodman/Brandes (*Diskurse*), Döring ("Luise"), Goodman (*Amazons*, "Of Gifts"), Kord (*Detours*).

[16] "Das Gottschedische Gewässer hatte die deutsche Welt mit einer wahren Sündflut überschwemmt, welche sogar über die höchsten Berge hinaufzusteigen drohte. Bis sich eine solche Flut wieder verläuft, bis der Schlamm austrocknet, dazu gehört viele Zeit, und da es der nachäffenden Poeten in jeder Epoche eine Unzahl gibt; so brachte

authority of the *Dichtkunst*, even though they turned away from the limitations of its approach. Since even the act of rejecting an influential work leaves traces in its polemical successors, an understanding of the *Dichtkunst* is necessary for a balanced picture of eighteenth-century German literature.

A batch of Gottsched scholarship in the 1970s and early 1980s did focus primarily on the *Dichtkunst*. A major contribution of this work is the debate over just how to understand Gottsched's concept of *Nachahmung der Natur* (imitation of nature). However, this set of scholarship focuses heavily on the question of Gottsched's relationship to the rhetorical tradition of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century and therefore does not straightforwardly address the terminological and conceptual ambiguities of the *Dichtkunst*. Hans Peter Herrmann's *Naturnachahmung und Einbildungskraft* of 1970 was the opening salvo in the debate. Herrmann's counterintuitive reading presents Bodmer and Breitinger (the champions of *das Wunderbare* and of mythical "possible worlds") as the first literary theorists to apply *Nachahmung* directly to the *empirical* world.[17] Accordingly, Herrmann sets up Gottsched as a straw man, arguing that his notion of imitation was purely formal and conventional, nothing but a continuation of the baroque's rhetorical approach to poetics. Herrmann's book raises important questions about the multiple ways of understanding *Naturnachahmung* but does not provide a fair interpretation of Gottsched's poetics.

Jan Bruck contributed several strong objections to Herrmann's approach, aiming to situate Gottsched in the Enlightenment rather than in the rhetorical tradition. In his published dissertation of 1972, Bruck argues that Aristotle's *Poetics* is the foundation for Gottsched's version of mimesis, and then delves into the complex semantics that characterizes both figures' theories of imitation. He ultimately concludes that for Gottsched "Natur" refers not to the empirical world but to a logical modality, namely the modality of what is likely or verisimilar. Bruck also highlights Aristotle's structural-compositional conception of mimesis, according to which effective imitation relies on the cohesiveness of a plot, and argues that this conception was lost in the epistemologically-oriented eighteenth century. Bruck's book is a great achievement in the way it reveals the rich semantics of the term "mimesis," which go far beyond a flat imitation. He elucidates the contrast between understanding verisimilitude as that which is likely versus that which is merely possible, and he touches in passing on various other structural, empirical, realist or subjective ways to understand verisimilitude, all of which does much to improve terminological precision in discussions of mimesis, which is in fact the main stated goal of his treatise. But his book offers less with regard to Gottsched himself; Bruck merely shifts the problem from the question of what Gottsched means by "nature" to the question of what Gottsched means by "verisimilar." And the whole attempt to pinpoint a unitary understanding of *Naturnachahmung* in the *Dichtkunst* is fruitless since Gottsched actually shifts between many understandings of the concept. Nevertheless, Bruck's work stands alongside Halliwell's as one of the main inspirations for my own investigation into literary imitation.[18]

---

die Nachahmung des Seichten, Wäßrigen einen solchen Wust hervor, von dem gegenwärtig kaum ein Begriff mehr geblieben ist" (Goethe 16.278; section II.6).

[17] Herrmann make this counterintuitive argument by emphasizing Bodmer and Breitinger's early painterly, i.e. empirical and visual, understanding of poetry, and reads the contortions of their later work as a doomed and strained attempt to bring Naturnachahmung into line with their growing recognition of the important roles of imagination and pleasure in poetry.

[18] See the books by Hans Freier, Ulrich Hohner and Karl-Heinz Stahl for more contributions to the 1970s debate over Gottsched's understanding of *Naturnachahmung*, his relation to the rhetorical tradition, and his position with

The compelling approach of Angelika Wetterer's 1981 book *Publikumsbezug und Wahrheitsanspruch* is that she makes the contradictions in early Enlightenment poetics the starting point of her investigation. She also attempts to rise above the teleological debates over whether Gottsched (and Bodmer and Breitinger) belong more to the baroque or to the Enlightenment, and instead analyzes the heterogeneous cultural-philosophical configuration of the early eighteenth century for the sake of its own ambiguities. The contradiction that interests Wetterer above all is that between the desire for a rational poetics of truth and a rhetorical poetics aimed at affecting the audience. She argues that Gottsched is forced in the *Dichtkunst* to dilute his strict concept of rational *Naturnachahmung* in order to allow for a marvelous poetics that will appeal to an uneducated audience, but that later in his career he reverts to a more rigid stance that disregards popular taste.[19] In the end, argues Wetterer, Gottsched fails to bridge this contradiction. Wetterer's work is vague with regard to what exactly "imitation" means for her or for Gottsched, or how it differs from truth or verisimilitude; she reads all three terms only with regard to their function, which is either to win the trust of the public or establish the rational basis of poetry. Since her guiding interest is in rhetorical problems, Wetterer's book is not particularly useful with respect to mimesis: her study focuses on Gottsched's attitude toward the unscholarly reading public and only superficially treats the question of how he modulates his concepts of truth and imitation. But her book certainly offers excellent observations on the rhetorical aspects of early Enlightenment poetics.

Werner Rieck's 1972 monograph *Johann Christoph Gottsched. Eine kritische Würdigung seines Werkes* comes closest to approaching Gottsched with the same duality that underlies my approach. Rieck highlights Gottsched's desire for realistic potrayal of humans and practical moral effect. But he does not delve very far into the complexities that result from this combination of imperatives. The orthodox Marxist perspective of Rieck's East German academic community shapes his approach, resulting in a teleology that provides an interesting contrast to the teleology of the western/capitalist academic communities described at the start of this chapter: Rieck's treatise views socialist realism as the ultimate end of literary development, and therefore he focuses mainly on pointing out the ways that Gottsched falls short of the mature socialist approach. For example, he celebrates the way Gottsched advanced the cause of unified bourgeois identity and regrets the inevitable regressive aspects of his Enlightenment-era social views (31-39); he hails Gottsched's moves toward realism but laments his susceptibility to Wolffian philosophy, with its fatal belief in eternal constants (143-146); and he approves of Gottsched's interest in *Wirkung* (effect) but criticizes its moral rather than social oreintation. Overall, according to Rieck, Gottsched was doomed by "der verhängisvolle Geist des Kompromisses" 'the fatal spirit of compromise' (36). Rieck's work exudes a measured respect for Gottsched's contributions, especially highlighting Gottsched's interest in the portrayal of humans, and contains quite a bit of detailed information on Gottsched's social milieu and multiple spheres of activity. The book does not, however, develop its argument very extensively and applies the

---

respect to Bodmer and Breitinger. Wetterer 85-93 and 161-164 provides a useful critical retrospective of these debates.

[19] The latter point is based on Wetterer's unconvincing reading of Gottsched's late-career preface to his translation of Batteux: she asserts that these very few pages are evidence of a major shift in Gottsched's poetic views away from any concession to public taste. Gottsched's preface actually indicates that he read Batteux fairly superficially, seeing in him nothing more than a confirmation of the same poetic views that Gottsched had been unbendingly defending for over two decades.

Marxist approach in a way that simplifies rather than illuminates the contradictions of Gottsched's poetics.

Much more recently, Rüdiger Campe's studies of eighteenth-century German literary discourse have paid substantial attention to Gottsched. Campe's *Affekt und Ausdruck* analyzes Gottsched's critique of rhetoric as part of the transition to a "hermeneutic" mode (9-53); his comments on Gottsched's preference for truth over surface decoration point toward the interest in *Nachahmung* that I analyze in this chapter. More relevant to my present concerns, however, is Campe's later book *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit*, which treats Gottsched only briefly, yet delves deeply into the complex permutations of literary verisimilitude in the early 18th century with an analysis of the so-called "probability revolution." Campe particularly highlights the figure of "unwahrscheinliche Wahrscheinlichkeit" (309-338), i.e. the notion that a literary representation can be plausible within an implausible frame. Although Campe does not directly tie this figure to Gottsched, this concept is operative in Gottsched's "hypothetical verisimilitude," which I will discuss below.

In short, Gottsched scholarship can benefit from a study that tackles directly and for their own sake the two major features of his poetics: imitation and didactic intention. Previous treatments often put him in a context that distorts the understanding of his poetics in order to fit him into a desired trajectory. In the process, scholars often tried to establish a reductive, unitary explanation of his mimetic and moral rules for poetry. It is essential instead to investigate the slippery semantic and conceptual shifts that underlie his doomed attempt to build a strict, rational, rule-based poetics on the basis of two principles that inherently conflict with each other.

PART I: POETRY AND THE DIDACTIC FUNCTION

The first chapter of Gottsched's *Dichtkunst*, following the traditional practice of rhetorical handbooks, gives a historical overview of the origins and development of poetry. Gottsched speculates that poetry arose from imitation of bird song and then traces the development of rhyme and meter among early cultures—giving particular credit to the Germanic tribes and the "Zärtlichkeit ihres Gehöres" 'sensitivity of their ear' (VI.1:128; I §15).[20] He also describes the

[20] All quotations from Gottsched's works are based on the *Ausgewählte Werke* edited by Joachim Birke, P.M. Mitchell, Brigitte Birke and Hans-Gert Roloff. English translations are my own. Quotations will identified according to volume and page number followed by chapter and paragraph number for ease of reference between different editions. (The limitations of the available character set necessitate one minor alteration: instead of the older method of indicating umlaut with a superscript <e> over the lowercase vowel I use the modern equivalent, <ä>, <ö> or <ü>.) Gottsched's *Critische Dichtkunst* came out in four editions, with slight to moderate revisions, between 1729 and 1751. Any edition would be an appropriate source for the questions posed here, since Gottsched's core poetic principles remained constant through all editions of his work—the revisions to part one are limited to a few additional illustrative examples and slightly more thorough explanations. (Part two of the *Dichtkunst*, which consists of individual treatises on dozens of different poetic genres, was more extensively revised and expanded in later editions, but those additions are not directly relevant to my inquiry.) Joachim Birke, who edited the *Dichtkunst* for the *Ausgewählte Werke*, chose to reprint the third edition of 1742, arguing that it incorporates most of Gottsched's revisions while leaving out the polemical barbs that entered into the fourth edition as a result of Gottsched's acrimonious quarrel with the Swiss critics J. J. Bodmer and J. J. Breitinger. Several options are available to readers who seek alternatives to the third edition of the *Dichtkunst*: the entire fourth edition is available in a facsimile reprint by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1962; and a large selection from the first edition is printed in

appearance of the major genres of epic, comedy and tragedy, recognizing the current preeminence of the French literary tradition in these genres while also drawing attention to existing German achievements. Once he has dispensed with this descriptive historical treatise, Gottsched addresses the question of the function of poetry. Here, in the culmination of the first chapter, the two central principles of Gottsched's poetics, didacticism and imitation, make their first appearance. The moral function comes first. Since Gottsched's stance on the didactic role of literature is more stable than his pronouncements on imitation, I will outline the salient features of his didactic theory before delving into the convolutions that this didacticism inflicts on Gottsched's mimetic theory.

According to the description of poetry's function given at the end of the first chapter, the earliest poetry lacked any strong moral purpose. It aimed instead at a simpler sort of rhetorical effect—the primitive poet's chief goal was the pleasing communication of emotion: "Die allerersten Sänger ungekünstelter Lieder, haben, nach der damaligen Einfalt ihrer Zeiten, wohl nichts anders im Sinne gehabt, als wie sie ihren Affect auf eine angenehme Art ausdrücken wollten" 'The very first singers of artless songs, in accordance with the simplicity of their time, likely had nothing else in mind but how they wanted to express their affect in a pleasing manner' (6.1:137; I §27). The affective and entertaining aspects of poetry, according to Gottsched's account, continued to be the poet's main concern for some time, as public admiration spurred poets to seek out the most enchanting and wondrous devices to win the favor of their listeners. Striking tales of the marvelous were especially cultivated. Gottsched writes that the poets endeavored, "allerley annehmliche und reizende Sachen in ihre Lieder zu bringen, dadurch sie die Gemüther der Zuhörer noch destomehr an sich locken und gleichsam fesseln könnten. Nichts war dazu bey der einfältigen Welt geschickter, als kleine Historien oder Fabeln, die etwas wunderbares und ungemeines in sich enthielten" 'to bring all sorts of pleasing and charming things into their songs, through which they could all the more draw in and, so to speak, bind the minds of their listeners. For this nothing in that simple world was more effective than little stories or tales that contained something marvelous and unusual" (6.1:138; I §28). In Gottsched's account, the origins of poetry are not moral but affective and entertaining. In the early stages of its development, poetry cultivated the pleasing rhetorical effects that would later be repurposed for a socially useful purpose.[21]

The didactic function, as Gottsched presents it, entered into poetry during a later, more mature stage of human civilization, when people had advanced beyond the childish desire for simple tales of wonder and heroism. Faced with a more mature audience, poets now sought to maintain their respected social position by introducing moral lessons and bits of wisdom into their writings. Primitive civilization had admired the poet's near-divine ability to move, entertain and arouse wonder; now poets came to be honored as great sages, divine in their wisdom:

> …so viel Verstand und hohe Weisheit, zeigten sie durch die trefflichen Sittenlehren und Lebensregeln, die sie in ihren Liedern mit vorbrachten. Die alten

---

the Reclam *Schriften zur Literatur*, 1972, edited by Horst Steinmetz. And of course Birke and Mitchell's *Ausgewählte Werke* fully documents the variations among all four editions and includes all passages, prefaces and genre treatises from editions one, two and four that were missing in the third edition.

[21] This passage may slightly lessen the disdain aroused by the caricatured image of Gottsched as a purely rational and humorless scholar who completely misunderstood the nature of poetry. Gottsched certainly instrumentalized the affective and entertaining aspects of poetry, but he did not deny their status as core, defining features of the poetic experience.

> Poeten waren nämlich die ersten Weltweisen, Gottesgelehrten, Staatsmänner: oder umgekehrt, die älteseten Weltweisen bedienten sich der Poesie, das rohe Volk dadurch zu zähmen… [sie] wurden also für Lehrer des menschlichen Geschlechts, für außerordentliche, ja recht göttliche Männer angesehen…
>
> …the excellent moral lessons and rules for life that they brought forth in their songs showed so much understanding and high wisdom. For the ancient poets were the first philosophers, theologians, statesmen: or, conversely, the most ancient philosophers made use of poetry in order to tame the rough people with it… [they] were therefore regarded as teachers of the human race, as extraordinary, in fact positively divine men… (6.1:138-39; I §29)

The above passage clearly indicates the sweeping moral-pedagogical function that Gottsched assigns to poetry. The passage also begins to reveal the particular features that generate a distinctive tension between Gottsched's literary didacticism and his imitative imperative. First of all, Gottsched's vision of literary pedagogy is of the most direct and concrete sort. The text does not aim to inculcate some vaguely ethical state of mind, but instead embodies a specific practical lesson, a "Sittenlehre" or "Lebensregel." The reader, moreover, is in the position of pupil to the teacher-poet—inferior in knowledge and ready to imbibe a concrete nugget of wisdom.[22] In Gottsched's model, then, there is no place for the sort of abstract "aesthetic education" proposed for example by Friedrich Schiller 65 years later (*Ästhetische Erziehung*); such a conception, based merely on the general cognitive effect of literary forms, would be too vague and inadequate for Gottsched's purposes. Nor would a neutral presentation of ethically relevant scenes from human life, along the lines of the "Schule der praktischen Weisheit" 'school of practical wisdom' sketched in Schiller's 1785 speech on the theater ("Schaubühne") satisfy Gottsched's intentions: this would assume that the reader is competent to draw his or her own conclusions from literary representations. On the contrary, in Gottsched's model the literary representation cannot stand alone but must be given an unmistakable tendency so that it can perform its role in the pedagogically optimistic Enlightenment's top-down project of educating the popular masses. This requirement for a distinct message gives the literary text a more immediate and obvious utility, but of course it also constrains the representation more than would a rhetorical approach based on a more open-ended conception of literary didacticism. Many sorts of literature can achieve a generally conceived aesthetic-ethical effect, but the text must be selectively designed if it is to convey the precise bits of wisdom that Gottsched prefers. The fundamental conception of this directly tendentious poetics is opposed to an imitative approach; the text is called on to perform a prescriptive rather than a descriptive function.

Despite Gottsched's commitment to the moral function, he makes no effort to hide that didacticism is a secondary imposition on literature: it results, according to his historical sketch, from a deliberate choice by poets who are seeking a way to enhance the status of their craft. The pedagogical goal, furthermore, is not only external to poetry but is a belatedly chosen goal; apparently the entertaining and affective functions were an earlier and more natural choice. The doctrine of imitation, in contrast, is intrinsic to the nature of poetry, as we will see later from the way Gottsched presents it. In Aristotelian terms, then, the didactic function can be understood as

[22] The seventeenth-century notion of the *poeta doctus*, the poet as learned scholar, is felt in this presentation of the poet as standing above ordinary people in education and in understanding.

a "final cause" while the nature of poetry as imitation is the "material cause." This configuration makes it all the more understandable that the didactic function of poetry necessitates some distortions on the part of the core imitative aspect of poetry: the "final cause" is an awkward fit with the "material cause." Gottsched's irreconcilable allegiances to the intrinsic nature versus the external and chosen function of poetry generate the shifting positions found in the *Dichtkunst*.

The fact that the didactic purpose of poetry is a deliberate instrumentalization does not, however, gives us reason to take it any less seriously as a foundation of the *Dichtkunst*. Gottsched (not having had the chance to read Kant's aesthetics) did not view such instrumentalization as a travesty on the pure existence of poetry. Rather, as becomes clear later in the poetics, he was convinced that any reasonable individual would wish to give literature the most beneficial application possible. From his point of view, it is irrelevant that original primitive poetry lacked a didactic purpose, since poetry certainly does have this moral purpose in the enlightened eighteenth century.[23] So even if the moral function is not intrinsic to poetry in itself, it *is* intrinsic to the poetic practice of the enlightened, rational citizen and is therefore as obligatory as any other poetic principle. Gottsched explicitly addresses the simultaneously arbitrary yet binding nature of the moral function in his chapter on imitation, where he asks whether every poetic plot must have a moral purpose. Here he admits, "daß es freylich wohl möglich sey, Fabeln zur bloßen Belustigung zu ersinnen" 'that it is certainly quite possible to invent plots for mere amusement,' but argues that there is no good reason to do so: "Allein da es möglich ist, die Lust mit dem Nutzen zu verbinden, und ein Poet nach der bereits gegebenen Beschreibung auch ein rechtschaffener Bürger und redlicher Mann seyn muß: so wird er nicht unterlassen, seine Fabeln so lehrreich zu machen, als es ihm möglich

Overview: Chapters 1-6 of the *Dichtkunst*:

Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst. Erster allgemeiner Theil.
Das I. Capitel. Vom Ursprunge und Wachsthume der Poesie überhaupt.
Das II. Capitel. Von dem Charactere eines Poeten.
Das III. Capitel. Vom guten Geschmacke eines Poeten.
Das IV. Capitel. Von den dreyen Gattungen der poetischen Nachahmung, und insonderheit von der Fabel.
Das. V. Capitel. Von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie.
Das VI. Capitel. Von der Wahrscheinlichkeit in der Poesie.

Attempt at a Critical Poetics. First and General Part.
I. On the origin and growth of poetry in general.
II. On the poet's character.
III. On the good taste of a poet.
IV. On the three types of poetic imitation, and in particular on the plot.
V. On the marvelous in poetry.
VI. On verisimilitude in poetry.

Chapters VII-XII treat poetic style, metaphor and versification, while Part II contains, in the final edition, 23 chapters treating individual genres.

[23] Gottsched had a strong awareness of living in an advanced and enlightened period, as comes out for example in his discussion of the marvelous in literary plots. "Die Welt ist nunmehro viel aufgeklärter, als vor etlichen Jahrhunderten, und nichts ist ein größeres Zeichen der Einfalt, als wenn man… alles, was geschieht, zu Zaubereyen machet" 'The world is now much more enlightened than it was a few centuries ago, and nothing is a greater mark of simple-mindedness than if one… turns everything that happens into a magical event" (5.1.238-9; I.5.16).

ist" 'But since it is possible to combine pleasure with usefulness, and since a poet according to the description already given must be also an upstanding citizen and an honest man: so he will not fail to make his plots as educational as possible' (6.1:213; IV §18). Here Gottsched freely admits the arbitrary nature of the moral imperative in literature but does not undermine the importance of that imperative. For even if literature does not always serve a moral purpose, all decent people, according to this quotation, would agree that it *should* do so. Gottsched's didactic tenet is therefore no different than any of the other deliberately chosen principles that have shaped aesthetic manifestoes at various points in literary history—it is an external criterion that becomes a core literary principle precisely by virtue of having been chosen as such by the poetics of a certain period. Our post-Kantian literary culture may tend to view it with suspicion, but it should be taken seriously and investigated for the ways it shapes the tensions and contradictions that underlie Gottsched's poetics as a whole.

The above discussion has established some general features of Gottsched's moralizing poetics, namely that moral utility was an extrinsic yet binding requirement that called for a concrete, practical lesson. But more specifics are required if we are to analyze just how this requirement interacts with an imitative poetics. The key question is how exactly the literary text is expected to express the moral. The first chapter of the *Dichtkunst* mentions only that tragedy and comedy provide "Exempel der Tugenden und Laster" 'exempla of virtue and vice' (6.1:140; I §31). Later chapters add more detail, revealing just how heavily Gottsched's ethical mechanism is based on plot and on character. The moral is embodied in the actual content of the literary representation rather than in any other formal, structural or cognitive features of the text. Compared to the ethical-aesthetic theories of the later eighteenth century, or considered from the vantage point of contemporary discussions of literature and ethics, Gottsched's model is not particularly sophisticated. But its rather blunt parameters are the source of the complex equivocations in Gottsched's mimetic theory: precisely the inflexibility of his heavy-handed didactic theory generates the intricate configurations of his overall moral-mimetic model.

The plot-based aspect of literary didacticism emerges in chapter four, where Gottsched discusses plot (*Fabel*)[24] as the "soul" of poetry (a phrase adopted from Aristotle, 1450a19). This chapter contains Gottsched's notorious "recipe" for poetic composition, in which the mutual codependence of plot and moral lesson is baldly asserted:

> Zu allererst wähle man sich einen lehrreichen moralischen Satz, der in dem ganzen Gedichte zum Grunde liegen soll, nach Beschaffenheit der Absichten, die man sich zu erlangen, vorgenommen. Hierzu ersinne man sich eine ganz allgemeine Begebenheit, worinn eine Handlung vorkömmt, daran dieser erwählte Lehrsatz sehr augenscheinlich in die Sinne fällt.

[24] The German word "Fabel" can mean both "fable" and "plot." Context makes it clear that Gottsched's "Fabel" refers to plot in general, not to the specific genre of the fable. (To give just one example: Gottsched backs up his major statements on *Fabel* with quotations from Aristotle's discussion of *mythos* [6.1:202; IV §7].) When Gottsched wants to refer to the specific genre he specifies the "äsopische Fabel." Confusion on this point is unfortunately common not only among first-time readers but even among some nonspecialist scholars (e.g. Alt's flawed reading of Gottsched 72-76), since Gottsched not only reads every work of literature as if it is an Aesopian fable (a story illustrating a moral lesson), but he clearly has the Aesopian fable foremost in his mind in some of his illustrative examples. Nevertheless, an attentive reading makes it obvious that "Fabel" refers to the plot element of all genres. It is essential to avoid a mistake on this point if one is to understand the core aims of Gottsched's poetics.

> First choose an instructive moral sentence that shall form the foundation of the entire poem, in accordance with the nature of the goals one has resolved to pursue. Thereto invent a quite general event in which an action occurs in which this chosen precept is very obviously apparent to the senses. (6.1:215; IV §21)

The moral, then, is immediately embodied in plot, the literary element that is most tangible and most accessible even to an uncultured audience. The Enlightenment's interest in educating the popular masses is evident in this choice. The plot, we read, is so imbued with moral implications that even the most passive, uncultivated observer could hardly miss that which is so clearly manifest to the senses. Gottsched's subsequent examples, which describe several variations on the story of a powerful man victimizing a quiet, honest man, clarify the ways that the plot carries the moral. First of all, the mere portrayal of this event is supposed to make evident the "Abscheulichkeit des gedachten Lasters" 'repulsiveness of the intended vice' (6.1:215; IV §21). Secondly, to drive the point home, the immoral action is usually shown to have undesirable consequences: the evildoer, for example, ends up beaten and left naked on the street, or loses everything that he has gained through immoral means, etc. This is the negative version of literary-moral instruction: the audience is presented with an evil action encased in a doubly protective barrier: the correct audience reaction, i.e. the rejection of this mode of behavior, is ensured because evil is shown as manifestly ugly in itself *and* is followed by a punitive poetic justice.

Gottsched does, however, reveal some uneasiness about this method; apparently, even the most strenuous spin does not completely eliminate the danger associated with the sensual-literary embodiment of evil. He concludes his examples with the brief comment that perhaps it is "rathsamer… löbliche, als strabare Handlungen zu verewigen" 'more advisable… to immortalize praiseworthy rather than punishable actions' (6.1:220; IV §27). And so an alternative, positive version of the literary exemplum emerges elsewhere in the *Dichtkunst*, a model based on the presentation of an admirable character rather than an evil action. In chapter two, discussing the features of the ideal poet, Gottsched writes the following:

> Vielmehr erfordert es seine Pflicht, die ihm, als einem redlichen Bürger obliegt, die Tugendhaften auf eine vernünftige Art zu loben, ihr Gedächtniß zu verewigen, und durch die Beschreibung ihrer ruhmwürdigen Exempel, theils die zu ihrer Zeit Lebenden, theils auch die Nachkommen, zu löblichen Thaten aufzumuntern… Hier malet ein rechtschaffener Poet das an sich selbst schöne Wesen der Tugend, in der Person eines tugendhaften Mannes so liebenswürdig ab, daß es alle, die es sehen, in sich verliebt macht.
>
> Rather his duty, incumbent upon him as an honest citizen, requires that he praise the virtuous in a rational way, immortalize their memory and, through the description of their glorious example, encourage both contemporaries and those who come after to praiseworthy deeds… Here an upstanding poet paints the intrinsically beautiful essence of virtue in the person of a virtuous man so charmingly that it makes all who see it fall in love with it. (6.1:163-64; II §21)

This model of moral utility is even more direct than the previous one: it gives the audience a positive example to emulate instead of merely portraying what *not* to do. As is the case with all

of Gottsched's didactic strategies, this approach aims for maximum possible clarity and accessibility. This passage, just like the previous quotation, suggests that the correct moral action on the part of the audience is irresistible and automatic—the portrayal is so appealing that the viewer cannot but fall in love and be inspired by it. And just like the negative model of moral communication described above, this positive example is not sufficiently effective to stand on its own. It must again be couched in a framework that provides the correct spin: even though virtue is "intrinsically beautiful" the poet must still take pains to paint it "charmingly."

Both the positive and the negative models of moral communication, then, aim for the utmost clarity and tangibility, since the primary concern of this poetics is to unmistakably convey the moral lesson to the broadest possible audience. The moral ideal is embodied in the representation, rather than in form, affect, or other more "aesthetic" aspects of literature, since the common popular response to literature is to read for plot and character. This straightforward, concretely embodied approach is what one would expect from Gottsched's goal-oriented practical activism and from the practical pedagogical stance of the early Enlightenment in general.

A final crucial element needs to be added to Gottsched's model of moral utility: the role of affect and pleasure. According to the understanding of poetry revealed in Gottsched's historical sketch, the original, defining features of poetry are its emotional impact, its striking language, and its ability to appeal to a crowd. These long-cultivated features were not left behind when poets took on their later roles as sages, philosophers and educators; instead they were retained as the means to achieve a new, more honorable end. They serve to arouse the wonder, enjoyment and emotional involvement without which even the most clearly embodied moral lesson would fall flat. The first task in education is after all to acquire and maintain the attention of the pupil, and this is the crucial contribution of the entertaining and moving aspects of poetry. Gottsched makes regular references to the important role of affect in his didactic model. We have already seen how he evokes the horror induced by depictions of vice or the admiration aroused by portraits of virtue. In addition, the whole fifth chapter of the *Dichtkunst*, which concerns the marvelous, is occasioned by Gottsched's recognition of the fact that wondrous plot elements are needed in order to enchant the public and successfully administer the moral message. The convolutions required to admit the marvelous into a rationally imitative poetry will be discussed below. In admitting the socially useful role of pleasure Gottsched is of course picking up on the Horatian commonplace as well as on the baroque rhetorical tradition of using literary delights to sweeten the "bitter pill" of moral instruction; Gottsched in fact concludes the first chapter's disquisition on the educational function of poetry with a direct quotation from Horace about how the poet, as Gottsched translates it, "Zum theil dem Leser nützt, zum theil Ergetzung bringt" 'In part is useful to the reader, in part provides delight' (6.1:141; I §32).[25] Gottsched, then, sees affect and pleasure as natural to poetry and welcomes them as long as they contribute to the pedagogical aim; he harnesses their power for practical social benefit.[26]

[25] Horace is one of the authorities most cited by Gottsched. Gottsched held him in such high esteem that he included his own translation of the *Epistle to the Pisones* in place of a preface to the first edition of the *Dichtkunst*.

[26] Gottsched makes only the briefest of references to the Aristotelian view of drama, in which affect is the central aim of tragedy: he mentions once in passing that the arousal of emotions in tragedy can purify our passions (6.1.140; I.1.31). Gottsched gives lip service to Aristotle but otherwise adheres to the Horatian view in which pleasure and affect are ancillary to the moral function of poetry. Gottsched's mimetic principle was substantially influenced by Aristotle, but for his didactic principle he had to turn to the later tradition. It should also be mentioned that the interrelation of moral function and affect is of course not as unproblematic as this discussion, or the Horatian

The model of literary pedagogy described above is destined to collide with the more dispassionately empirical aspects of Gottsched's imitation-based poetics, since the model obviously places great constraints on the representation. The portrayal of any sort of vice at all is somewhat unreliable; to be pedagogically safe it must be given a horrendous appearance and capped with a heavy-handed punishment. The single truly reliable method for instructive literature is to present only positive examples, only inspiring and heroic role models—and even in this case the poet must take pains to make these glorious figures as charming and attractive as possible. In Gottsched's model, then, the ideal moral vision is presented via the representation. The problem, however, is that the plots and characters that most neatly and vividly illustrate the moral are unlikely to be found directly in nature. In addition, the reliance on pleasure and wonder for the moral function of poetry constitutes yet another stumbling block for the integration of morality and imitation, since sober imitation is of course not particularly compatible with the pursuit of novelty and the marvelous. Gottsched's model relies on the power of affect, novelty and wonder, but such devices encourage the poet to seek the unnatural more than the natural. In sum, the urge to make the moral lesson immediately manifest in the literary text generates a very restrictive didactic strategy in Gottsched's poetics. The stringent nature of the didactic model in turn produces the particularly extreme tension between the moral and imitative principles that underlies the theoretical vacillations of the *Dichtkunst*. Ultimately, it is the imitative principle that is forced to give way in the face of the overriding rhetorical orientation toward the needs of the public and the inflexible pedagogical model that results. Gottsched's commitment to imitative poetry is robust, as will be described below, but it is by far the more flexible of his two core principles. Although the call for poets to follow in the footsteps of nature comes out robustly whenever Gottsched considers poetry for its own sake, it either recedes or transforms itself whenever the didactic function of literature comes to the forefront.

Most other theories of the ethical role of literature are much more accommodating than Gottsched's; their lenient framework and minimal requirements easily embrace a wide range of literature within the realm of the moral and ethical.[27] But no such approach could satisfy Gottsched, who was neither inclined to base the moral impact on abstract literary properties nor willing to trust the common reader to take charge of his or her own moral response. And so Gottsched's very literal notion of morality in literature fatally constrains his poetics. Yet his approach retains a certain appeal precisely because it does not elude the confrontation between the mimetic portrayal and the moral vision. Gottsched declines to employ the sort of attenuated and abstract understanding of ethics that dissipates all potential for conflict with any other features of the literary artwork. Nor does he, on the other hand, completely abandon the notion of mimetic literature in order to give full sway to moral considerations alone. He retains his commitment to both imperatives, to the desire that literature be didactic and to the sense that the

---

formula, suggests. Even though affect integrates itself into the ethical goal more smoothly than does imitation, there remains the underlying problem that eighteenth-century psychology understood affect as more of a source of than an antidote to vice. Angelika Wetterer has explored this problem in some depth; see 49-61.

[27] To mention just a few examples: Schiller's theory of aesthetic education requires nothing more than the union of form and matter in an artwork; more concrete models such as those of Wayne Booth or Noel Carroll are slightly more stringent, but basically require only that the text propose a range of models and then leave it up to the reader to draw ethical conclusions; Geoffrey Galt Harpham finds ethical movement in any narrative at all; Adorno and Dostoevsky find that even the most "autonomous" art inevitably engages society and has the strongest effect via free formal development ("Lyrik und Gesellschaft," "Engagement," "Gospodin –bov"); Robert Eaglestone or Michael Eskin throw perhaps the broadest net of all as they argue that literature and ethics are either at their core identical, or are at least structurally very similar.

core of literature is imitation. In doing so, Gottsched, despite his occasionally crude and pedantic approach, begins the process of working out the literary problem of how narrative texts can engage with an empirical reality that they also seek to change.

PART II: POETRY AND IMITATION

Some readers of Gottsched's poetics would deny the significance of the conflict between moral vision and empirical imitation, arguing that Gottsched's concept of imitation of nature should not be understood literally as an actual orientation toward empirical realities.[28] But Gottsched's notion of poetic imitation is substantial enough that it cannot be so easily dismissed by means of an excessively subtle reinterpretation of what his words actually mean. At the same time, of course, the theories of imitation of nature or of verisimilitude have seldom been propounded in an exact or literal sense; they exist at an abstracted and arbitrarily theorized remove from the empirical world. It is precisely this terminological flexibility that Gottsched utilizes in order to integrate the core didactic and imitative tenets of his *Dichtkunst*, albeit in a patchy and inconsistent way. Gottsched vigorously, and not altogether speciously, professes his allegiance to the notion of imitation of nature, but behind those words he carries out an endlessly slippery reformulation of the ideas of nature and verisimilitude. In almost every case the clear impetus for these shifting definitions is his concern to accommodate his robust and concrete vision of the moral function of literature. Since instruction is the final cause of literature and imitation merely the material cause, when conflicts arise the theory of imitation gives way in favor of the more important end goal; poetic imitation shifts its form to fit in with the rhetorical and pedagogical need for striking and unusual portrayals. When this happens, Gottsched often ends up closer to a notion of representation than of imitation, closer to an internal or subjective understanding of verisimilitude than an external or objective understanding, and more interested in what is possible than what is actual. The following analysis of the multiple versions of verisimilitude that occur in the *Dichtkunst* will therefore have the added benefit of untangling the various possible ways of deploying the concept of verisimilitude in general.

1. Conceptual Entanglements

Gottsched's first statement on imitation, as I noted earlier, appears at the very end of his first chapter, just after he has spent several paragraphs explaining the pedagogical function of literature:

> Bey dem allen ist nicht zu leugnen, daß nicht, nach dem Urtheile des großen Aristoteles, das Hauptwerk der Poesie in der geschickten Nachahmung bestehe. Die Fabel selbst, die von andern für die Seele eines Gedichtes gehalten wird, ist nichts anders, als eine Nachahmung der Natur. Dieß wird sie nun durch die Aehnlichkeit mit derselben, und wenn sie diese hat, so heißt sie wahrscheinlich.

[28] E.g. Herrmann (*Naturnachahmung*) or Bruck (*Mimesisbegriff*).

> Die Wahrscheinlichkeit ist also die Haupteigenschaft aller Fabeln; und wenn eine Fabel nicht wahrscheinlich ist, so taugt sie nichts. Wie kann sie aber wahrscheinlich seyn, wenn sie nicht die Natur zum Vorbilde nimmt, und ihr Fuß vor Fuß nachgeht?
>
> Alongside all this it cannot be denied that, in the judgment of the great Aristotle, the chief work of poetry consists in skilled imitation. The plot itself, which is held by others to be the soul of a poem, is nothing other than an imitation of nature. It becomes this by virtue of its similarity with the latter; and when it has this similarity, then it is called verisimilar. Verisimilitude is therefore the chief feature of all plots; and if a plot is not verisimilar, than it is of no use. But how can it be verisimilar if it does not take nature as the model and follow step by step in her path? (6.1:141; I §33)

The first observation we can make about this passage is that its opening casts imitation as an intrinsic and defining feature of poetry, as opposed to the way that the moral function is deliberately chosen. The imitative nature of poetry requires no explanation; apparently it is an undeniable and obvious fact. Several paragraphs earlier, the pedagogical and emotional aspects of poetry were called "Absichten" 'purposes' (6.1:137; I §26); here Gottsched calls imitation a "Hauptwerk" 'chief work.' This statement, then, seems to express Gottsched's convictions about the inherent essence, as opposed to the purpose, of poetry, and thereby sets up the conflicting dichotomy between the intrinsic nature of poetry and its assigned function in a practical and enlightened age.

Moving on to examine the specific mimetic concept suggested by this passage, we see that the quotation establishes a tight circle of linked terms all centered around imitation: first, the key to poetry is plot; next, the plot is an imitation of nature; imitation of nature designates similarity of plot and nature; this similarity is called verisimilitude; and finally, bringing us back to the starting point, verisimilitude is the main feature of plot. Particularly notable is the third step, in which Gottsched explicitly specifies that "imitation of nature" is to be understood as *similarity* to nature. This extra bit of definition may be intended to assure us that his principle of imitation is more than a convention or tired formula; there is to be a genuine correspondence between the imitation and the original. On first reading, then, this opening statement appears to firmly anchor the *Dichtkunst* in the poetics of an objectively oriented imitation of nature.

At the same time, Gottsched's literary positions are heavily reliant on a poetic tradition that, while proclaiming the doctrine of imitation, applied the principle in a very non-empirical way. The whole tangled history of that tradition of interpretations and misinterpretations of the literary notion of mimesis is invoked at the very start of this quotation with the mention of Aristotle. Aristotle, of course, did not speak of imitation but of *mimesis*. Scholars who seriously study theories of mimesis concur that the word "imitation" is by no means an adequate rendering of the concept; "representation" is a slightly more accurate alternative. The classicist Stephen Halliwell, in one of the most recent reappraisals of mimesis, argues that "mimesis" has always had a duality of meaning that moves between "world-creating" and "world-reflecting" approaches (22-23), while the Polish historian of aesthetics W. Tatarkiewicz elaborates four possible meanings for the term, of which the most literarily relevant are, as with Halliwell, the interpretations as either copying or as free creation; finally, Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf's history of mimesis advances a more monolithic interpretation of the term based

nevertheless on the notion that a mimesis always involves the creation of a world since it arises from a particular constructed understanding of the world. Halliwell and Tatarkiewicz also both present Aristotle as the principal source for the "world-creating" understanding of mimesis, as opposed to the more narrowly understood interpretation of mimesis as imitation or copying found in Plato.

Certainly any attentive reader of Aristotle's *Poetics* will notice that the notion of copying is but a small part of his treatise. Much more prominent are the passages that elaborate a more flexible understanding of mimesis as "representation." These passages are more concerned with the internal structure of the text, or the effect of the text on the audience, than with the reproduction of some objective model. Aristotle is for example very interested in rules for the proper structuring of the plot (Ch. 7-8, 10-11), which ask the poetic representation to look not outward toward some natural original but inward toward the internal cohesion of the text. Or, in his discussion of the tragic character (Ch. 13) Aristotle shows great concern for the impression made on the viewer, particularly with a view toward achieving the most powerful cathartic result; in this approach the mimesis is shaped by the subjectivity of the audience much more than by the objectivity of nature. Finally, Aristotle also emphasizes in many ways that poetry is not to be too strongly bound by empirical reality. He expressly states in the well-known formulation from chapter nine, for example, that poetry is not concerned with the actual particulars of history but with philosophical generalizations about the possible. Furthermore, close to the end of his treatise Aristotle shows great tolerance for impossible events as long as they *appear* probable (1460a19)—again the subjective impression is what matters most. And, finally, he finds it acceptable to depict things as they "ought to be" rather than as they are (1460b11). In all these ways, then, Aristotle's deployment of the notion of mimesis is rife with elements that situate poetry well outside of objective imitation.

The Renaissance and Neoclassical traditions exploited the flexibly subjective, formal and decidely nonempirical elements found in Aristotle's elaboration of mimesis, at the same time as they continued to employ the deceptively simple catchphrase of the "imitation of nature." That is, the linguistic formula suggested objective imitation, but the actual content of that formula was drawn from a source that was only passingly concerned with imitation as such. The Renaissance rediscovery of Aristotle beginning in late 15th-century Italy[29] translated his *mimesis* into the Latin *imitatio*, and this translation brought the potential for significant disconnection from the original concept of mimesis. Whether the Latin term actually involved an immediate semantic narrowing of the term is debatable; Halliwell argues that the entire Renaissance and French Neoclassical tradition gave *imitatio* a richer range of meaning that included the notion of "representation" that has now been lost. Nevertheless, as Halliwell suggests, the path toward a gradual modern narrowing and displacement of mimesis was opened by the use of the new word "imitation." At the same time, the term was in practice broadened and confused by a profusion of new applications and associations, as the Renaissance and French Neoclassical traditions interpreted imitation in ways that were neither accurately Aristotelian nor particularly empirical or realistic. As Tatarkiewicz describes it, first painters, and then poets, stretched the notion of imitation so that it could refer to imitation of abstract concepts, of moral ideals, of exaggerated types or of a beautified and carefully selected nature. In addition, the quite different idea that *imitatio* refers to imitation of past literary masters arose in the Renaissance and persisted through

[29] The Hutton translation of Aristotle provides a very useful account of the context and reception of the *Poetics* from which I draw here.

the seventeenth century in Germany, perpetuating a heavily academic type of "mimetic" literature.

Most influential for Gottsched was the French Neoclassicism of the seventeenth century, which codified Aristotle into a rigid set of rules based on the concepts of *bienséance* (decorum) and *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude) and on Castelvetro's unities of time, place and action (only the last of which is seriously advocated by Aristotle). The concept of *vraisemblance* is particularly relevant to an interpretation of the *Dichtkunst*, since it recurs there prominently as the German *Wahrscheinlichkeit.* Although inspired by Aristotle, the French *vraisemblance* is quite distinct from his *mimesis*. It is drawn from Aristotle's very limited comments about how poetry depicts the possible (*ta dunata*), probable (*to eikos*) or inevitable (*to anagkaion*) (1451b). *Vraisemblance* is a mixed notion that on the one hand requires a fidelity toward certain objective and empirical probabilities, but on the other hand distances itself from nature, since it expressly deals with the modality of possibility rather than with actual events. Consequently, the French pursuit of *vraisemblance* results on the one hand in a ridiculously narrow notion of literal imitation, prescribing for example that the time of dramatic action exactly match the time of performance. On the other hand its very etymology indicates that it opens the door to speculative seeming rather than objective accuracy. In practice, it generates drama that is far from empirically imitative, since plots had to be enormously contrived in order to adhere to the three unities. And so even if a desire to remain true to rational possibility motivated this neoclassical doctrine, the result, nevertheless, was adherence to a structural rulebook rather than to "nature." *Vraisemblance* ends up being a slippery union of literally imitative intentions with a nonimitative practice based on rules, forms and speculative possibility.

By the end of the seventeenth century, then, the concept of mimesis had become incredibly obscure and entangled. Post-Renaissance poetics had carried on many of Aristotle's non-imitative, flexible and broadly conceived elaborations of mimesis and had added more of its own, so that the mimesis of the Renaissance and Neoclassicism could certainly not be said to be objectively oriented. But at the same time the poetic tradition had for centuries been professing allegiance to "imitation of nature," which seems to require that all poetic theories be given at least an official veneer of orientation toward objective models. This formula was a clear departure from Aristotle, who referred briefly to imitation of an action (*praxeôs*, 1449b2) but not imitation of nature. Aristotle's flexible notion of mimesis, as already discussed, is best interpreted as "representation" rather than as the copying of nature; his concept easily encompasses the ways that a text can be internally, structurally, subjectively, psychologically, idealistically or morally coherent even if its relation to "nature" is tenuous. The appearance of the longer phrase "imitation of nature" undermines this flexibility and starts to limit mimesis to a narrower notion of objective reproduction, even as the many nonobjective versions of mimesis live on. The resulting poetic doctrine is awkwardly split between the entrenched surface terminology, which privileges objective copying over creative invention, and the practical deployment of the term that tends more to transform nature than to follow in its footsteps. This poetic tradition gave lip service to Aristotle's term, then distorted that term in translation into a much narrower official doctrine, and then continued to propagate broad Aristotelian versions of mimesis that contradict the narrow term that it mistakenly believes it has taken from Aristotle.

This excursion into the history of mimesis is intended to establish that Gottsched inherited a confused and complex tradition of mimetic theory that is only accentuated in his *Dichtkunst*. Gottsched was strongly attracted to the principle of imitation and often propounded it in a more genuinely empirical way than his predecessors. The German term that he uses,

Nachahmung, specifically denotes copying and indicates the existence of a prior model; a literal translation would be something like "after-mimicking." By the time it reaches Gottsched, Aristotle's *mimesis* has been narrowed first to *imitatio* and then further to *Nachahmung*, yet Gottsched still sees himself as a devoted and accurate follower of Aristotle. As a result he falls into the same odd dichotomy as the previous tradition, pairing a misinterpreted narrow distortion of "mimesis" with all of the non-imitative poetic notions that he also takes from Aristotle. In other words, Gottsched inherits a term that he interprets as literal imitation together with a theoretical elaboration that is actually based on broader notions of representation. It is no wonder, then, that his mimetic principle buckles easily under pressure from the moral principle. Gottsched simply exploits the odd equivocations and readily available attenuations of "imitation" that for him still have the stamp of approval because they have been propounded under the heading of Aristotle's "mimesis."

To return now to the quotation from the *Dichtkunst* given several pages above: the traces of this ambiguity are visible in the progression of the quotation, which starts with the term *Nachahmung* but concludes with the word *Wahrscheinlichkeit*. While *Nachahmung* has a clearly delineated, narrowly imitative meaning, *Wahrscheinlichkeit* has a broader semantic range that gives it flexibility, since the verisimilar is not necessarily a faithful copy but only *seems* like the truth. This "seeming truth" can occur on a subjective or structural level, so that the objective orientation toward a model implied by the term *Nachahmung* is no longer a requirement. Gottsched's opening pronouncement on mimesis, then, is no longer so definitive. Is a literary plot an objective imitation or a representation that only seems? Although Gottsched tried to equate *Nachahmung* and *Wahrscheinlichkeit* in the firm logical progression of the above passage, the two terms are significantly different, and the move toward the latter term is an early sign of the move toward a loose notion of representation rather than imitation in the *Dichtkunst*. This terminological and conceptual instability undermines the coherence of the *Dichtkunst*, but it is also the essential feature that allows Gottsched to achieve what would otherwise be impossible—to unite a committed imitative poetics with a strict literary didacticism. The various flexible versions of *Wahrscheinlichkeit* that Gottsched exploits in the process will be elucidated in the following sections—but the first step is to consider how Gottsched understands the *Natur* that grounds the *Wahrscheinlichkeit*.

2. An Ontology of Morality and Order

The contours of an imitative poetics become clear only when we understand just how the theorist conceives of this nature that the poet is supposed to imitate. Therefore the first step in pulling apart the details of Gottsched's doctrine of *Nachahmung der Natur* is to investigate how he understood the second part of that formula: nature. This term offers an alternate route for making imitation compatible with moral instruction: instead of stretching the concept of imitation to accommodate the non-empirical tendencies of his didactic model, Gottsched could construe nature in such a way that it does not actually conflict with moral ideals. For if nature is itself already morally structured, then a straightforward imitation of it will also have moral import.

It is in fact the case that Gottsched understands nature as imbued with morality. In his *Erste Gründe der gesammten Weltweisheit* (first full edition 1734), a philosophy textbook heavily based on the views of G.W. Leibniz and Christian Wolff, Gottsched lays out a theory of

natural moral law. Ethics, in his view, is the practical science of achieving happiness in life. Moral laws, then, arise from the facts of life, from the "unveränderliche Natur der Dinge" 'unchangeable nature of things' (5.2:83; II.1 §22). Virtuous actions are those that increase our perfection, and evil actions those that reduce our perfection. Gottsched does also admit the existence of an "arbitrary" divine law alongside the natural law, but he sees it as identical to natural law—God created the world with moral laws embedded in it. And so the moral law is inscribed in nature. Tellingly, the word "nature" is ubiquitous in Gottsched's discussion: he writes frequently of "natürliche Verbindlichkeit," "das Gesetz der Natur," "die Natur des Menschen," "natürliche Strafe und Belohnung" 'natural duty,' 'the law of nature,' 'human nature,' 'natural punishment and reward.'

If moral law is thus rooted in nature rather than in divine revelation, it follows that any accurate depiction of reality will carry a moral message. Theoretically, then, poetic imitation can harmonize perfectly with didactic function. Gottsched, however, does not trust readers to correctly infer moral implications from impartial portrayals alone; he requires a more immediate and direct lesson. Conveniently, his ontology has an additional feature that provides this needed emphasis: the *Weltweisheit* states that in nature all bad deeds are punished and all good deeds rewarded. According to Gottsched's account, this justice is an inevitable result of the automatic consequences of good or bad action; it is not administered by providence, but relies on the natural order of things. Gottsched is enthusiastically convinced that a practical system of rewards and punishments is inextricably ingrained in the world: "…also ist die Glückseligkeit eine unausbleibliche Belohnung der Tugend. Ein Tugendhafter muß notwendig glücklich werden!" 'therefore happiness is an inevitable reward of virtue. A virtuous man must necessarily become happy!' (5.2:107; II.1 §72). The formula "imitation of nature" thus acquires a new set of implications in the light of the conception of nature offered in the *Weltweisheit*. Certainly, if the nature Gottsched has in mind is not only imbued with moral law, but demonstrates those moral principles via the most obvious rewards and punishments, then, at least on Gottsched's terms, a poetic text can communicate clear moral lessons without having to depart at all from objective imitation of "nature."

We can be confident that the image of nature found in the *Weltweisheit* applies also to Gottsched's poetics, for a similar conception is expressed in chapter two of the *Dichtkunst*, where Gottsched is describing the character of the poet:

> Außer allen diesen Eigenschaften des Verstandes, die ein wahrer Poet besitzen und wohl anwenden muß, soll er auch von rechtswegen ein ehrliches und tugendliebendes Gemüthe haben. Der Beweis davon ist leicht. Ein Dichter ahmet die Handlungen der Menschen nach; die entweder gut oder böse sind. Er muß also in seinen Schildereyen, die guten als gut, das ist schön, rühmlich und reizend; die bösen aber als böse, das ist häßlich, schändlich und abscheulich abmalen. Thäte er dieses nicht, und unterstünde er sich die Tugend als verächtlich, schädlich und lächerlich, das Laster hergegen als angenehm, vortheilhaft und lobwürdig zu bilden: so würde er die Aehnlichkeit ganz aus den Augen setzen, und die Natur derselben sehr übel ausdrücken.
>
> Besides all these properties of the understanding that a true poet must possess and use well, he should also rightly have an honest and virtue-loving disposition. The proof of this is simple. A poet imitates human actions; which are either good or

> evil. He must therefore in his depictions paint the good as good, that is, beautiful, laudable and attractive; the evil however as evil, that is, ugly, shameful and repulsive. If he should not do this, and if he should have the audacity to portray virtue as contemptible, harmful and ridiculous, evil on the other hand as pleasant, advantageous and praiseworthy: then he would absolutely disregard the principle of similarity, and express the nature of these things very poorly. (6.1:159; I.2 §18)

This quotation reasserts the key notion that an accurate imitation will always show virtue rewarded. Admittedly, a shadow of ambiguity creeps when Gottsched says the poet "must" portray the good as good: does the word "must" indicate a natural inevitability or a normative demand? The phrase *could* be read to mean that nature is not always virtuous, but that the poet is required to portray it as such. However, the close of the quotation affirms that the goodness of the good is in fact rooted in nature, as Gottsched gives us the "proof" that any contrary representation would violate the principle of similarity.

This ontology has the potential to eliminate much of the friction arising from the expectation that poetic representations be both morally useful and empirically accurate. Gottsched's conception of nature reduces the gap between facts and moral values; the latter are not only practically inherent in the former but are in fact underlined by an ever-present tangible justice. Poetic justice, instead of being an imagined construct, has in effect become empirical, natural justice. An Enlightenment optimism underpins this sort of ontology, preventing the cynicism that would assume a large gap between the real and the moral ideal. As we move into the second chapter of the *Dichtkunst*, then, Gottsched as yet feels little pressure to offer anything but a literal version of imitation, since he can claim that moral utility in literature arises out of the copying of reality rather than from creative portrayal. The more insistently unempirical aspects of his literary didacticism lie dormant for now.

This state of affairs continues into chapter three of the *Dichtkunst*, which treats the topic of taste (*Geschmack*). This chapter has little bearing on either mimesis or literary morality,[30] but two passages do shed even more light on Gottsched's ontology. Here we learn that an additional key feature of Gottsched's nature is its harmony, or what he describes as "Uebereinstimmung des Mannigfaltigen… Ordnung und Harmonie" 'correspondence of the multifarious… order and harmony' (6.1:174; III §8). For Gottsched, order, together with the perfect beauty that results, is as essential a feature of nature as was the moral law in the previous passages:

> Die Schönheit eines künstlichen Werkes, beruht nicht auf einem leeren Dünkel; sondern sie hat ihren festen und nothwendigen Grund in der Natur der Dinge. Gott hat alles nach Zahl, Maaß und Gewicht geschaffen. Die natürlichen Dinge sind an sich selber schön: und wenn also die Kunst auch was schönes hervorbringen will, so muß sie dem Muster der Natur nachahmen. Das genaue Verhältniß, die Ordnung und richtige Abmessung aller Theile, daraus ein Ding besteht, ist die Qvelle aller Schönheit. Die Nachahmung der vollkommenen Natur, kann also einem künstlichen Werke die Vollkommenheit geben, dadurch es dem Verstande

[30] Berghahn provides a brief and useful account of the implications of Gottsched's views on *Geschmack*. Gottsched insists that universal and objective laws underlie judgments of taste and thereby, according to Berghahn, polemicizes against the subjective sensualist aesthetics of Dubos.

> gefällig und angenehm wird: und die Abweichung von ihrem Muster, wird allemal etwas ungestaltes und abgeschmacktes zuwege bringen.
>
> The beauty of an artistic work is not based on an empty impression; instead it has its firm and necessary reason in the nature of things. God created everything according to number, size and weight. Natural things are beautiful in themselves: and therefore when art likewise desires to produce something beautiful, it must imitate the model of nature. The exact proportion, the order and correct dimension of all the pieces which make up a thing, is the source of all beauty. The imitation of the perfection of nature can therefore give to an artistic work the perfection by means of which it becomes pleasing and agreeable to the understanding: and the departure from her model will in every case bring about something tasteless and misshapen. (6.1:183-84; III §20)

The idea expressed in this passage—imitation of the beauty of nature—seems to be a familiar poetic notion, perhaps a precursor of Charles Batteux. But it is important to realize what distinguishes Gottsched's approach. Gottsched does not suggest that the poet make a selection from nature or idealize nature; instead the poetic principle expressed in this passage is based on the idea that *all* of nature is beautiful and needs no modification. Therefore the concept of imitation expressed in this passage is literal and objective, not idealizing (since the idealization has already been performed in the very conceptualization of nature). The move Gottsched makes here with respect to beauty is similar to what he did with reference to morality in nature: he modifies his understanding of nature in order to be able to claim that what some would view as an idealizing, refracted sort of imitation is actually a literal copying of the objective world. Although Gottsched lectured on Batteux's *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* in the early 1750s, there is no indication that he subscribed to the notion of "imitation de la belle nature" in the sense that Batteux propounded it, where "belle" is a limiting adjective.[31] Gottsched's nature was always beautiful; no selection is required. And so if poetry contains order and harmony, those features arise directly from nature and not from the shaping effect of poetic craft. To openly call for the deliberate neglect of an undesirable part of nature would be too obvious an affront both to Gottsched's understanding of nature and to his treasured doctrine that similarity to nature is the soul of poetry.

Gottsched appears to have an unbelievably rosy view of the world, but this impression is lessened when we realize what kind of beauty Gottsched was talking about. It is evident from the quotation above that for Gottsched beauty meant order; harmonic structures and correspondences are beautiful. An appendix to the *Weltweisheit* expands on this point, stating that the perfection of nature exists *only* on the metaphysical, not on the moral or physical-sensual level. As an enthusiastic student of Christian Wolff and G. F. Leibniz, Gottsched agreed that our world is the best of all possible worlds; the appendix to *Weltweisheit* provides a proof of that theory but also sketches its limitiations. For Gottsched differentiates between the moral, physical and

[31] Gottsched's reception of Batteux is telling on this point. Gottsched does praise Batteux's treatise in the foreword to an excerpted translation of *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* published in 1754. Yet Gottsched does not acknowledge the distinguishing particulars of Batteux's concept of imitation. Increasingly under attack for his rigid poetics, Gottsched saw nothing in Batteux but a confirmation of his own notion of *Nachahmung der Natur*; he overlooks the fact that Batteux is writing of *la belle nature*. Tellingly, Gottsched's praise of Batteux never includes the key adjective, *belle*, that defined Batteux's concept of poetic imitation (10.2:391-93).

metaphysical good, and clearly states that only the last is relevant to his theory (5.2:540). The perfection of the world, in Gottsched's account, arises from the way its enormous variety of parts fits together like clockwork—such a vast number of things working together with so little friction is, in Gottsched's view, a spectacle of great perfection. And so a poetic imitation of this incredible order will be beautiful in a structural sense, but explicitly not in a moral or physical sense. Gottsched's idealized image of nature loses much of its theoretical usefulness when we realize it means only that nature is rationally ordered. We read above that moral law can be deduced from nature; but here we are reminded that this does not mean that nature is actually full of images of virtuous perfection. Since Gottsched's concept of order and perfection explicitly excludes moral perfection, this aspect of his ontology does not help bridge the gap between an imitative poetics and a moralizing role for literature. The notion of order behind nature will, however, play a role in his later "structural" interpretation of verisimilitude, where it will enable the claim that a structurally ordered text, even one that contains a very idealized image of virtue, is by reason of its order alone an imitation of nature.

In summary, Gottsched has developed a distinctive view of nature that significantly reduces the gap between objective imitation and idealistic morality. "Imitation of nature" means imitation of a world full of ethical import and harmonic order. The "imitation" part of the formula, meanwhile, is as yet unmodified; it is still understood as literal similarity. However, this notion of imitation will have to change soon, since Gottsched's view of nature, despite its optimism, does not on its own perform all the transformations necessary to achieve the harmonious union of moral utility and empirical imitation in literature. According to the passages just analyzed, an exact imitation of nature will be ordered—but order carries no clear moral lesson. An exact imitation will also show virtue rewarded and vice punished, which does accommodate at least one of the ways that Gottsched said a plot can incorporate a moral. But Gottsched's concept of nature still does not comfortably accommodate his other favored model, in which poetry gives us striking images of extraordinary virtue or unusual depravity—such depictions are by definition not found commonly in nature, especially since Gottsched underlined the fact that this is not the "best" world in an moral sense. Furthermore, Gottsched's concept of nature certainly does not accommodate the very important rhetorical device whereby unnatural, marvelous portrayals are used to attract the attention of the public. Gottsched's partial idealization of nature thus makes it slightly easier to present a moral vision within a literal imitation, but the remaining gap is enough to induce Gottsched to modify not just the second but also the first term of his formula "imitation of nature," moving his concept of imitation gradually away from his initially literal and objective approach.

3. Empirical Inclinations

Gottsched starts from a point that, both in his general approach to philosophy and in his poetics specifically, is more objective and empirical than is generally acknowledged. A recurring theme of Gottsched scholarship is the central role of *Vernunft* (reason) in all fields of his activity. Susi Bing influentially argued in 1934 that *Vernunft* is the basis of Gottsched's conception of nature, and this notion is repeated in, for example, the discussions of Christoph Siegrist (281), Jochen Schmidt (38) and Peter-André Alt (72) and persists nearly up to the present day in

Katherine Goodman's overview of Gottsched's career (55, 66).[32] Gottsched's commitment to *Vernunft* is undeniable, yet the excessive focus on this aspect of his intellectual outlook wrongly suggests that he was interested only in a rarefied, intangible, purely rational approach to the world. In fact Gottsched's stance was not so stark; while he was most definitely convinced that nature is *vernünftig*, he did not view it as *Vernunft* itself and did not subsume nature in rules alone. For he was a proponent not just of the Enlightenment orientation toward reason but also of the Enlightenment's celebration of scientific observation and its interest in practical, worldly problems.

We see evidence of Gottsched's empirical inclination in his *Weltweisheit*, which devotes considerable space to contemporary scientific ideas about the physical makeup of the solar system and of the earth, and presents basic principles of meteorology, geology, electricity, magnetism, botany, zoology and human anatomy (complete with a number of diagrams). These chapters attest to Gottsched's strong interest in and knowledge of the objective world. Furthermore, the very first sentence of the *Weltweisheit* signals the earthly concerns of philosophy: it defines "Weltweisheit" as "eine Wissenschaft der Glückseligkeit, die uns in dieser Welt zu erlangen möglich ist" 'a science of the happiness that it is possible for us to attain in this world' (5.1:19; I.1 §1). This emphatic placement of the phrase "in dieser Welt" proclaims the practical, secular orientation of the Enlightenment.[33] Gottsched's method was also based on a professed empiricism. Rather than impose his own conceptual creations on the world in the manner of a purely rational speculator, he sought to deduce his principles from nature. The "Regeln der Kunst" 'rules of art,' he writes in the *Dichtkunst*, are "aus der Vernunft und Natur hergeleitet" 'derived from reason and nature' (6.1:144; II §2) and "gründen sich auf die unveränderliche Natur der Menschen, und auf die gesunde Vernunft" 'are based on the unchanging nature of humankind and on sound reason' (6.1:146; II §4). In these passages *Natur* gets equal billing with *Vernunft*; reason works in tandem with empirical knowledge of nature. Thus Gottsched's philosophy is to a notable degree both concerned with and derived from objective realities. Admittedly, as described in the last section, his understanding of nature was idiosyncratic and idealized, but after all it is hardly possible to apprehend nature directly without putting some subjective spin on it. Overall, the passages just presented indicate a genuine regard for a physical nature that was more than just the construction of Gottsched's own mind. And so it would be a mistake to cast *Vernunft* as the sole guiding light of Gottsched's career. *Natur* plays an equal role and is in fact the original source of all the rules and rational systems that mark Gottsched's supposed obsession with *Vernunft*.[34]

It is therefore no surprise that when he turned to poetics, Gottsched makes imitation of nature a core principle of literary composition. Gottsched's principle of imitation is often not

[32] Joachim Birke unconvincingly argues that all of the *Dichtkunst* is based on logical structures from Wolff's philosophy ("Gottscheds Neuorientierung"). For Peter Brenner as well, the only aspect of Gottsched that matters is that he projected a rational order onto nature.

[33] Ludwig Stockinger underlines how Gottsched's *Weltweisheit* has a practial orientation toward regular life and society. In fact Stockinger argues that this orientation distances Gottsched from Wolff, who was otherwise Gottsched's model. Wolff's philosophy, says Stockinger, unlike Gottsched's, was more about a metaphysics of "all possible things" ("Gottscheds Stellung" 39) than about this world.

[34] Gottsched's commitment to *Vernunft* can itself be traced to an initial empirical orientation, since the science of astronomy, the most highly admired observation-based science of the period, was demonstrating the incredible degree to which nature itself does obey equations and rules. As a scholar acquainted with these scientific developments, Gottsched can hardly be blamed for concluding that reason is a primary characteristic of nature.

taken very seriously. It is frequently interpreted as abstract, insincere and merely formulaic,[35] and is overshadowed by his moral principle in the same way that his orientation toward *Natur* is overlooked in favor of his interest in *Vernunft*. But in fact it is the imitation principle that is most fundamental to Gottsched's understanding of literature—imitation after all is the defining characteristic of poetry alone, while moral concerns are common to all areas of human activity. When Gottsched first encountered the poetic principle of imitation of nature, he reacted to it as a clarifying revelation. He describes his experience in an autobiographical reflection included in a late edition of the *Weltweisheit*: his early readings of the seventeenth-century German poetic handbooks (Opitz, Kindermann, Harsdörffer, Rotth, Omeis) had, as he writes, left him at a loss for the clear principles he was seeking, until, by way of Scaliger, he encountered Aristotle: "Aus diesen kleinen Büchern nun, gieng mir das erwünschte Licht auf. Ich begriff den großen Grundsatz von der Nachahmung der Natur…" 'From these small booklets what I had wished for now dawned on me. I grasped the great principle of the imitation of nature…' (5.2:30). The enthusiasm of these lines suggests that Gottsched did not merely adopt imitation of nature as a standard, empty formula, but was genuinely inspired by its potential for grounding poetry in a solidly objective and rational nature, and for clearly separating poetry from rhetoric. Gottsched latched on to the principle of imitation with the conviction of the once-floundering convert and proceeded to disseminate it widely in his native land in his bid to spur a respectable national literature. With some justification he boasts decades later of having been the first to bring the principle of imitation to Germany ("Batteux-Vorrede," 10.2:391).

And so the first version of poetic imitation that needs to be investigated in the *Dichtkunst* is what I will call the "objective" version, the one most inspired by the empirically oriented aspects of Gottsched's outlook. The particularities of Gottsched's version of objective imitation are what one would expect from a scholar who is both a popularizer of the natural sciences and a devotee of Aristotle's *Poetics*. One aspect of Gottsched's concept of imitation is the requirement that the plot keep supernatural elements to a minimum and stick to natural phenomena. This concern comes to the fore in his famous dispute with Bodmer and Breitinger—Gottsched took issue with the profusion of demons and angels in works by Milton and Klopstock, which the Swiss critics celebrated. But the editions of the *Dichtkunst* prior to the literary feud are actually more concerned with accurate portrayal of humans rather than of inanimate objects. Like Aristotle, Gottsched views plot as the soul of poetry, and as a result his "imitation of nature" refers above all to the accurate reproduction of human action. Poetry, Gottsched writes, is "nichts anders… als eine Nachahmung menschlicher Handlungen" 'nothing other… than an imitation of human actions' (6.1:146; II §4). Gottsched's strong interest in objectively observed human nature is apparent in several passages from the *Dichtkunst*, for example in chapter two, where Gottsched emphasizes the importance of *Scharfsinnigkeit* (keen perception), which allows the poet to notice "viele Eigenschaften der Dinge" 'many features of things' and "auf alle Kleinigkeiten bey einer Person, Handlung, Begebenheit u.s.w. Acht [geben]" 'pay attention to all details of a person, action, event, etc.' (6.1:152; II §11). Gottsched continues:

> Vor allen Dingen aber ist einem wahren Dichter eine gründliche Erkenntniß des Menschen nöthig, ja ganz unentbehrlich. Ein Poet ahmet hauptsächlich die

[35] Gottsched's *Naturnachahmung* draws a fair amount of scholarly attention, only to be eviscerated and dismissed. See the earlier discussion of Herrmann and Bruck; also Kaiser interprets it as merely a blend of convention and reason (64-65).

> Handlungen der Menschen nach… Daher muß derselbe ja die Natur und Beschaffenheit des Willens, der sinnlichen Begierde, und des sinnlichen Abscheues in allen ihren mannigfaltigen Gestalten gründlich einsehen lernen.
>
> Above all, however, a thorough knowledge of the human being is necessary, in fact quite indispensable, to a true poet. A poet imitates chiefly the actions of humans… Therefore he must learn to thoroughly recognize the nature and composition of the will, of the sensual desires and of sensual repulsion in all of their diverse forms. (6.1:156; II §16)

This passage underlines the importance for the poet's craft of objective observation of human nature in particular, suggesting that an accurate imitation will be a sort of statistical amalgam drawn from extended scrutiny of individuals.

This observation-based, empirically accurate version of imitation recurs in chapter four of the *Dichtkunst*, which is the first chapter directly concerned with the principle of *Nachahmung*. Gottsched delineates three basic subtypes of imitation. The first type is just the description of some "natürliche Sache" 'natural thing,' (6.1:195; IV §1), i.e. physical description. The second type is the dramatic portrayal of a person. Of this Gottsched writes, "hier muß ein Poet alles, was von dem auftretenden Helden… wirklich und der Natur gemäß hätte geschehen können, so genau nachahmen, daß man nichts unwahrscheinliches dabey wahrnehmen könne" 'here a poet must so exactly imitate everything that in reality and in accordance with nature could have happened with the hero in question… that one can perceive nothing improbable in it' (6.1:199; IV §5). Again, this passage restates the importance of accurate human portrayals, referring not only to nature but also going so far as to use the word *wirklich* (one of only a handful of occurrences in the *Dichtkunst*). Furthermore, this passage contains an essential feature of a poetics of imitation that is rare in the *Dichtkunst*: it clearly acknowledges the fictional nature of poetic imitations, by stating that the poet imitates what *could* happen. The emphasis on the real and natural is immediately followed by a hypothetical subjunctive, thus making it clear that the poet does not reproduce the exact things that do happen, but the general sort of thing that commonly happens. Without this step from the actual to the fictionally probable, a poetics of objective imitation has no logical foundation. This passage (and once later in the sixth chapter) is the closest Gottsched comes to a workable theory of an objectively understood poetics of imitation, a theory that allows for the fictional nature of poetry while basing it on some real external model.

Once Gottsched moves on to the third and, in his opinion, the highest form of poetic imitation, namely the plot, he suddenly lets his moral concerns gain the upper hand and draw his theory away from the more literally understood version of imitation. But the preceding analysis establishes that the initial impulses of the *Dichtkunst* are toward a model of imitation based on a sort of statistically probable objective accuracy. Of course this statement needs to be accompanied by caveats about the constructed and historically variable understanding of reality. I have already described how Gottsched had his own peculiar understanding of what "nature" is, which was heavily conditioned by convention, and certainly even his most literal version of imitation does not attain any transcendent objective accuracy. Gottsched's objective imitation is also far from the nineteenth-century version of realism; while he wants characters to act like real humans, he never widens his cast of characters to include the full social milieu and he tends to prefer certain schematic general plots over the prosaic details and historical groundedness of Realism proper. Nevertheless, if one accepts the difference between a literature that constrains

itself by what it understands as objective reality and a literature that does not so constrain itself, Gottsched's initial tendencies put him in the former camp. He wants to tie literature to the rational certainties of his "nature," and thereby asks literature to reproduce a present model that is distinct from the forward-looking moral visions that he advocates when his didactic principle comes to the fore. Gottsched starts, then, with a significant commitment to the accurate depiction of typical human behavior and natural phenomena. And even when the conflicting imperatives of his didactic principle challenge this stance, he seeks out every possible way to maintain at least a veneer of allegiance to the principle of imitation he so enthusiastically embraced from the start of his poetic reflections. His eventually very attenuated interpretations of imitation are therefore more than just the typical distortions of a worn-out formula; instead they are evidence of the tenacity of Gottsched's imitative principle even under strain. The later versions of imitation arise from the peculiar dynamic that results when a genuine interest in objective imitation seeks to be reconciled with a genuine commitment to the embodiment of practical moral principles in literature.[36]

4. Structural Verisimilitude

The shift away from a more literal understanding of imitation occurs as soon as Gottsched begins to discuss the plot (*Fabel*),[37] which he describes as the third and highest form of poetic imitation. It is no accident that the turn away from imitation occurs together with the move to plot. The first two forms of imitation had referred to static description, and, for someone with Gottsched's commitment to imitation, there is little reason not to require that they accurately adhere to external models. But when he comes to plot he is discussing the action that is expected to carry the moral lesson of the narrative; not surprisingly, then, his paramount concern is now the moral utility of the represented action, and didactic considerations begin to push asided the principle of imitation. Here the two aspects of Gottsched's practical orientation come into conflict: the empirical interest in the world as it is collides with the practical interest in changing that world into what it should be. As a result Gottsched's original, relatively objective idea of imitation changes into a more flexible notion of representation. We no longer encounter the word *Nachahmung*, even though it is the ostensible topic of this chapter; instead Gottsched refers to *Fabeln* (plots) and *Gedichte* (poems). And in a parallel shift, Gottsched now increasingly expects the text to be not *ähnlich* (similar) but *wahrscheinlich* (verisimiliar)—the contrast is particularly clear in the English words. A text can be verisimilar in many abstract ways without actually following in the footsteps of nature.

An abrupt shift in approach is apparent as soon as Gottsched starts to define the plot. Responding to René le Bossu's mid-seventeenth-century treatise on epic poetry, Gottsched writes, "In der That muß eine jede Fabel was Wahres und was Falsches in sich haben: nämlich einen moralischen Lehrsatz, der gewiß wahr seyn muß; und eine Einkleidung desselben in eine gewisse Begebenheit, die sich aber niemals zugetragen hat, und also falsch ist" 'In fact every single plot must contain something true and something false: namely, a moral lesson, which must certainly be true, and a clothing of that lesson in a certain event, which however never occurred

[36] Gottsched's chapter on the genre of opera includes another rousing call for objective verisimilitude. Gottsched denounces opera as a travesty to human nature—people do not act so melodramatically "im gemeinen Leben" 'in ordinary life,' and they certainly do not talk (sing) like that (6.2:366; II.XII §7).

[37] Again, "Fabel" does not refer to the Aesopian fable; see footnote 24.

and therefore is false' (6.1:203; IV §8). In this statement fidelity to nature, acute observation and all the other features of objective imitation are thrown aside; while earlier Gottsched was so committed to similarity that he barely acknowledged the fictional nature of literature, now he openly and strikingly refers to the plot as "false," omitting any statement about how the invented fiction must nevertheless correspond somehow with nature. If there is any sort of verisimilitude in this poetic model, then, it is an "moral verisimilitude" based on the lesson allegorically clothed in the plot. Apparently the only part of nature that need be imitated are the moral norms that undergird the world, as if the transcendent verity of moral truth is alone enough to ground the verisimilitude of a text.

But while moral verisimilitude is powerful, it is not a model that Gottsched pursues at any length. The main sort of verisimilitude put forward during the discussion of plot is a structural verisimilitude, a verisimilitude that concerns itself with internal order rather than external models, and with what is logically possible rather than what is empirically real. The stark notion of the plot as false seen above, then, is quickly abandoned in favor of the new strategy of attributing at least a hypothetical truth to the plot based on structural coherence. The idea is introduced in a central passage of the *Dichtkunst*:

> Ich glaube derowegen, eine Fabel am besten zu beschreiben, wenn ich sage: sie sey die Erzählung einer unter gewissen Umständen möglichen, aber nicht wirklich vorgefallenen Begebenheit, darunter eine nützliche moralische Wahrheit verborgen liegt. Philosophisch könnte man sagen, sie sey ein Stücke von einer andern Welt. Denn da man sich in der Metaphysik die Welt als eine Reihe möglicher Dinge vorstellen muß; außer derjenigen aber, die wir wirklich vor Augen sehen, noch viel andre dergleichen Reihen gedacht werden können: so sieht man, daß eigentlich alle Begebenheiten, die in unserm Zusammenhange wirklich vorhandener Dinge nicht geschehen, an sich selbst aber nichts Widersprechendes in sich haben, und also unter gewissen Bedingungen möglich sind, in einer andern Welt zu Hause gehören, und Theile davon ausmachen. Herr Wolf hat selbst, wo mir recht ist, an einem gewissen Orte seiner philosophischen Schriften gesagt, daß ein wohlgeschreibener Roman, das ist ein solcher, der nichts Widersprechendes enthält, für eine Historie aus einer andern Welt anzusehen sey. Was er nun von Romanen sagt, das kann mit gleichem Rechte von allen Fabeln gesagt werden.
>
> Therefore I believe I best describe a plot when I say: it is the account of an event that is under certain circumstances possible but that has not occurred in reality, and behind which a useful moral truth lies hidden. In philosophical terms one could say, it is a piece of another world. For, since in metaphysics one must imagine the world as a series of possible things; but besides the one that we see before our eyes in reality, still many other such series can be thought of: so one sees that all events that do not happen in our structure of things present in reality, but that in themselves contain nothing contradictory, and therefore under certain circumstances are possible, actually belong at home in another world and are parts of that world. Herr Wolf himself, if I am not mistaken, said in a certain passage from his philosophical writings that a well-written novel, that is, one that contains nothing contradictory, is to be considered as a history from another world. Now,

> what he says of novels, that can with equal justification be said of all narratives. (6.1:204; IV §9)

Just a few pages earlier Gottsched had enjoined the poet to emulate what is real (*wirklich*); now the plot is explicitly *not* real but instead only possible (*möglich*).[38] On first consideration this might seem to be a useful term to ground an objective notion of poetic imitation: it could designate that necessary middle ground where a fiction is neither actually true nor fully false, but instead "possible," i.e. fully compatible with the usual conditions of the real world and prevented from occurring only by arbitrary circumstances. But in fact Gottsched does not pursue that interpretation of the possible, both because it would not be flexible enough to allow for the inspiring moral models he desires in literature and (as will be explained in more depth later) because his metaphysics does not have a space for such a conception of the possible. Instead, he employs a spare logical understanding of the possible: it includes anything "nicht widersprechend" 'not contradictory.' As a result, any logically conceivable configuration is admitted as a "possible world" and as a worthy object of poetic representation. Gottsched here introduces the broadest notion of the verisimilar to be found in the *Dichtkunst*, throwing the doors of poetry open to an endless universe of hypothetical worlds. Logical, cohesive structure is in effect the only requirement for a poetic representation, which can still claim to be an "imitation" by virtue of its resemblance to a postulated "possible world," whose only criterion for existence is internal coherence.[39]

This conception has two main sources: a metaphysical source in Christian Wolff and a poetic source in Aristotle. The theory of possible worlds was prominent in the "Schulphilosophie" of Leibniz and Wolff, of which Gottsched was a devoted proponent. Wolff illustrates the theory with the metaphor of a clock whose particular current setting, as its constituent parts operate according to set rules, determines all past and future configurations—but nevertheless a different clock with different settings showing a different time is certainly possible and is equivalent to a different possible world (*Deutsche Metaphysik* §556). Gottsched incorporates this exact metaphor into the relevant section of his *Weltweisheit*, putting a spin on it that widens its speculative potential even beyond Wolff. Gottsched puts much less empahsis than Wolff on the rules the govern the operation of the world "clock." Meanwhile, he goes out of his way to assert that "Hirngespinste" 'fantasies,' such as a sphinx, are possible; he further assures his readers that "Wunderwerke" 'miracles,' while "übernatürlich" 'supernatural,' are perfectly possible (5.1:230; I §226). The only things Gottsched rejects are logical contradictions such as an iron piece of wood or a mountain without a valley. "Möglich," he writes, "nennet man, was keinen Widerspruch in sich hat, und sich also gedenken läßt" 'We designate as possible that which contains no contradiction and therefore allows itself to be thought' (ibid.). These passages from the *Weltweisheit* give further support to the fact that when Gottsched speaks of the "possible" in chapter four of his *Dichtkunst*, that term encompasses the broadest range of events. Gottsched's "possible" is not limited to the empirical realities of this world, but encompasses everything logically conceivable and coherent merely with respect to itself.

---

[38] Part of Gottsched's problem, as will be explained later in this section, is that he does not have a clear sense of what "real" means when applied to fiction.

[39] Herrmann, in his effort to set up Gottsched as a straw man to the supposedly empirical Bodmer and Breitinger, takes this one idea to be the sum of Gottsched's concept of imitation. He asserts that Gottsched's concept of imitation is only about formal order (114).

A peculiarity of this metaphysics of possible worlds is that it contains no space for literary realism, in the sense of a fiction that is not exactly the same as but nevertheless compatible with the patterns of the existing world. Gottsched's version of possible worlds theory allows for only two categories: on the one hand the one actual existing world, and on the other hand all logically imaginable "possible" worlds, which might contain anything from flying pigs to rivers of molasses. Even if only a tiny particular of the existing world is changed, such as perhaps a house being painted blue instead of green, we are dealing with a "possible world" that is metaphysically indistinguishable from a completely fantastic world. In Gottsched's metaphysics, either a story is one hundred percent historically accurate and belongs to our world, or it is part of a possible world that can be full of fantastic elements. In this dichotomy there is no place for "realistic" fiction; that is, there is no in-between category of a world that operates according to the same rules and general patterns of our world even though the particular people at events have been changed.[40] Gottsched is occasionally able to formulate such a notion on the *linguistic* level, when he uses phrases such as "was… wirklich und der Natur gemäß hätte geschehen können" 'whatever… in reality and in accordance with nature could have happened' (6.1:199; IV §5) or "was wirklich zu geschehen pflegt" 'whatever tends to occur in reality' (6.1:255; VI §1). Here the linguistic combination of the word "real" with a mood of the conditional or typical manages to evoke the concept of a realistically probable fiction—but this concept eludes Gottsched's metaphysics.

Even these linguistic formulations are tenuous and fleeting; they could well be undigested verbatim borrowings from Aristotle's *Poetics* (e.g. the discussion of poetry versus history, 1451b1). Other aspects of Gottsched's use of language affirm his confusion about the modality of empirically-oriented poetic imitations. For example, as seen in the last several quotations, he uses the word "wirklich" in contradictory ways, sometimes associating poetry with the real and sometimes opposing it to the real. Apparently he has trouble with the fact that the imitative poetry he envisions is neither completely false nor completely true. In any case, this lack of philosophical grounding for an empirically accurate yet fictional imitation can partly explain why Gottsched so quickly abandoned his advocacy for the faithful reproductions of nature that had so excited him initially. He was drawn to the idea of portraying the world and humans as they typically are, but since he lacked a philosophical foundation for this modality, and since it caused difficulty for his didactic goal anyway, he never made a concerted effort to delineate the parameters for a fiction that is realistic but not exactly real. Instead he slipped into the wide-open modality of the logically possible.

While Gottsched adopted his metaphysics of possible worlds from Wolff, he took a more literary version of this idea from Aristotle when he adopted Aristotle's focus on the internal cohesion of literary plots. This is one of the more obvious instances of Aristotle's influence on Gottsched. An overriding concern of Aristotle's *Poetics* is the proper structuring of plot, based on the idea that, "there is a vast difference between following from and merely following after" (1452a, Hutton translation). That is, the constituent events of the plot should be linked together with a certain inevitability or probability, and they must be structured around a single unified action at the center of the plot. Gottsched is well aware of Aristotle's position and clearly approves of it, as seen for example when backs up his own ideas about *Fabel* by citing the definition of plot found in the *Poetics*: "die Zusammensetzung oder Verbindung der Sachen" 'the

[40] The concept that Gottsched is missing is that of "fictionality"; see Gallagher's "The Rise of Fictionality" for a discussion of how this concept emerged in the eighteenth-century English novel.

assembly or connection of things' (6.1:203; IV §8). Aristotle's concern for order in plot dovetails well with Gottsched's own appreciation for order, harmony and (to use the philosophically fashionable seventeenth-century terms) "sufficient reason" for every event, and so Gottsched is well inclined to espouse the Aristotelian view of plot structure. Furthermore, this notion of plot coherence has the full weight of Aristotle's authority behind it. Since Gottsched mistakenly viewed Aristotle as the original source of the principle of *Nachahmung der Natur* (even though Aristotle's *mimesis* is rather broader than *Nachahmung*), Gottsched likely viewed Aristotle's principle of coherent plot composition as the natural companion to an imitative poetics. Even the principle of internal cohesion is not imitative in any externally oriented, empirical sense, it may seem to Gottsched to be a consequence of *Nachahmung* since it has such a large place in Aristotle's treatise. In any case, the dual influence of Wolff and Aristotle gives Gottsched two complementary versions of internal-structural verisimilitude: a logical and metaphysical "possible-worlds" version that calls for events to be non-contradictory, and a literary version that requires causal connection between plot elements. Gottsched's earlier concern for externally oriented *Ähnlichkeit* has disappeared, and the text now seeks only to perfect its internal harmony.

The decreased emphasis on external models now allows Gottsched to create a whole category for the kinds of unnatural plots that would have been rejected under his earlier principle of imitation. While classifying plot types, he distinguishes between "unglaubliche" 'unbelievable' and "glaubliche" 'believable' plots. The former contain animals and inanimate objects gifted with reason and speech, while in the latter group human beings are the only active characters (6.1:205; IV §10). These new terms can be understood as part of Gottsched's faltering attempt to pinpoint the difference between objectively imitative and non-imitative or fully invented plots; the distinction between "believable" and "unbelievable" is more successful than the extreme dichotomies of possible worlds theory or the linguistic confusion over whether a plot can be *wirklich* or not. In any case, it is remarkable that here Gottsched no longer limits poetry to believable, objectively accurate plots. At the start of the *Dichtkunst*, Gottsched had seemed willing only to approve of those plots that follow in the footsteps of nature; now these plots are reduced to merely one category of possible plots as Gottsched brings in the category of "unbelievable" stories. Having used possible worlds theory to open poetry up to the vast realm of all that is logically possible, Gottsched has now strayed so far from his original notion of the plot as a faithful imitation of nature that he needs to reintroduce that concept as a particular subtype of the plot. In this new spirit of permissiveness, with this interest only in internal aesthetic harmony, Gottsched has left the concepts of imitation and similarity far behind.

As imitation recedes in chapter four, moral didacticism comes to the forefront. References to morality heavily outnumber references to imitative accuracy in the discussion of plot. In fact the most famous moralizing passage from Gottsched's writings, his "recipe" for concocting a plot based on the chosen moral lesson (quoted above in the discussion of Gottsched's didactic principles), is found in this chapter. In general the entire discussion of the plot is presented in terms of pedagogical function. For example, Gottsched defines a "vollständige" 'complete' plot as one that contains everything necessary for the moral lesson (6.1:209; IV §14) and the "Hauptfabel" 'main plot' is the part that conveys the moral message (6.1:212; IV §17). Finally, the key generic impetus for Gottsched's abandonment of literal imitation cannot be overlooked: the Aesopian fable. A critic as committed to moral utilitarianism as Gottsched could hardly proclaim a poetic doctrine that leaves no room for the entertaining and didactic fable, a genre that was popular not just with the pedantic Gottsched but in Enlightenment literature in general (e.g. Gellert, Lessing, and German translations of La

Fontaine). Gottsched's openness to non-imitative poetry and "unbelievable" plots is formulated specifically with reference to the Aesopian fable with its talking animals and animated objects. As just discussed, Gottsched classifies credible and incredible plots according to whether they include talking nonhuman characters, and we see these Aesopian motifs over and over again whenever he gives an example of something that violates the existing order of things: the phrases "talking animals" and "reasoning trees" turn up multiple times in chapter four's discussion of plot (e.g. 6.1:206; IV §11). The conventions of the Aesopian fable are foremost in Gottsched's mind. In all these ways, then, the deemphasis of objective imitation in chapter four coincides with an upsurge of motifs related to moral lessons and morally instructive genres.

The extreme widening of the sphere of poetic imitation that occurs in this chapter is therefore not just the random vagary of a critic who never took imitation of nature too seriously, but is a distinct result of the need to tack between the demands of the imitative principle and the demands of the moral function. The two exist in a mutually determining relationship: when one of them rises in prominence, the other retreats. When Gottsched speaks of poetics in general introductory terms, he lets his enthusiasm for accurate imitation hold sway, but when he discusses plot specifically, the essential allegorical-didactic import of the action comes to the fore of his mind and fidelity to nature recedes to the background. The broad options made available by the possible worlds model allow for all of the morally useful stories—the implausibly virtuous heroes, unusually neat moral lessons, and unrealistically prompt poetic justice—that were restricted in Gottsched's more literal model of imitation. In the discussion of plot Gottsched is more directly fixated on didactic concerns than anywhere else in the *Dichtkunst*; the ironic result is that precisely in the chapter on imitation he moves as far as ever from the objectively imitative end of the spectrum. In this chapter, a plot need fulfill only the barest of requirements in order to be approved: if it does not contradict itself, it is acceptable according to possible-worlds theory. If we take Gottsched seriously, the stubborn and rigid Leipzig professor is giving his approval to the most inventive and fantastic plots conceivable.

However, it must be noted that even amid the extremities of this chapter several features help preserve a minimum appearance of fidelity to the principle of imitation of nature; Gottsched was never willing to completely abandon *Nachahmung*. First of all, Gottsched's metaphysics allows for the claim that the inventive poet is actually imitating a natural model, albeit a model from a possible world rather than an actual world. The following passage nicely recaps his theory and shows how Gottsched stops just short of allowing for poetic invention:

> Dadurch aber, daß wir die erste Art der Fabeln unglaublich nennen, widersprechen wir der obigen Erklärung noch nicht; darinnen wir behaupteten, die Fabel sey eine mögliche Begebenheit. Es kann ja eine Sache wohl möglich, aber in der That bey der itzigen Ordnung der Dinge sehr unglaublich seyn. Diese Verknüpfung der wirklich vorhandenen Dinge hält ja nämlich nicht alle mögliche Dinge in sich, wie die Weltweisen darthun. Es wären andre Verbindungen endlicher Wesen eben sowohl geschickt gewesen, erschaffen zu werden, wenn es Gott gefallen hätte. Dem Dichter nun, stehen alle mögliche Welten zu Diensten. Er schränket seinen Witz also nicht in den Lauf der wirklich vorhandenen Natur ein. Seine Einbildungskraft, führet ihn auch in das Reich der übrigen Möglichkeiten, die der itzigen Einrichtung nach, für unnatürlich gehalten werden. Dahin gehören auch redende Thiere, und mit Vernunft begabte Bäume, die zwar, so viel uns bekannt

> ist, nicht wirklich vorhanden sind, aber doch nichts widersprechendes in sich enthalten.
>
> However, in calling the first type of plot unbelievable, we are not yet contradicting the earlier explanation, in which we claimed that the plot is a possible event. A thing can after all be well possible, yet very incredible in the current order of things. For the current combination of things present in reality does not contain all possible things, as the philosophers have demonstrated. Other conjunctions of finite beings would have been just as well suited to be created, if it had pleased God to do so. Now, all possible worlds are at the service of the poet. He does not limit his wit to the course of the real, present nature. His imagination leads him also into the realm of the other remaining possibilities, which, according to the current arrangement, are considered to be unnatural. And it is there that the talking animals and the trees gifted with reason belong, which admittedly, as far as we know, are not present in reality but certainly contain nothing contradictory. (6.1:206; IV §11)

The start of this passage demonstrates how Gottsched is immediately uneasy with the excessively loose category of "unbelievable plots," which he had introduced a moment earlier; he hastens to assure us that they have a rational place within the universe of possible worlds. Then, however, the passage closes with words that seem to celebrate poetic imagination and even encourage the poet to abandon the prosaic realities of the existing world, almost putting him on the same plane as God the creator. Yet the words do not quite allow that the invented plot arises solely from the poet's genius. Instead, in Gottsched's description the possibilities already exist outside the poet. They are not imaginative flights of fantasy, but actual places, "possible worlds" of their own, "realms" to which the poet must travel, a certain "there" where the talking animals and rational trees live. The external model has become hypothetical and conditional, but it has not disappeared entirely; Gottsched just barely manages to maintain the minimum framework of an imitative poetics.[41]

Gottsched goes on to even more explicitly remind his readers of the limits on the poet's imagination, stating that the poet must be careful to give his plots "einen gewissen Grad der Wahrscheinlichkeit" 'a certain degree of verisimilitude' (6.1:206; IV §11) but it remains unclear just how this is to be achieved. Gottsched writes that the poet can "eine Fabel durch die andre wahrscheinlich machen" 'make one plot verisimilar by means of the other' (ibid.), for example by simply postulating that there was a time when plants and animals could talk, after which the rest of the plot will be believable. This suggests that the incredible aspects of a plot should be limited to a few initial postulates, but overall this mechanism offers only a closed system of intertextual warrants not much different from the basic requirement for internal non-contradiction already expressed. Still, the mention of verisimilitude indicates that the concern for credibility persists even when Gottsched is mostly concerned with moral efficacy.

Toward the end of chapter four, then, Gottsched is trying to contain the profusion of options opened up by his possible worlds theory but is not finding a clear way to do so. To some degree he is probably tempted to rest satisfied with the structural approach on its own merits. For

[41] J. J. Breitinger also makes extensive use of the theory of possible worlds in order to give his poetics of the marvelous at least a metaphysical basis in imitation (*Dichtkunst* 52-77).

order and harmony are so attractive to Gottsched's rational outlook that they could be seen as the third leg of his poetics, after imitation and ethics. Even though the sole emphasis on internal order leaves the door open to considerable poetic invention and departures from "nature," for a theorist with Gottsched's frame of mind rational structure would seem almost enough in itself to ground a poetic imitation. A well-ordered structure could hardly go too far wrong. Furthermore, an internally ordered text, even though it seems completely indifferent to external natural models, does nevertheless in a way correspond to nature, at least from Gottsched's point of view. Recall that Gottsched's ontology was based on the conviction that nature is ordered. The argument could then be made that any well-ordered imitation is at least in that respect an imitation of nature. A formal rather than an empirical similarity would then be achieved: even if the talking animals contradict the specific facts of the world, they at least, as part of a skillfully composed plot, imitate the harmony of particulars that Gottsched so admired in nature. This consideration helps smooth the transition from a poetics of natural imitation to a poetics of internal structure, contributing to the sensation that this new approach is not such a departure from the previous ideas after all.

In summary, the poetics of chapter four opens up a broad range of possibilities for literature, as verisimilitude is conceived in structural terms of internal cohesion rather than external correspondence. This shift gives poetry the flexibility to pursue moral utility by the most effective means available, even if the talking animals and other implausibilities contradict the realities of the existing world. Yet even though the principle of imitation is stretched to the limit here, it retains a certain attenuated validity. In theory, the possible worlds model allows for almost anything imaginable, but in practice Gottsched does not allow for all kinds of invention. This chapter already hints that in actuality he limits poetry to only a small subset of the "possible worlds" (above all the Aesopian ones). In the next two chapters Gottsched will backtrack further from the wide-open field of logical non-contradiction and find new ways to limit poetic invention while still leaving room for the most rhetorically and didactically effective elements.

5. Subjective Verisimilitude

The topic of the fifth chapter of the *Dichtkunst* is *das Wunderbare* (the marvelous). Although Gottsched is remembered as an opponent of the marvelous due to his role in the Leipzig-Zürich debate, he did in fact recognize the marvelous as an integral and necessary aspect of poetry. The opening of the chapter explains why:

> Nun bewundert man nichts Gemeines und Alltägliches, sondern lauter neue, seltsame und vortreffliche Sachen. Daher mußten die Poeten auf etwas Ungemeines denken, dadurch sie die Leute an sich ziehen, einnehmen und gleichsam bezaubern könnten… An sich selbst… ist dergleichen Mittel, die Leute aufmerksam zu machen, ganz erlaubt: wenn man nur den Endzweck hat, sie bey der Belustigung zu bessern und zu lehren.
>
> Now, people do not admire that which is common and everyday, but only new, strange and excellent things. For this reason poets had to think up something uncommon, by means of which they could pull the people to themselves, win them over and so to speak enchant them… In itself… this sort of method for

> making people take notice is quite permissible, as long as one has the end goal of improving and teaching them while entertaining. (6.1:225; V §1)

According to this passage, the marvelous exists in the first place simply because it is a natural result of crowd-pleasing poetic ambition and an indispensable contributor to the charming effects of poetry. In a second step, however, Gottsched co-opts this pleasurable effect for a practical-moral purpose. Although the wording here suggests that Gottsched merely tolerates the marvelous, it becomes clear in the course of the chapter that the unusual and striking aspects of poetry are in fact essential to the didactic process: they draw the attention of an undisciplined general public and add emotional emphasis to an otherwise dry and unattractive moral lesson.

The marvelous, then, is a pragmatic necessity for a didactic poetics; but it offers a challenge to Gottsched's principle of imitation, suggesting as it does that the most rhetorically effective methods, in fact the *only* effective devices, are those that depart from rather than follow nature. One might expect then that in this chapter Gottsched would continue to weaken his principle of imitation in a concession to practical necessity. But in fact the discussion of the marvelous focuses more on defining limits for the use of wondrous plot elements, and thereby ends up reining in and reestablishing the imitative principle that was nearly abandoned in the previous chapter. Gottsched provides more practical examples here than in previous sections of his treatise and in the process gives precise dispensations for particular marvelous devices, as opposed to the sweeping openness of his possible worlds theory. In describing these rules a new criterion for judging verisimilitude comes to the fore, one that is more limiting than the previous criterion of structural coherence, yet still offers enough flexibility to accommodate the moral function. This new criterion is the subjectivity of the audience: whatever gives the impression of verisimilitude is acceptable.

The criterion of subjective plausibility is more than just a convenient new way to prop up a distended sort of verisimilitude; it in fact has a functional role. As Angelika Wetterer has pointed out, the poetic representation must seem true or else the public will reject the lesson contained therein (89). Rhetorical considerations therefore pull in two directions: they motivate the use of the marvelous for its attention-grabbing properties, but also motivate the adherence to a certain minimal verisimilitude in order that the public not dismiss the message of the poem entirely. From this point of view, Gottsched's allegiance to criteria of imitation and verisimilitude are not based solely on bare convictions about the nature of poetry, but acquire a functional role of their own. Interpreted as a subjective requirement, the principle of verisimilitude is no longer external to the didactic goal; instead the requirements for attention-grabbing impact and for believability are conflicting poles within the rhetorical instrumentalization of poetry. The subjectivity of the audience, then, pervades the considerations of this chapter in dual fashion: it initially motivates the use of the rhetorically striking marvelous, and subsequently serves as the judge for what kinds of the marvelous can be considered verisimilar.

In analytical fashion, Gottsched starts by dividing the wondrous into three general types: that involving gods and spirits, that involving people and their actions, and that involving animals and inanimate objects. It is in the first of these categories that he most obviously uses subjective considerations to justify exceptions to his imitative rule. For example, when launching a pages-long discussion of the proper contexts for invocation of the muses Gottsched writes, "Wenn nun die Poeten, diesem gemeinen Wahne zu folgen [i.e. the idea that poets are inspired by the gods], fleißig die Musen anriefen: so klang es in den Ohren des Pöbels so andächtig… und folglich machte es dem Dichter ein gutes Ansehen" 'When the poets now, in order to go along

with this common delusion [i.e. the idea that poets are inspired by the gods], assiduously called on the muses: then it sounded so reverent in the ears of the commoners… and therefore it added to the good reputation of the poet' (6.1:227-8; V §4). This passage evinces a clear orientation toward the subjectivity of the audience. The poet invokes the muses in order to pander to popular opinion, tailoring the composition according to the way it sounds "in the ears" of the listeners. These subjective considerations are apparently an acceptable explanation for the "marvelous" device of calling on the muses. Gottsched offers no other justification; instead this appeal to popular perception opens a long series of examples in which Gottsched freely grants that invocation of the muses, as long as it is used with the proper genres and subject matter (e.g. only in longer forms, in narrative but not in drama, only for particularly difficult tasks) can be employed "mit guter Wahrscheinlichkeit" 'with good plausibility (6.1:230; V §8). "Plausibility" here is obviously divorced from any external reference and is satisfied by appeal to tradition, convention and the expectations of the audience.

Allegory, another sort of "marvelous" invocation of spirits, is justified in similar fashion. Why are allegories acceptable? Because "wir sind es längst gewöhnt, von Tugenden und Lastern… als von so vielen Personen zu reden" 'we have long been accustomed to speak of virtues and vices… as if they are so many people.' Gottsched furthermore finds allegory most palatable when the poet sticks to "die alten bereits bekannten Namen" 'the old, already familiar names' and when the poet "bey dem, was schon eingeführt ist, bleibet" 'keeps to that which has already been introduced' (6.1:243; V §21). Here again, convention strongly determines the acceptable aberrations from the rule of objective imitation; the poet no longer ranges into all possible worlds, but only into those to which the path is well trodden by literary tradition. Objective accuracy is thereby replaced by that which only *seems* right due to long familiarity. The weight of tradition generates the subjective impression of plausibility.

In making his concessions to subjective judgments of verisimilitude, Gottsched also takes into account the historical variability of popular expectations. For a critic reputed to be stubbornly rule-bound, he demonstrates a remarkable flexibility and awareness of historical change. In Gottsched's view, people were more credulous in the earlier stages of human civilization, more likely to truly believe in magic, miracles or monsters. (Gottsched is very conscious that *his* age, by contrast, is advanced and enlightened.) Because of this historical difference, Gottsched applies a more lenient standard not only to works that were composed long ago, but also to contemporary works that are set in long-ago times. He writes, "Das erste Weltalter hat bey allen Völkern das Vorrecht, daß man ihm gern viel Wunderbares zuschreibt: ja was man itzo seinen eignen Augen nicht glauben würde, das dünket den meisten sehr möglich und wahrscheinlich; wenn es nur vor drey oder vier tausend Jahren geschehen seyn soll" 'The earliest epoch has with all nations the privilege that one readily ascribes to it many marvelous things: and even that which one would nowadays not believe if seen with one's own eyes, seems very possible and verisimilar to most people, if only it is supposed to have happened three or four thousand years ago' (6.1:239-40; V §17). Here again Gottsched uses a vocabulary of belief ("glauben") and seeming ("dünket"); he bases judgments on popular attitudes ("den meisten") and subjective sensory impression ("seinen eignen Augen"). The poet orients himself according to the changing vicissitudes of the masses rather than the constancies of nature. Objective imitation of the actual world has made way for a subjective verisimiltude of possibility.

The vocabulary seen in the passages above contrasts markedly with the terms used earlier, when Gottsched championed a more literal imitation of nature. The words used then emphasized objective observation: "Ähnlichkeit" 'similarity,' "Vorbild" 'model,' "wirklich" 'real,'

"Scharfsinnigkeit" 'keen perception,' "gründliche Erkenntnis" 'thorough knowledge.' Now references to subjective impressions and conventional tradition abound. All of this, however, is the corollary to a more central terminological shift, in which reference to *Nachahmung* (imitation) is replaced by reference to *Wahrscheinlichkeit* (verisimilitude). The subtle move from the former to the latter gives Gottsched the flexibility to bring his imitative and his didactic principles into harmony. For verisimilitude is on the one hand close enough to imitation that Gottsched can treat the two concepts as nearly equivalent, as he did for example in his initial pronouncements on imitation. On the other hand, of course, the semblance of truth implied in "verisimilitude" is a looser concept than "imitation." And so, while it would be difficult to construe "imitation of nature" in the loose and all-encompassing manner necessary for Gottsched's pedagogical ends, the term "verisimilitude" more easily accommodates rhetorically and morally effective, but not strictly imitative, devices. But even as the term gives Gottsched more space to maneuver, it also retains the surface appearance of fidelity to his initially firm imitative principle. Since Gottsched had earlier designated an accurate imitation as "wahrscheinlich," the regular references to *Wahrscheinlichkeit* in chapter five seem to put everything in that chapter under the aegis of the original imitative principle. The subjective interpretation of verisimilitude described above is one of the most successful exploitations of the flexibility of "Wahrscheinlichkeit." It relieves poetry from the confines of accurate objectivity while still upholding at least a subjective truth criterion; Gottsched thereby gains needed flexibility without, as he did in the previous chapter, opening his poetics up to every single logical possibility imaginable.

6. Heroes as Statistical Outliers

The subjective approach to verisimilitude is prevalent mainly in chapter five's discussion of the divine category of the marvelous. When Gottsched moves on, in the same chapter, to his second cateogry of marvelous devices, those related to humans and their actions, he finds a new way to balance need for striking, unusual representations with the demands of verisimilitude and imitation. His method starts from the fact that humans, unlike the gods, are after all a real and observable aspect of nature; therefore Gottsched no longer has to appeal solely to erroneous popular convention in order to establish their acceptability. Nevertheless he faces the problem that the humans commonly found in the world do not provide the shining models necessary for his model of moral utility. Gottsched solves the theoretical conflict by exploiting the wide range of phenomena found in "nature": all he has to do is switch his imitative orientation from the sorts of things that *usually* happen to the extraordinary events that rarely happen. This move gives Gottsched the flexibility to satisfy both of his fundamental poetic criteria. On the one hand, he now emphatically points to nature as the poet's model, thus regaining some of the objective approach that was lost in the preceding interpretations of verisimilitude; on the other hand he explicitly instructs the poet to focus on the remarkable features of nature that increase the rhetorical impact and didactic efficacy of the text. This verisimilitude of extremes is able to make claims to empirical objectivity even if its representations are statistically unlikely. Gottsched's emphasis on the unusual is a departure from earlier sections of the *Dichtkunst*, where he did adhere to what could be called a "statistical" concept of objective verisimilitude, one that imitates nature in its most common manifestations. The oddity-seeking approach that he turns to now could be called an "exceptional" concept of verisimilitude. This "exceptional" version of mimesis

should not be equated with the idea that the poet actually improves on nature by making it more interesting. Rather, Gottsched clearly desires that the poet follow nature closely even as he pushes the poet to seek out the most striking aberrations from the norm.

The atypical heroes that Gottsched now celebrates are, of course, preferred for their ethical utility: they provide readers and viewers with the most inspiring models for emulation as well as the most shocking models of the depravity that must be avoided. In the following passage Gottsched describes the didactic efficacy of this "human" version of the marvelous:

> So wohl das gute als das Böse kann wunderbar werden, wenn es nur nicht etwas gemeines und alltägliches, sondern etwas ungemeines und seltsames ist… ein hoher Grad der Tugend und des Lasters [ist weit mehr zu bewundern] als ein geringerer, der uns gar nichts neues ist. Da nun die Poesie das Wundersame liebet, so beschäfftiget sie sich auch nur mit lauter außerordentlichen Leuten, die es entweder im Guten oder Bösen aufs höchste gebracht haben. Jene stellt sie als lobwürdige Muster zur Nachfolge; diese aber, als schändliche Ungeheuer, zum Abscheue vor. Eine mittelmäßige Tugend, rühret die Gemüther nicht sehr. Ein jeder hält sich selbst für fähig dazu, und also machen dergleichen wahre oder erdichtete Exempel wenig Eindruck… Daher sucht sich ein kluger Poet lauter ungemeine Helden und Heldinnen, lauter unmenschliche Tyrannen und verdammliche Bösewichter aus…
>
> The good as well as the evil can become marvelous, as long we have something that is not common and everyday, but uncommon and strange… a high degree of virtue and of vice [is far more to be admired] than a modest degree that is not at all new to us. Now since poetry loves the marvelous, it therefore also deals only with extraordinary people, who have gone the farthest either in good or in evil. It presents the former as praiseworthy models for emulation; the latter however as shameful monsters to repulse us. A merely average virtue touches our feelings but little. Every person considers himself capable of that, and so these sorts of exempla, true or invented, make little impression… For this reason a wise poet seeks out only uncommon heroes and heroines, only inhuman tyrants and damnable villains… (6.1:243-44; V §22-23)

Every phrase in this passage calls for a poetry of extremes, in fact to the exclusion of all else: poetry, we are told, deals *only* with the rhetorically effective outliers. The aim of poetry is to make an impression, and in a morally utilitarian poetry those striking impressions translate into soaring images of virtue and repugnant images of evil. In this passage Gottsched's calls for extraordinary representations are unmistakable and repetitive; they stand out even more when contrasted with a passage from the second chapter, in which he presents the same idea of hero emulation, but without the emphasis on extremes. In this earlier passage Gottsched writes that poets have a "Pflicht… die Tugendhaften auf eine vernünftige Art zu loben" 'duty… to praise the virtuous in a rational way'; he continues, "Hier malet ein rechtschaffener Poet das an sich selbst schöne Wesen der Tugend, in der Person eines tugendhaften Mannes so liebenswürdig ab, daß es alle, die es sehen, in sich verliebt machen" 'here an upstanding poet so endearingly paints the essence of virtue, which is beautiful in itself, in the person of a virtuous man, that all who see it fall in love with it' (6.1:163; II §21). This passage conspicuously lacks any mention of the

unusual or exceptional; on the contrary, its call for a "rational" portrait and its deliberate statement that virtue is "beautiful in itself" suggest a certain sober moderation: virtue should be portrayed in an attractive way, but since it is always already attractive it need not be pushed to extremes. In this earlier passage, imitation is oriented toward a rational and measured norm. The contrast between the passages from chapters two and five makes clear that the *Dichtkunst* is characterized more by theoretical modulation and contradiction than by uniformity. The earlier passage was still under the influence of Gottsched's opening reliance on the imitation of rational nature, while the later passage shows how his poetic doctrines shift toward the unusual and the extraordinary whenever his interest in the rhetorical-didactic function of literature gains the upper hand.[42]

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, nature does retain an important position within Gottsched's emphasis on the extraordinary. The importance of having a natural model emerges for example in Gottsched's description of how to create a "Geizhals" 'miser': "ich muß alles zusammen suchen, was ich an verschiedenen kargen Leuten bemerket habe, und aus diesen Stücken einen vollkommenen Geizhals zusammen setzen" 'I must seek out and bring together everything that I have noticed in various stingy people, and from these pieces put together a perfect miser' (6.1:245; V §24). To some extent, this approach does go beyond nature, since it is not content merely to find and imitate the most extreme miser available in reality, but actually pulls nature apart into pieces and assembles them into something new. Nevertheless, Gottsched is not calling on the poet to wholly invent the miser; close observation of objective nature is still the foundation of this method, whose first step is to gather together traits that have been observed in real people. The poet takes empirically observed characteristics and brings them together into a statistically improbable conglomeration; the poet can however still assert that the result is theoretically possible in nature, and that the poet is only completing the assembly that nature herself may well have achieved at some point.[43]

As the chapter continues, Gottsched states even more emphatically that his call for the extraordinary does not grant the poet license to depart from nature. In example after example, he characteristically juxtaposes the call for the unusual with the insistence on "natural" limits. Discussing the portrayal of sorrow in a contemporary text, for example, Gottsched declares:

> Das Wunderbare muß noch allezeit in den Schranken der Natur bleiben und nicht zu hoch steigen… Das Seltsame in allen Arten muß noch natürlich und glaublich bleiben, wenn es die Bewunderung, nicht aber ein Gelächter erwecken soll… Der Affect hat bey dem Verluste einer ungemeinen Ehegattinn ungemein und wunderbar sein sollen: er ist aber unglaublich geworden.

[42] Gottsched's position continues to shift whenever he returns to the question of the hero. In his chapter on tragic drama, he is most concerned that the viewer be able to identify with the hero and recommends Aristotle's idea that the hero be a mixed moral type (6.1:312-313; II.X §5). In the preface to his drama *Cato* Gottsched oscillates between the hero as inspiring model and the hero as having human faults. And in an early speech defending the theater, Gottsched marvels over the "Vollkommenheit" 'perfection' of the hero.

[43] The idea of the extreme miser is of course a famous "type" suggested by Molière's *L'Avare*, and the model of poetic composition described in this passage is very close to the peculiarly exaggerated sort of verisimilitude attained by literary "types." The type is a figure whose extreme focus of character is too unlikely to have an exact natural model; nevertheless, individual pieces and pale reflections of the personality are readily discerned in everyday human encounters. The type is drawn from reality but in its extremity has unity and verisimilitude mainly with respect to itself: all of its features are consistent and likely according to the dominant trait that determines it.

> The marvelous must at all times remain in the limits of nature and not rise to undue heights… Strange things in all categories must still remain natural and credible, if they are to arouse admiration rather than laughter… The affect, at the lost of an uncommon spouse, should have been uncommon and marvelous: however it became incredible. (6.1:246-47; V §25)

In addition, we read that the events of the plot must be "seltsam und ungemein… ob es gleich alles ganz natürlich zugeht" 'strange and uncommon… although it all happens quite naturally' (6.1:249; V §28). This same pattern persists when Gottsched moves on to the third category of the marvelous, that related to animals and inanimate objects. Here we read that the poet is not permitted to wholly invent new species of animals—unusual enough specimens can be found in nature: "Neue Gattungen von Thieren zu dichten, ist wohl kaum erlaubt… Das beste und vernünftige Wunderbare ist, wenn man auch bey Thieren und leblosen Dingen nur die Wunder der Natur recht nachahmet, und allezeit dasjenige wählt, was die Natur am vortrefflichsten gemacht hat" 'It is hardly permissible to invent new species of animals… the rational and best sort of the marvelous is when even in the case of animals and lifeless things one correctly imitates only the marvels of nature, and at all times chooses that which nature has made most excellently' (6.1:250; V §29). Finally, unusual natural phenomena can also be taken directly from nature: "Ungewöhnliche Witterungen, Schiffbrüche… sind freylich sehr wunderbar, wenn sie nur natürlich beschrieben werden" 'Unusual weather, shipwrecks… are certainly very marvelous, if only they are described naturally' (6.1:253; V §32).

Nature surges back to prominence in these quotations in its role as the objective standard that sets limits on poetic imitations and that moderates the rhetorical excesses of the marvelous. Even though Gottsched has strayed significantly from his originally more empirical approach, we see nevertheless that "imitation of nature," in its most literal sense, is an abiding concern for him. The mimetic imperative necessarily receded during chapter five's discussion of the divine, but we now see it reassert itself as soon as it finds an opening when the discussion turns to the human realm. The resulting dialectic makes the passages quoted above some of the best for revealing the pull between competing poetic imperatives at the heart of the *Dichtkunst*. The contrapuntal juxtaposition of opposed terms—"marvelous" yet "natural"; "strange" yet "credible"; admirable but not ridiculous—aims to achieve the perfect balance between rhetorical efficacy and rational imitation. The everyday is to be avoided just as much as the absolutely incredible in order to achieve a precise quality that is both unusual and minimally believable. Overall, the acceptable degree of the marvelous is described with the words "seltsam" (strange); "erstaunen" (to be amazed); "vortrefflich" (excellent); "außerordentlich" (extraordinary); or "edel" (noble); that which goes too far, on the other hand, is signified "lächerlich" (ridiculous); "ausschweifend" (wildly digressing); or "ungereimt" (inconsistent). The profusion of various terms, some of which contradict previous statements (e.g. earlier Gottsched had announced that "unglaubliche Fabeln" (unbelievable plots) were a perfectly acceptable category) indicates the unsettled nature of Gottsched's poetics as he vacillates between his imitative and his rhetorical-moral principles. Throughout the *Dichtkunst*, Gottsched tries out many possible ways to harmonize his conflicting poetic principles but never settles firmly on a single approach.

The non-divine types of the marvelous described in the middle of chapter five provide one of the potentially most satisfying solutions to the conflict between an imitative and a didactic poetics. They manage to unite rhetorical impact with objective verity by exploiting the fact that nature itself is a prime source of wondrous events (a fact that was underlined by the cabinets of

curiosities circulating around Europe since the previous century). We see in the quotations above that Gottsched's orientation toward natural models becomes especially pronounced as he moves from humans (where the mediocre average largely overshadows the few outliers) to the animals and meteorological phenomena where nature's extraordinary power, variety and extreme range are on full display. But the human world too offers a wide range of empirically observable oddities, even if their marvelousness needs to be augmented a bit by selecting and combining various particular traits. As a result, nature begins to assist the moral function more than to oppose it, and the push for rhetorically effective, striking and unusual plot elements can lead toward nature rather than away from it. This solution works as long as one abandons the idea that "imitation of nature" needs to be statistically representative. Just as Batteux would later call for imitation of *la belle nature*, Gottsched here asks poets to imitate exceptional nature—thereby opening the door to the memorable heroes that project an ideal moral vision, or to the marvelous devices that hold the attention of the crowd. Gottsched therefore temporarily achieves a reasonably successful unification of his two disharmonious poetic principles: a plot can after all be an accurate imitation without sacrificing its impact on the audience. But of course this "exceptional" version of verisimilitude remains but one solution among many shifting attempts to establish a morally visionary yet imitative poetics in the course of the *Dichtkunst*. Despite its potential, the "exceptionalist" approach remains inadequate since several rhetorically necessary poetic devices remain outside its purview: divinities, talking animals, etc. As a result, this "exceptional" verisimilitude coexists with the previously deployed approaches of "subjective" and "structural" verisimilitude. All of these approaches together constitute an admission that the simple model of imitation of nature, which Gottsched asserted at the opening of the poetics, is not adequate to satisfy the requirements of a didactically oriented literature.

7. "Hypothetical" Verisimilitude

After several chapters of frequent reference to verisimilitude, Gottsched finally addresses the concept directly in chapter six, "Von der Wahrscheinlichkeit in der Poesie" ("On verisimilitude in poetry"), which is the last chapter of the *Dichtkunst* that is devoted to general poetic principles. (The remainder of the *Dichtkunst* is devoted to questions of style, metaphor and versification, followed by treatments of individual genres in volume two.) Inconsistency reigns in this chapter: Gottsched freely borrows from all of the versions of verisimilitude described above, so that the culmination of his principle of imitation is a hodgepodge of standards selected according to what best justifies the genres or poetic works that he himself prefers for extraneous reasons.

The chapter opens with an emphatic return to the most literally understood version of verisimilitude. In statement that largely echoes the initial pronouncement on imitation from chapter one, Gottsched reiterates that the marvelous must be "glaublich" (credible), and then continues:

> Daher kömmt es denn, daß man auch im Dichten eine Wahrscheinlichkeit beobachten muß, ohne welche eine Fabel, Beschreibung, oder was es sonst ist, nur ungereimt und lächerlich seyn würde. Ich verstehe nämlich durch die poetische Wahrscheinlichkeit nichts anders, als die Aehnlichkeit des Erdichteten, mit dem,

> was wirklich zu geschehen pflegt; oder die Uebereinstimmung der Fabel mit der Natur.
>
> And this is why one must also observe a verisimilitude in the composition of poetry, without which a plot, description, or whatever else it is, would only be inconsistent and ridiculous. For I understand poetic verisimilitude to be nothing other than the similarity of the composition with that which tends to occur in reality; or the agreement of the plot with nature. (6.1:255; VI §1)

The traces of Gottsched's earlier concessions are gone. Here he is once again using the word *wirklich* (real) rather than *möglich* (possible). He is once again speaking of *Ähnlichkeit* (similarity) and *Übereinstimmung* (agreement) with objective nature, rather than of what subjectively seems to be true. And he is no longer directing poetry toward the exceptional, but specifically says it imitates the sorts of things that usually happen (thus in a rare instance achieving the precise formulation for a realistic fiction, which does not directly imitate "nature" but only the things that tend to happen in nature). The reappearance here of this more literal point of view reinforces the argument that Gottsched's concept of verisimilitude is no mere modality or conventionalized decorum (the arguments, respectively, of Bruck and Herrmann). Consistently, when Gottsched expresses his principle of imitation in isolation, free of the distractions of didactic considerations and specific examples, he presents it in literal and objective terms. Although Gottsched's account of his imitative poetics is inconsistent and inadequately developed, the core idea that the poet depicts the things that we tend to see in the world around us seems to be the preferred stance that he reverts to when possible; he expresses this point of view at the start of the *Dichtkunst* and repeats it again in the chapter that closes his theoretical discussions.

However, a skeptic would rightly point to the fact that Gottsched abandons the more literally empirical position *very* quickly, in the case of chapter six almost as soon as he has proclaimed it. As always, Gottsched's reflexive attraction to a poetics of genuine imitation coexists with a remarkable willingness to stretch that principle to its limits. And so, in the very next paragraph, Gottsched introduces a major qualification. The above statement, he acknowledges, seems to contradict the allowances he made earlier for the "unbelievable plots" in which animals speak. And so he finds a way around this: "Soll nun die Wahrscheinlichkeit in allen Gedichten herrschen, so wird man etwa sprechen: so müssen ja alle diese thierische Begebenheiten ganz verworfen und aus der Poesie verbannet werden. Allein man muß hier die poetische Wahrscheinlichkeit in eine unbedingte und eine bedingte Wahrscheinlichkeit abtheilen" 'Now if verisimilitude is to hold sway in all poems, then one might for instance say: in that case all these occurrences with the animals must after all be totally rejected and banished from poetry. But here one must separate poetic verisimilitude into an absolute and a conditional verisimilitude' (6.1:256-57; VI §2). The typical fantastic motifs of the fable, Gottsched goes on to explain, have a "hypothetische Wahrscheinlichkeit" 'hypothetical verisimilitude,' a verisimilitude that, as Gottsched explains, "unter gewissen Umständen dennoch statt hat, wenn gleich so schlechterdings keine vorhanden wäre" 'in certain circumstances nevertheless holds, even if no such circumstances are fully at hand' (6.1:256-57; VI §3). This somewhat dubious-sounding equivocation means simply that the poet can ask us to suspend our disbelief on one or two discreet points. As long as the remaining aspects of the literary text do accord with nature, the text has an acceptable degree of verisimilitude. Gottsched gives the example of a fable in

which the trees choose a king: "das ist an sich selbst, in dieser Welt, weder möglich noch wahrscheinlich" 'that is in itself, in this world, neither possible nor verisimilar.' Nevertheless a write *can* use this idea in a plot:

> …der es an ihrer hypothetischen Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht im geringsten mangelt. Denn man darf nur die einzige Bedingung zum voraus setzen, daß die Bäume etwa in einer andern Welt Verstand und eine Sprache haben: so geht alles übrige sehr wohl an. Es wird möglich und wahrscheinlich seyn, daß sie in ihrer Wahl auf den Oelbaum fallen werden…
>
> …which is not in the least lacking in hypothetical verisimilitude. For one need only presuppose the sole condition that the trees, for instance in another world, have understanding and a language: then all the rest functions very well. It will be possible and verisimilar that their choice will fall on the olive tree… (6.1:256-57; VI §3)

In this example, commonplace ideas about human nature are transferred to the trees, giving the story the impression of conditioned plausibility that Gottsched rightly finds in it. Meanwhile, the appeal of the story is heightened by the wondrous displacement of the plot onto the kingdom of the trees. The perfect mix of the marvelous and the verisimilar is thereby achieved in this instructive story, which Gottsched incidentally found in the Old Testament.

One of the most significant features of this hypothetical verisimilitude, as becomes clear in the examples Gottsched provides, is that it limits the impossible aspects of the text to a small, easily stated set of one or two postulates, ensuring that the story will become (in the vocabulary of the previous chapter) neither "ausschweifend" (wildly digressing) nor "lächerlich" (ridiculous). A proper, reasoned order is maintained, with a neat pairing of a few initial imaginative postulates with the conventional development of the plot thereafter. The notion of hypothetical verisimilitude is therefore nothing other than a commitment to a standard verisimilitude of objectivity and typicality combined with the willingness to grant one or two discreet exceptions. The main contribution of this proposed "hypothetical verisimilitude," then, is the new implication that fantastic exceptions should be precise and limited. When it comes to justifying the exceptions themselves, Gottsched has recourse to all his earlier attenuated versions of verisimilitude, so that the examples given in this chapter serve as a retrospective of the methods deployed in previous chapters.

Subjective verisimilitude, for example, is given a generic twist when Gottsched justifies the scene in the *Iliad* where Achilles chases Hector at length around the walls of Troy while the rest of the army stands still. This would be ridiculous on the stage, Gottsched writes, but it comes across as verisimilar in an epic, especially when such improbabilities are artfully concealed (6.1:258; VI §4). An objectively implausible event is therefore justified when the chosen genre allows for the impression of believability. A "structural" version of verisimilitude is also applied to justify Homer: Gottsched writes that incredible things, such as the involvement of gods in human affairs, can be made "wahrscheinlich und glaublich" 'verisimilar and credible' "durch den Zusammenhang mit andern Begebenheiten" 'through the connection with other occurrences' (6.1:258, VI §5). This "connection" of plot devices was a key feature of the internally-oriented verisimilitude first proposed during the discussion of plot in chapter four. Gottsched's already noted willingness to make concessions to historical change appears when he asserts, contrary to

the opinion of other critics, that it is perfectly plausible for Achilles to personally serve food to guests. In ancient times, Gottsched explains, it was usual even for a high-ranking individual to perform such service (6.1:260; VI §7). Finally, the requirement for internal cohesion makes another appearance when it is used to reject poetry that contains a mix of references to pagan and Christian gods (6.1:263; VI §11)—each alone could be justified, but together they lose verisimilitude because they lack consistency. Most of the numerous examples in this chapter on *Wahrscheinlichkeit* can be tied to one or another of the more abstract versions of verisimilitude developed in previous chapters of the *Dichtkunst* and analyzed above. As a result, it becomes clear that the category of hypothetical verisimilitude does not allow any and every extraordinary motif to be excused as an initial postulate. Instead the suspension of disbelief that enables hypothetical verisimilitude only extends as far as the limits laid out in previous chapters. It turns out that the unreal conditions must themselves must have their own sort of plausibility, grounded in the subjective effect or structural cohesiveness that they generate.

And just as Gottsched, in the previous chapters, deployed his various versions of verisimilitude not so much for their own sake as for the sake of the rhetorically necessary literary devices that they enabled, so in this chapter he distributes his approval and condemnation quite inconsistently. As he does throughout the *Dichtkunst*, he uses the versions of verisimilitude that are at his disposal to justify (or denounce) the literary elements of which he is already either a fan or a foe; he does not rigorously start from a particular understanding of verisimilitude for its own sake and investigate what sorts of things it allows. For example, Gottsched is unwilling to excuse the fact that Virgil's *Aeneid* allows for an encounter between Aeneas and Dido despite the fact that the Phoenician queen lived a few hundred years after the Roman hero. Of course this plot could be made workable by instituting the simple hypothesis that the two were contemporaries, but Gottsched ignores that possibility. Perhaps because this particular inaccuracy has no useful rhetorical effect and merely perpetuates historical misconceptions, he sees no reason to use one of the arguments in his repertoire to justify it.

The judgments Gottsched makes in this chapter reveal a certain pattern of preferences with regard to the observance of objective imitation. The moral utilitarianism that was so prominent in earlier chapters seems to have lessened, and in the absence of that rhetorical pressure we can more clearly observe in which general areas Gottsched has a more unbending dedication to imitative accuracy. A general concern for accuracy with regard to human character is most prominent, which is unsurprising considering that Gottsched expressed interest in correct human portrayals in earlier chapters as well. Gottsched refuses to accept hypothetical conditions that violate a conventional understanding of human nature. For example, he is offended by the way Homer's heroes carry on long conversations with their adversaries in the heat of battle: "Warum schlagen sie nicht lieber zu? Warum verderben sie die Zeit mit einem unnöthigen Geplauder? Hier läuft alles wider die Natur menschlicher Affecten, die zu allen Zeiten einerlei gewesen" 'Why don't they strike at each other instead? Why do they ruin the time with unnecessary chatter? Here everything runs counter to the nature of human emotions, which have been the same in all periods' (6.1:261; VI §8). Human actions are the cornerstone of Gottsched's imitative principle; we have seen that he was willing to make allowances for historical change in several instances, but he clings strongly to his belief in an objective and eternal human nature. Divinity is another sacred realm for Gottsched (even though his own religion was rationalized and unorthodox). Despite his willingness to acknowledge historical variability, Gottsched cannot stomach the fact that Homer paints the gods with so many human failings, even though such an

image of the gods was fairly common in those "unenlightened" times (6.1:259; VI §6). Divine nature, just like human nature, is apparently invariable and nonnegotiable.

Finally, disorder is a recurring target of Gottsched's disapproval in this chapter. He is repulsed by the profusely fantastic adventures of Ariosto's Roland, which are "gewiß eher den Träumen eines Kranken… als der vernünftigen Dichtung eines Poeten ähnlich… weil weder Wahrscheinlichkeit, noch Ordnung darinn anzutreffen ist" 'certainly more like the ravings of a sick man… than the rational composition of a poet… since neither verisimilitude nor order is to be found there' (6.1:268; VI §18). A similar judgment is applied to Marino, and above all to Milton's excessive perversions during his description of hell, such as the birth of Death from the incestuous encounter of Satan with his own daughter. Order, which I have already suggested is possibly the third leg of Gottsched's poetics, becomes an across-the-board criterion for deciding which texts can be granted any sort of verisimilitude. It works together with the requirements for subjective credibility and structural cohesiveness to block any text from becoming too fanciful. In the end we are reminded that the principle of imitation of nature itself was so attractive to Gottsched probably because of the ordered, rational foundation it provided for literary production. In any case, the firmly stated commitment to the accurate reproduction of nature expressed at the opening of the sixth chapter has by the end of the chapter modulated into a general, nonreferential desire for rational and ordered plausibility. The chapter concludes therefore with a version of verisimilitude that has been turned back toward the abstract and back toward internal and subjective considerations. This chapter is a fitting close to the general theoretical section of Gottsched's *Dichtkunst*, as it showcases in many practical examples how Gottsched employs multiple understandings of verisimilitude in order to delineate the boundaries of poetic representation in a way that achieves the precise balance of rigidity and flexibility required by his own rhetorical needs and preferences.

CONCLUSION

Two types of truth collide in Gottsched's *Dichtkunst*: an empirical truth and a normative truth. The desire to describe a literature that satisfies both kinds of truth at once generates the dynamic variety of approaches offered in the course of the text. Gottsched, who eagerly sought the one principle that would rationally establish the essence of poetry, ironically ends up with two separate principles, a conflicting "material cause" and a "final cause," that give his *Dichtkunst* more disorder than order. As described in the course of this analysis, Gottsched variously switches between imitation and a more permissive type of verisimilar representation, between objective and subjective measures of verisimilitude, between external reference and purely internal concerns, between an orientation toward what is real and an openness to what is merely possible, and between a call for statistical typicality and the insistence that the text deliberately seek out the atypical. Overall, Gottsched's theoretical preference is for an objectively imitative literature, but he readily departs from the requirement for empirical accuracy if the text in question exhibits at least a structurally cohesive order, or appeals convincingly to popular beliefs, and especially if it has a strong moral intention.

This analysis contributes to the understanding of Gottsched's poetics mainly by drawing attention to the shifting multiplicity of his poetic views. The mere fact that Gottsched's "imitation

of nature" often does not actually refer to the literal, objective reproduction of nature is of course not surprising or particularly interesting—the phrase was a widely circulating formula that was given many stretched interpretations. What *is* interesting is to recognize the specific way that the attempt to accommodate a moralizing poetics generated Gottsched's many different conceptions of imitation and verisimilitude. The imitative and the didactic imperatives are the dual constitutive poles of the *Dichtkunst*, clearly pronounced at the end of chapter one and then unfolding in a mutually determining interaction throughout the succeeding chapters. Critics have often attempted to reduce Gottsched's mimetic principle to a single concept, but this approach cannot do justice to the dynamic substance of the *Dichtkunst*. Scholarship has also tended to downplay the more objective and empirical aspects of Gottsched's poetic and philosophical views. Gottsched's genuine interest in objective imitation needs to be recognized as an essential element in his outlook; it anchors one end of the spectrum in his shift between literal and abstract understandings of verisimilitude and provides the essential counterbalance to his didactic principle. Without the initial objective mimetic orientation the conflict that structures the *Dichtkunst* would not even get started.

Besides analyzing Gottsched in particular, the discussion of the *Dichtkunst* allowed for the elaboration of several subcategories of verisimilitude that will be useful in pinpointing the imitative orientation of later texts. Each version has been reiterated many times already, but, in summary, the main variations were: an objective, statistically typical imitation; an objective imitation oriented toward the exceptional; a verisimilitude of bare logical possibility; a verisimilitude of structural-compositional cohesiveness; and a verisimilitude that aims at the subjective impression of truth. "Hypothetical" verisimilitude was not really a separate category, but a license for a range of different conditional departures from verisimilitude.

Finally, this reading of Gottsched is also intended to suggest a model relevant to literary studies in general. I was originally drawn to study Gottsched not so much for his own sake as because I saw in his poetics the theoretical encounter of two principles whose interaction, I am convinced, presents a configuration worthy of concerted investigation. Visionary, world-transforming and imitative, world-reflecting impulses often occur as a pair in literary aesthetics—they both result from the desire for poetry to grapple in the most direct way with our understanding of the world, an understanding simultaneously of how it is and how it should be. But these two interests—not always, but only in the case of an especially direct approach to mimesis and didactic intent—can pull literature in two different directions, producing a particular type of poetic theory and a particular type of literature that strains to bridge the gap between what is and what should be. This conflict is certainly not inevitable; it arises only when a text locates its visionary, socially and morally transformative impulse in the same part of the text that is supposed to be imitative—i.e. in the plot and the characters, and only when they are meant to convey some clear, positive model for moral behavior. There are of course many ways that a text can have moral or socially transformative import without directly instilling a positive moral lesson on the level of the representation. A text can merely point the reader to a previously unrealized part of existence, or can provide a sort of general, practical, compendium of vicarious experience free of any specific normative message. Or, regardless of specific content, the didactic, transformative effect can arise out of the aesthetic encounter, out of a cognitive impact that has nothing to do with specific practical situations. All of these options are very real; however, the actual history of literature demonstrates that texts very often do seek to effect change through the more simplistic and direct means of a tendential plot and character—perhaps recognizing that most people do after all "read for the plot." Current work on ethics and literature

has done an excellent job of exploring the most subtle and abstract ways that a text can carry out an ethical or moral function. However, in pursuing the most theoretically interesting and complex modes of ethical communication, the more abstract theories sidestep an encounter with the problems and issues—and strange and fascinating phenomena—that arise when a very concrete and embodied understanding of literary didacticism collides with a genuine aspiration toward objective imitation.

This dissertation traces that encounter in a small sampling of German and Russian texts. Gottsched's *Dichtkunst* displays the clash of didacticism and imitation in the realm of poetic theory; the next chapter examines how that encounter plays out in a text of narrative fiction, Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*. The situation Wieland faces is more acute than Gottsched's. For Gottsched's commitment to objective imitation, while enthusiastic at first, was in the end fairly shallowly rooted and underdeveloped, and in addition his optimistic conception of nature helped reduce the gap between empirical realities and moral ideals. Thus, although he foreshadows the developments that this configuration would produce in later decades and centuries, Gottsched's solution to the encounter of imitation and transformation is somewhat awkward, stuck between the literary formulas and authorities of the seventeenth century and the faintly appearing impulse to try out a refreshed, newly objective approach to poetic imitation. Wieland, on the other hand, is more persistent and practically oriented in his desire to counteract what he saw as the unnatural portrayal of characters in eighteenth-century narrative. He also has a more pessimistic view of the possibilities for moral conduct and human happiness in the world. Paired with the didactic interest of his novel, this produces an intense nexus of conflicting forces in the portrayal of his hero Agathon.

Chapter 2

Impossible Virtue in the Mid-Enlightenment: C.M. Wieland's Early Work through *Geschichte des Agathon*

> Kurz, seine Erfahrungen machten ihm die Wahrheit seiner ehemaligen Denkungs-Art verdächtig, ohne ihm einen gewissen geheimen Hang zu seinen alten Lieblings-Ideen benehmen zu können.
>
> In short, his experiences led him to question the truth of his former mode of thought, but were not able to deprive him of a certain secret fondness for his old favorite ideas. (*Agathon* 346; ch. 8.6) [1]

Christoph Martin Wieland's early work, from the 1750s through the 1760s, represents the high point of the clash between an imitative and a didactic poetics during the German Enlightenment. His work offers a rich field for study because the twin concerns of verisimilitude and ethics are intensely entwined in his poetic production on multiple levels. These two concerns, first of all, define the early evolution of his career, as the almost comically seraphic young Wieland makes a very self-aware transition to a more worldly mode of writing, without ever fully renouncing his original idealistic inclinations. This gradual shift toward greater empiricism occurs in a series of works written in the 1750s. Wieland's early publications offer a concrete illustration of the difficult interaction of imitative and didactic modes in the work of a developing and striving young writer, and thus display the conflicting and evolving poetic currents of the mid-eighteenth century in general. Secondly, the struggle with these two equally alluring aesthetic imperatives marked Wieland's literary consciousness so strongly that it also

[1] All quotations from *Geschichte des Agathon* are drawn from the 1766-67 version as reprinted by Deutscher Klassiker Verlag under the editorship of Klaus Manger. (Manger's edition also includes additional material from later versions in appendices.) Quotations will be identified by page number followed by book and chapter number for ease of reference between different editions. Quotations from Wieland's works prior to *Agathon* are taken from the 1986 reprint of the 1909-1939 *Gesammelte Schriften* (the "Akademie-Ausgabe"), and are identified by volume and page number (the volume number for the original Akademie edition, which differs slightly from the volume number in the reprint, is given in parentheses). If chapter or section numbers are available, I supply those as well. Finally, quotations from Wieland's correspondence are taken from the *Briefwechsel* edited by Seiffert et. al. I give the volume and page number followed by the date if not already indicated. Wieland's spelling in both German and French is often erratic and is given as printed. All translations into English are my own.

came to be overtly expressed on the thematic level in several of his most acclaimed works. The verse narrative *Musarion* (1768) and the novels *Don Sylvio* (1764) and *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766-67) all revolve around moments in which the hero's excessively ethereal idealism is challenged by the undeniable physicality and the rough imperfections of the sublunary world. In these works, the literary-theoretical tension between imitation and moral vision finds its fleshed-out counterpart in portrayals of actual lived experience, as protagonists struggle to find a workable middle path between realism and idealism. Finally, one more factor makes Wieland's work such an intensely involved site for the intersection of an imitative and a didactic poetics: his work is not an isolated case, but emerges precisely during the period in which the interaction of these two principles was becoming a prominent topic in broader literary discourse. This was particularly the case in the theory of the novel, where a more realistic mode was being advocated expressly for the sake of greater *moral* utility, in a reaction against the seemingly unattainable and overdone virtue of the Richardsonian character. The unique poetic configuration that lies at the intersection of imitation and of moral vision was therefore key to the dynamic literary culture of the mid-eighteenth century in Germany, and achieved its fullest expression in the most successful and widely read writer of the period, Christoph Martin Wieland—before being displaced and overshadowed by the new set of aesthetic values promoted in the subsequent movements of *Sturm und Drang*, Weimar Classicism and German Romanticism, whose influence even to this day tends to impede our view of the immediately preceding decades.

Why is it that the mimetic-didactic configuration sketched above was swept aside by a series of seemingly much more vital and productive literary modes in the later part of the eighteenth century? Although it would be foolish to offer a single definitive answer to this question, one reason may be that the mid-eighteenth century defined its literary goals in a way that was doomed to failure. The reconciliation of imitation and ethics, of description and prescription, can really only happen in a modality halfway between the two, a zone best described as the "possible." This modality encompasses situations and characters that are not particularly likely—but that do occur on rare occasions, or situations that are not on par with the utopian ideal, but are at least a step ahead of the norm. "Possible" is a wonderfully useful term for delimiting this sort of space since it sets up semantic boundaries in two directions: compared to the impossible, "possible" is a limiting term that confines us to the attainable; it can have a dampening effect that shuts down overly enthusiastic and unrealistic speculation. But compared to everyday commonalities, "possible" is a broadening term that pushes us out to the edges of our comfortable routines, asking us to consider how the status quo could be changed; the word has an invigorating effect when we speak, for example, of opening up a "world of possibilities." And so the word points precisely to the sphere that a writer or theorist with coexistent didactic and imitative inclinations would desire: the sphere of *plausible* progress.

But mid-Enlightenment literary culture, and Wieland in particular, proved unable to pull off the balancing act required to unite the verisimilar with the moral ideal in the sphere of the possible. The problem was that, even as eighteenth-century writers strained to encompass both requirements in their work, at the same time they pushed the spheres of the real and the ideal apart into intractably opposed extremes. The worldly sphere was just too fallen to ever satisfy the noble, optimistic strivings of the pious Enlightenment reformer, and the sphere of virtue was too inviolable to be sullied by any concessions to pragmatic realities. And so the story of Wieland's early work is the story of an early and deeply rooted interest in the realm of ecstatic moral visions, of the development of an equally intense commitment to worldly pragmatism, of repeated attempts to balance the one with the other in his first major novel *Geschichte des*

Agathon (*The History of Agathon*), and finally of the complete capitulation that occurs when the two terms, as a result of Wieland's own parameters, ultimately refuse to enter into any sort of workable harmony. Wieland's work explicitly establishes as its goal this realm that I have labeled the "possible"—only to ultimately dramatize its impossibility. In the following pages, after sketching the relevant scholarship on Wieland, I will trace the development of Wieland's worldly aesthetic out of his visionary aesthetic in the course of his publications during the 1750s, and then will analyze the clash of these two fully developed principles in the first version of *Geschichte des Agathon*.

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

The notion of a "turn" in the early stages of Wieland's career toward what is variously described as empiricism, realism, history, truth or worldly experience has been repeatedly documented by scholars. Friedrich Sengle's still-unsurpassed 1949 biography of Wieland, one of the seminal works in the gradual rehabilitation of Wieland from the tenaciously lingering Romantic disdain for Enlightenment culture,[2] established the idea of a "grosse Wandlung" 'great change' (89) resulting from Wieland's correspondence with his physician friend Johann Georg Zimmermann and from Wieland's increasing interest in French materialist philosophers. Sengle presents this turn as a major step in Wieland's growing self-assertion and personal independence after the ascetic and moralizing tone that marked the young writer's sojourn in Zürich. Sengle's biographical insight was picked up and developed in several more poetologically oriented works in the 1960s and 1970s. Wolfgang Preisendanz, for example, argues in a 1963 lecture that Wieland's work marks a shift in the eighteenth-century understanding of imitation from a rational or structural understanding of verisimilitude to a concept of imitation that is genuinely oriented toward human nature and typical worldly experience ("Auseinandersetzung"). Klaus Oettinger fleshes out this idea in a 1970 book presenting Wieland as a sort of Lockean empiricist who rejects the poetics of the marvelous (*das Wunderbare*) in favor of history (*Geschichte*), which is understood as a set of general truths about human nature. Finally, the idea of a "Wandlung" or "Krise" ("change" or "crisis") in the late 1750s is still alive in Sven-Aage Jørgensen's contribution to a collaborative overview of Wieland published in 1994; Jørgensen particularly gives credit to Wieland's Shaftesbury infatuation for the shift away from his earlier "Platonic" phase (42-46).

While these analyses acknowledge the contrast between an earlier more "idealistic" phase and a later more "realistic" phase, they overemphasize Wieland's empirical tendencies, casting Wieland's transformation as a decisive rejection of all Platonic reverie in favor of a full embrace of lived experience and real human nature. Oettinger even goes so far as to argue that, in the major opposition between the idealist Agathon and the materialist Hippias in *Geschichte des Agathon*, the author is thoroughly on the side of the materialist who mocks Agathon's idealistic enthusiasm (71)—even though most readers of the novel have rightly recognized that Hippias's

[2] See Nowitzki for an account of the many fluctuations in the reception of Wieland. In addition, Benjamin's article provides an interesting snapshot of the ambivalent relationship to Wieland that prevailed prior to his post-WWII revival—Benjamin praises Wieland while also claiming that he is no longer relevant.

position is no more satisfactory than that of Agathon. These approaches are perhaps overly influenced by the admittedly remarkable preface to *Agathon*, in which the narrator expressly declares his intentions to create a believable hero and a plausible story. But the preface to *Agathon* cannot be taken as the last word. As suggested in the above introduction, Wieland's worldly turn by no means entails the total repudiation of his earlier visionary inclinations; instead, the result of his empirical shift is that both tendencies coexist and generate the intense contradictions that are the very essence of Wieland's first mature works. While the studies by Sengle, Oettinger and Preisendanz greatly enhance our understanding of how contemporary empirical and materialist philosophies influenced Wieland's poetics, an accurate account of Wieland needs to acknowledge the persistent moral and visionary aspects of his work as well.

Many studies of Wieland, and in particular the analyses of *Geschichte des Agathon*, do in fact note the contradictions inherent in the combination of prescriptive and descriptive literary intentions. But these contradictions are often pointed out with a brief and tantalizing comment that, while precisely recognizing the logical problem, fails to explore the elaboration or resolution of the problem in any depth. Walter Erhart, a distinguished scholar of Wieland who wrote the entry on *Geschichte des Agathon* for the recently published Wieland *Handbuch*, notes that the ironic utopian ending of the novel results from the "Aporien seines philosophisch-theoretischen Entwurfs" 'aporias of its philosophical-theoretical framework' (266), but he privileges an "anthropological" analysis over an investigation of this aptly characterized aporia. Klaus Schaefer similarly mentions the "Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit" 'conflict between ideal and reality' (52) in *Agathon*, and even connects the situation of the novel to the broader cultural contradictions of Enlightenment-era optimism and disillusionment—but this comment remains underdeveloped amid Schaefer's wide-ranging discussion. Anna Richards' chapter on the Enlightenment novel in the recent *Camden House History of German Literature* also notes the conflicts between verisimilitude and improbability, between an average and an extremely virtuous hero, in *Agathon*, but the chapter format is too short for her to pursue her insights.

As the citations above suggest, the logical difficulties of *Geschichte des Agathon* are in fact quite overt. The narrator regularly reminds us that his goal is to somehow reconcile a Platonic and a materialist philosophy, and the impossibility of this task becomes explicit above all in the abruptly utopian ending to the novel, where the narrator directly states that the tensions of his story can only be resolved via a retreat to the exceptionally perfect community of Tarent. Consequently, some mention of the conflict between the prescriptive and the descriptive aspects of the novel easily makes its way into even the most brief analysis of the novel. Moreover, the closing Tarent episode provides a convenient answer to the interpretive problem: a critic can simply point out that *Agathon* takes on poetic and thematic tasks that are essentially impossible, and that the utopian ending represents the inevitable capitulation to these impossibilities. This sort of brief account is accurate, but limited; it impedes a more substantial analysis of the interacting currents of imitative and didactic poetic theories. The closing Tarent episode is only the final response to a poetic conflict that appears in various intricate guises earlier in the novel as well. Our current understanding of the interaction of imitation and ethical prescription in *Agathon* is quite limited because scholarship often stops after having noted this problem only in its simple and broad outlines. We need a more thorough analysis of how the struggle between these two key poetic principles structures the whole novel.

A few works have given somewhat more attention to the conflicting poetic strands in Wieland's prose. Wilhelm Vosskamp's work on early novel theory in Germany, which will be

discussed in more depth below, provides essential context for the sort of analysis proposed above. Vosskamp shows how a tension between historical-empirical and teleological-moral tendencies was apparent already in the literary culture of the decades preceding the publication of *Agathon*. Furthermore, Vosskamp recognizes that it is precisely in Wieland's novel that this tension reaches new heights; he briely suggests that the tension can be resolved via the aesthetic distance offered by the foregrounded narrator (194).

Horst Thomé is the only scholar who devotes a longer study to the interaction of the empirical *and* the moral in Wieland's work. His 1978 *Roman und Naturwissenschaft* develops the lines of inquiry suggested by Sengle, Oettinger and Preisendanz. Like them, Thomé describes an "empiristische Wendung" 'empirical turn' (117) in Wieland's early career. In particular, Thomé contrasts the rational-metaphysical outlook of Wieland's early philosophical poem *Natur der Dinge* with the new scientific, experience-based approach of *Geschichte des Agathon*; in the process Thomé provides a wealth of contextual information on the contemporary philosophical currents that would have influenced Wieland, including Locke, Diderot, Helvétius and La Mettrie. Unlike some other accounts of Wieland's empirical turn, Thomé's analysis recognizes that the point of Wieland's novel is to find a halfway point *between* the Platonic-idealist and the materialist positions; his idea that Wieland aims to depict "empirisch möglicher menschlicher Vollkommenheit" 'empirically possible human perfection' (124) is an excellent formulation for the difficult balance Wieland tries to achieve. Thomé's analysis also notes that this goal is relevant not just to the plot and themes of the text, but also to its poetic approach. All of this treads the same path that I have proposed above. The dissatisfying aspect of Thomé's interpretation, however, is that he severely downplays the incompatibility of an empirical and a moral poetics and does not recognize the essential impossibility of an "empirically possible human perfection" according to Wieland's terms. Thomé claims that a moderate position drawn from the philosophy of J.G. Zimmermann and Albrecht von Haller wins out in *Agathon*, i.e. that Wieland successfully attains his sought-after synthesis of ethics and empirical verisimilitude; for Thomé, the anti-empirical, utopian explosion at the end of the novel is only a secondary consideration. In the end, like the scholars who preceded him, Thomé gives a much better account of Wieland's empirical turn than of the ongoing, deeply rooted, conflicting moral interest that persisted in Wieland's writing. And so once again the key contradiction at the heart of Wieland's work is highlighted, but its detailed contours escape sustained analysis.

Of course, the conflict between the poetics of imitation and the poetics of moral instruction is not the only significant feature of Wieland's work. A few words about the other recurring themes of Wieland scholarship will provide a more well-rounded picture of his literary profile. First of all, the pronounced psychological interest of Wieland's novel has repeatedly been recognized as a feature that distinguishes *Agathon* from the novels of the earlier eighteenth century. Wieland himself, via the narratorial voice of *Agathon*, overtly proclaims his interest in "Seelen-Malerei" 'portrayal of the soul' and in exploring "die verborgenern Triebfedern" 'the hidden springs' of his hero's actions (356; ch. 8.7). Scholars through the centuries concur: the major eighteenth-century theorist of the novel Friedrich von Blanckenburg, in his 1774 *Versuch über den Roman*, hails the subtle portrayal of character as one of the most admirable features of Wieland's novel. Wieland's psychological innovation was still the central interest in a 2008 article by Lorna Martens, albeit rephrased in twentieth-century terms as the "construction of interiority." The discussions by Richards and Schaefer, among others, highlight Wieland's interest in the inner life of his characters. Since psychological depth is one of the distinguishing

features of the modern novel in general, Wieland's contribution to this development certainly deserves emphasis.

Wieland's elegantly composed language has also been a topic for literary scholars, who follow in the tracks of one of Goethe's comments in his *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, in which he gives Wieland most of the credit for Germany's "Fähigkeit sich gehörig auszudrücken" (19:129; 18 Jan. 1825). Wieland's verse compositions naturally get more of the attention when it comes to style, as for example when Friedrich Beißner, partaking in a 1953 colloquium meant to revive and rehabilitate Wieland, proclaims that style must be the foundation of any genuine appreciation of Wieland's writings. When it comes to prose, however, the stylistic aspect that has received the most attention is Wieland's predilection for dialogic forms. Jürgen Jacobs, for example, spurned prevailing opinion by declaring that Wieland's writings are not empirical in the least, but are woven instead out of pleasantly ironic conversations that generate an artificial, rococo tone. Jacobs gives this playful, urbane conversational tone credit for the entire pedagogical effect of the novel: in his view, Wieland's dialogic style is a form of aesthetic education that gently integrates the reader into society (*Romane* 5-14). Bernhard Budde's 2000 *Aufklärung als Dialog* similarly underlines the dialogic structure of Wieland's texts, but puts more emphasis on the productive confrontation of antithetical points of view that inevitably arises from a dialogic form. But there is certainly more to Wieland's prose style than his fondness for dialogue. Wieland's characteristic combination of finely balanced, lengthy periods and chatty, ironic tone deserves more appreciation, since one of the dominant impressions left by a reading of Wieland arises from his distinctive tone.

Besides psychological depth, urbane style and underlying poetic conflicts, philosophical engagement is one of the major components of Wieland's novels recognized by scholars. Early references to *Agathon* in Wieland's correspondence mention his desire to write a "philosophische Geschichte" 'philosophical story' (3:152; 11. Feb. 1763), and the philosophical content of *Agathon* is obvious, in that characters are presented as carriers of particular philosophies of antiquity that have clear eighteenth-century analogues. Walter Erhart in particular has analyzed *Agathon* as a philosophical novel, relating it to the views of Leibniz, La Mettrie and Helvétius, and these same names are invoked by most scholars (for example Oettinger and Thomé, as mentioned above) when they situate the novel in its contemporary intellectual context. The core of the entire novel is, generally speaking, conflict between realism and idealism, and this conflict naturally is amenable to a philosophical interpretation, just as it could also be used to structure a psychological analysis of character development, or the poetic analysis proposed here.

Finally, *Geschichte des Agathon* has also played a major role in the traditional German fondness for the *Bildungsroman*. Since the novel tells the story of a young man's struggle to come to terms with social realities, it fits well into the genealogy that leads up to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*; thus Wieland's novel has been a regular touchstone for debates over the proper understanding of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Melitta Gerhard's classic 1926 work *Der deutsche Entwicklungsroman*, which introduced the more general term "Entwicklungsroman," presents *Agathon* as the first major modern example of the genre. Wolfram Buddecke's 1966 *C.M. Wielands Entwicklungsbegriff* draws on Gerhard's terminology in carrying out a painstaking book-length analysis of Agathon's personal development, which Buddecke, like many other readers (e.g. more recently Klaus Manger 165), interprets as an instructive example for readers. Jürgen Jacobs uses *Agathon* as a key text in two book-length overviews that present a traditional teleological-optimistic understanding of the *Bildungsroman*, while Martin Swales uses the problematic conclusion of *Agathon* to argue that the *Bildungsroman* does *not* necessarily require

a harmonic resolution. And Monika Schrader analyzes *Agathon* in order to introduce a new allegorical understanding of the *Bildungsroman* based on aesthetic rather than personal categories.

Wieland's novel may have contributed substantial insights to the debate over the *Bildungsroman*, but it is not as clear whether the *Bildungsroman* framework offers special insight into the novel. One difficulty with reading *Agathon* as a *Bildungsroman* has been that the hero ostentatiously and repeatedly fails to integrate into any sort of normal society. This has given rise to the perhaps more useful notion that *Geschichte des Agathon* is actually a "Desillusionierungsroman" (a novel of disillusionment), as suggested for example by Rolf Grimminger (697-98) and Walter Erhart ("Agathon" 270). Certainly, Agathon's progressive disillusionment is apparent, while his *Bildung* is inconclusive, so that Grimminger and Erhart's term more accurately captures the trajectory of the novel.

But an even more fruitful move is to abandon altogether these specific teleological terms and highlight more generally the novel's undeniable interest in the individual human, regardless of developmental trajectory. The classic interpretations of Wieland already take this approach—Blanckenburg immediately hailed the novel's focus on the inner life of the individual, and a century and a half later Sengle's foundational monograph again emphasized the "Konzentrierung auf den einzelnen Menschen" 'concentration on the individual person' and the "Erhöhung des Menschen als Menschen" 'elevation of the person as person' (190) in *Agathon*. A similar interpretive approach finds renewed expression in many of the most recent interpretations of Wieland's work that promote what is now called the "anthropological" approach to Wieland. Walter Erhart, for example, prefers this approach above all others in his 2008 contribution to the *Wieland-Handbuch*. Hans-Jürgen Schings had offered an earlier, more narrow and idiosyncratic, understanding of the "anthropological novel" as one that explores the influence of external circumstances on personal development. But a number of contemporary scholars, influenced by a general shift in Enlightenment studies, understand the anthropological approach as an examination of how the modern crisis of the individual subject finds expression in literary works. In recent years, Klaus Schaefer, Frank Krause and Walter Erhart have read *Geschichte des Agathon* as a portrayal of the disoriented individual, or as a narrative of the insecure modern subject trying to establish a place in the world in the wake of what Krause calls the "Theodizee-Krise" 'theodicy crisis' (1). Rather than quibble over the end result of the hero's experiences—whether *Bildung* or *Desillusionierung*—the anthropological approach allows readers to see how the novel grapples with problems that cannot be conclusively resolved in either direction.

The anthropological approach, of course, coexists with the wide variety of divergent methods found in modern literary scholarship. Some examples of current diverse interpretations of Wieland are Claire Baldwin's analysis of the way Wieland deliberately elicits the reader's desire in an assertive challenge to the eighteenth century's general discomfort with the novel's ability to arouse desire, or Rüdiger Campe's exploration of *Agathon* as a commentary on shifting eighteenth-century notions of evidence, contingency and certainty ("Improbable Probability," *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit*). But after the array of approaches outlined above, it is time to return our attention to the poetic configuration that imbues every level of this novel. While the anthropological approach does a good job of accounting for the *thematic* aspects of *Geschichte des Agathon*, the literary-theoretical aspects of the novel, although repeatedly recognized, still lack a thorough and satisfactory analysis. And so this chapter will bring together the productive strands of earlier Wieland scholarship into an approach optimally poised to get at the crux of his significance for poetic theory. In response to some limitations of earlier studies that focused on

Wieland's poetics, the present analysis will recognize both the empirical-mimetic *and* the didactic motivations that drive Wieland's writings; it will highlight the intersection and resulting tension of these two literary intentions; and finally it will examine this conflict of the real and the ideal not so much on the thematic-human level that often occupies our attention, but instead as an intriguing problem of poetic theory, and as an illustration of the intricate modes of representation that result when the two dominant aesthetic principles of the Enlightenment, the imitative and the didactic principles, are developed to the point of their own insoluble incompatibility over the course of a full-length novel. Before turning to the confrontation that shapes *Geschichte des Agathon*, I will trace how the poetic theory of the young Wieland gradually develops into the intractable positions revealed in his 1766 novel.

PART I: WIELAND'S EARLY PUBLICATIONS: BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

1. Living Among the Seraphim

The young Wieland had a reputation as a seraphic moralist who lived in his mind, mentally wandering in celestial realms—for which he was mocked by the Berlin circle of critics. Lessing's mordant wit targets Wieland in a series of reviews in the *Literaturbriefe*. "Freuen Sie sich mit mir!" he writes in October 1759, "Herr *Wieland* hat die aetherischen Sphären verlassen, und wandelt wieder unter den Menschenkindern" 'Rejoice with me! Herr Wieland has left the ethereal spheres and wanders again among the sons of man' (4:645; 63. Brief). This was Lessing's response when Wieland wrote a drama, *Johanna Gray*, that, in contrast to his previous works, actually had a human hero and an earthly setting—but as Lessing goes on to note, the supposedly human figures of this play are ridiculously idealized, just as one might expect from an author, "der sich so lange unter lauter Cherubim und Seraphim aufgehalten" 'who has sojourned so long among nothing but cherubim and seraphim' (646). Lessing's comments illustrate the reputation Wieland established for himself at the very start of his literay career. During the 1750s, any critic would have viewed Wieland as a writer amply endowed with idealistic moral striving, and would have been hard pressed to foresee that he would later be vilified for excessive worldliness.

The idealistically moralizing tone of Wieland's early work was the product of both natural inclination and circumstance. Wieland seems to have had a personal tendency toward ecstatic raptures and a persistent attraction to noble ideals of virtue and truth. This, at least, was his understanding of himself. For example, Wieland suggested that the hero of *Agathon* was a semi-autobiographical representation of the intense mixture of enthusiasm and virtue that characterized his own youth.[3] Wieland also cites the idealistically striving aspect of his personality on multiple occasions in his correspondence. In a lengthy self-reflection addressed to his close friend J. G. Zimmermann, Wieland writes, "Von meiner Jugend an entrainirte mich das Wahre und schöne; ich vergaß alles über den Ideen von Weisheit, Tugend, Vollkommenheit, nach denen ich dürstete" 'From my youth on the true and the beautiful carried me along; I forgot

[3] Beginning work on this novel, Wieland wrote "Ich schildre darin mich selbst" 'In it I portray myself' (5 Jan. 1762; III: 61).

everything over the ideas of wisdom, virtue and perfection, which I thirsted after' (1:408; Feb. 1759). Another letter to Zimmermann from October 1756 emphasizes the passionate and excitable aspect of these noble strivings:

> Was Sie meinen genie heißen sind wie Sie wißen sehr reitzbare Fibern, und eine daraus entspringende Lebhaftigkeit der Empfindungen u[nd] Imagination, Activität, Kühnheit, Neigung zum Wunderbaren, zum Ausschweiffen u[nd] dergl[eichen] Zeug… Aber dafür danke ich Gott als für eine grosse Gabe, daß ich von Jugend an die Wahrheit geliebet und für das was gut, recht und moralisch schön ist, sehr empfindl[ich] gewesen.
>
> What you call my genius is, as you know, very irritable fibers, from which arise a liveliness of the feelings and imagination, activity, boldness, an inclination for the marvelous, for wild digressions and that sort of thing… But I thank God, as if for a great gift, that I loved the truth from my youth and was very sensitive to whatever is good, right and morally beautiful. (1:286-87)

This idealism, regardless of whether or not Wieland enacted it consistently in his actual day-to-day behavior, is an enduring aspect of his sense of self as projected into his literary work. The lofty strands of his character motivate the preoccupation with morality in Wieland's early writings, and they persist—even though they are joined by a healthy appreciation for earthly pleasures and fallibilities—in his more mature work. The noble moral intention sketched in his correspondence is one of the lasting poles of Wieland's poetics.

Meanwhile, external circumstances encouraged Wieland's high-flown tendencies. He was raised near the Swabian town of Biberach in a family that practiced a Pietistic form of Protestant Christianity—his father was a clergyman who had studied with August Hermann Francke at the famous seminary in Halle, and Wieland himself attended the Pietist-oriented boarding school Kloster Berge in Magdeburg during his early teenage years. Inasmuch as the Pietist movement encouraged a personal, rigorously self-examining and morally demanding form of spiritually, this religious orientation is likely to have encouraged Wieland's own individualized commitment to "virtue" and his immersion in a visionary inner life. Wieland's friendship with the cultured and poetically inclined Sophie Gutermann (later Sophie von la Roche, a successful novelist in the sentimental genre) furthered his elevated outlook and his poetic aspirations in particular—Wieland claims that this friendship, which began in his teenage years, spurred his turn to poetry (Sengle 28). Admittedly, elevated piety was not the only characteristic of Wieland's youthful outlook. His education brought him into contact with free-thinking, materialistic strains of contemporary thought that attracted his strong interest, particularly during his time at Kloster Berge. However, it is the pious and idealistic side of his mentality that decisively influenced his early poetic production, due largely to the third and most important influence on his early outlook: the time he spent at the house of the eminent poet and literary critic Johann Jakob Bodmer.

Bodmer and his close associate Johann Jakob Breitinger were the leading figures in the "Swiss school" of poetics. By means of persistent and flattering correspondence, the poetically ambitious Wieland had secured an invitation from him and set off for Zürich in October 1752 at the age of 19. Only a few years earlier, the famous poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock had spent some time at Bodmer's house and had gravely disappointed his host with what Bodmer

perceived as a lack of diligence and an unseemly interest in local young women. As a result, Wieland had to overcome Bodmer's reluctance to enter into another such arrangement; in his letters he repeatedly assures the elder critic that he will be a pliable guest and an committed ally in matters both moral and poetic. As a mostly unknown figure, Wieland was surely eager to maintain the goodwill of such an influential literary eminence, and so for the next few years he became an eager Bodmer acolyte, in the process developing those aspects of his mentality that made him into the ethereal figure that Lessing mocked.

Bodmer and Breitinger were engaged at the time in a heated literary battle with the rationally oriented Leipzig critic Johann Christoph Gottsched, and Wieland acted as their proxy in this war of words. The Swiss school advocated for a poetry oriented toward effect and sensual impact, and accordingly they encouraged the use of the imagination and defended the role of "das Wunderbare" (the marvelous) in poetry. One of Bodmer's main publications, for example, was a defense of Milton's incorporation of angels and demons in *Paradise Lost*. Although the Swiss critics did maintain the traditional classical allegiance to "imitation of nature," their notion of *Nachahmung* was stretched to the point of meaninglessness—in his *Critische Dichtkunst* (1740) Breitinger directs poets to imitate "possible worlds" rather than the actual world, and encourages them to focus solely on the most wondrous and striking aspects of nature. Bodmer and Breitinger's poetics also had a strong religious orientation: they espoused the Enlightenment view that moral instruction is one of the main goals of literature, and they championed literature that treated religious themes, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Klopstock's *Messias* and Bodmer's own Old Testament epic *Die Noachide*. Wieland's new literary milieu, then, was likely to encourage his idealistic flights of moral and religious imagination while repressing any potential empirical inclinations. The pliable and ambitious young writer became an eager supporter of all the Swiss doctrines, so that, for now at least, poetic imitation was just an empty phrase, whereas lofty visions of virtue were, for Wieland, the only true calling of the poet. The Zürich locals, Sengle tells us, were surprised and amused at this unworldly and bookish young man who spent all his time writing at Bodmer's side (53).

Lofty Devotional Texts

And so the Wieland who first became known in literary circles, as documented in Lessing's response above, was a lofty and self-righteous literary partisan. Two major works that earned Wieland this reputation were his *Briefe von Verstorbenen an hinterlassene Freunde* (*Letters from the Deceased to Friends Left Behind*) and the *Empfindungen eines Christen* (*Sentiments of a Christian*), published in 1753 and 1757 respectively. Both works abundantly document Wieland's prevailing poetic orientation during this period: enthusiastically committed to the promotion of piety and virtue, and almost completely unconcerned with the incorporation of believable earthly representations. These two texts document the enthusiasm and elevation of Wieland's initial poetic outlook, providing the opening contrast to his later preoccupation with plausible imitation of worldly human life.

The *Briefe* are exactly what the title suggests: invented communications from the residents of heaven to their friends still on earth. They model themselves after a popular similarly titled 1728 work by the English poet Elizabeth Rowe. Some of the letters describe the magnificent sights and the vast multi-world cosmology of the afterlife; others admonish wayward friends to return to the path of virtue, or encourage pious friends to remain steadfast

until the time of a heavenly reunion—all in the gushing tones of Pietistic sentimentality. Most significant for the present discussion is the absolute devaluation of worldly, physical life found in the letters. This stance is illustrated in particular by a passage from the first letter. Here a certain recently-deceased Junius is writing to his virtuous mentor Daphnis back on earth. Junius, apparently, was blind during his earthly life. After death, his guardian angel explains that this disability was given him for his own good:

> Dein zu empfindliches herz, das aller wollust sich aufthat,
> Hætte sich unvorsichtig in sanftverstrickenden blicken
> Jeder Syrene gefangen. Die vorsicht wusst es, und nahm dir
> Augen, die nur den blumichten weg zum unglyk zu leuchten,
> Schœner und feuriger glænzten.
>
> Your too sensitive heart, which opened itself to every lust,
> Would have recklessly gotten caught in the gentle entanglements
> Of every Siren's glance. Providence knew this, and took your
> Eyes, whose fiery and beautiful sparkle would only have lit
> The flowery path to unhappiness. (I(2):4)

This passage pushes the spiritual stance of these letters to an almost ridiculous extremity: the afterworld is so much more important than the actual world that the individual must be drastically, physically severed from the earth, must minimize his contact with the whole experience of living, in order to ensure a safe arrival in heaven. The worthlessness of the earth in these letters also comes through in the standard hyperboles that underline the heaven/earth contrast: earthly language cannot begin to express the wonders of heaven, the incredible luminescence of heaven completely washes out our view of the earth, etc. (I(2):1, 11). Heaven is the only space with any value, and the earthly is of no consequence. Admittedly, the attraction of the worldly realm does manage to assert itself here and there in spite of the vigorous attempts to exclude it: a physical, sexual interest appears, for example, in the gratuitous description of the tears falling on a grieving maiden's "myhsam arbeitende brust" 'arduously heaving breast' (I(2):2); here, as often in sentimental literature, sexual energy is cloaked in virtuous effusions. This sensuality, perhaps, foreshadows the insistence and inevitable reemergence of the worldly—but for now, Wieland generally prefers to dwell, as Lessing put it, among the seraphim.[4]

The *Empfindungen eines Christen*, composed 1755-1756, exhibit the same spiritual orientation as the *Briefe*. Wieland later referred to these works as the *Psalmen*, which is exactly what they are: a series of hymns to God, praising his majesty and his creation, and offering justifications for the existence of suffering in the world. Unlike the Biblical psalms of the Old Testament, Wieland's work also contains hymns to Jesus Christ, to the glory of his crucifixion and to his resurrection. As Dieter Martin has remarked (164), these Christianized psalms are a remarkable mix of two styles: some proficiently mimic the sublime laconic style of the Hebrew psalms, while others fully indulge in Pietism-influenced sentimental effusions, as seen for

[4] The ethereal conceits of this text are ripe for mockery, and Lessing, again, delivered: In a December 1753 review for the *Berlinische Privilegierte Zeitung*, he suggests that the excessive length of the letters is explained by the fact that the postal service between heaven and earth runs so rarely that the correspondents had to make the most of the opportunity when available (II: 561).

example in the typical Pietistic warning against "Zerstreuungen" 'distractions' (I(2):360; psalm XI), in the "entzükungsvolle Empfindungen" 'rapturous sentiments' (I(2):404) expressed at Christ's resurrection, and in the emotional wallowing exhibited at the contemplation of the crucifixion: "In süsser Wehmut schwebet meine Seele um den Hügel deines Creuzes, und genießt den geheimnißvollen Anblick, der sie gänzlich in Schmerzen und Entzükung zerschmelzt" 'In sweet melancholy my soul hovers around the hill of your cross and savors the mysterious sight, at which it melts completely into pain and rapture (I(2):367; psalm XV). The latter, effusive style is a particularly strong expression of Wieland's current poetic inclinations, as he dwells in a rapturous otherworld composed exclusively of spiritual rather than empirical truths.

Sven-Aage Jørgensen has suggested that we consider this period of Wieland's production as part of "empfindsame Erbauungsliteratur," i.e. devotional literature of the sentimental period (42), and this certainly seems like the correct context for these writings. In this genre, the principle of imitation, so important for Enlightenment literature both in the earlier neoclassical period and for the later rise of the pragmatically oriented novel, really does not apply: the devotional genre is defined solely by a rhetorical, emotional, and didactic rather than by an imitative and narrative function. The pious effusions and the rejection of the material realm may appear tiresome to those who conceive of a more terrestrially engaged literature, but they are an inherent feature of the chosen genre. And so we cannot necessarily be surprised that, within this genre, Wieland shows no interest in earthly imitation. Nevertheless, the fact that he chose to compose in a purely spiritually oriented genre in the first place is a telling sign of his early poetic orientation.

Wieland's theoretical pronouncements in these years match the idealistic ambition of his poetic practice. He regularly declares that the sole end of literature is moral and spiritual improvement. The "Zuschrift" (Dedication) to *Empfindungen eines Christen* was particularly notorious. In it Wieland slanders the school of anacreontic poets—most controversially his contemporary Johann Peter Uz—as "eine Bande von epicurischen Heiden" 'a band of Epicurean heathens' (I(2):342). Instead of dwelling on sensual pleasures, he writes, all poetry should be dedicated to the praise of God: "ob es nicht nöthig sei, daß alle, welche würklich gehörige Empfindungen für Gott und für seine Offenbarungen gegen uns haben, dieselbe so lebhaft als ihnen möglich ist, andern mittheilen" 'is it not necessary that all who have the truly proper sentiments for God and for his revelation to us should share these sentiments with others in as lively a manner as possible?' (I(2):339). In Wieland's approach there is no room for any other concerns to make a case for themselves alongside the all-encompassing majesty of God. As in his poetic compositions, in Wieland's thoeretical statements the eternal consequence of the spiritual drowns out any worldly matters.

Alongside the otherworldly orientation, the role of the sentiments comes out strongly in this prefatory dedication. The statement quoted above presents literature as an emotional communicator: poets convey *Empfindungen* to their readers. The representational aspect, then, is of little consequence compared to the evocation of effusive piety. This gushing style made Wieland vulnerable to the charge of *Schwärmerei*. This German term, which has no exact translation, was the derogatory term of choice for the mix of unbridled, rapturous enthusiasm and dreamy striving that marked the young Wieland (and his novelistic hero Agathon). Wieland explicitly defended himself against this label in the dedication of *Empfindungen eines Christen*, rejecting the idea that "eine jede heisse Empfindung für die Religion sey fanatisch" 'every single fervent sentiment for religion is fanatic': "Soll man von Bliken eines wollüstigen Mädchens, aber

ja nicht von göttlichen Wohlthaten entzükt werden dürfen?" 'Shall we be allowed to be delighted by the glances of a lusty girl, but not by the benevolence of God?' (I(2):341). The youthful excesses of Wieland's piety led him to believe that God's majesty justified every possible ecstasy, and so he indulged the sentimental style without reservation. In sum, the idealistic branch of Wieland's poetic outlook enjoyed nearly unchallenged dominance during the first part of his time in Zürich. Not only does he make spirituality the sole substance of literature, but he specifically advocates the most high-flown and gushing outpourings of religious feeling. In these early devotional texts, he clearly privileges emotion over imitation, and the otherworld over the real world.

When Wieland later abandons the devotional genre and turns to the novel, adopting along with it new commitments to realism and plausibility, the single-mindedness and emotional effusiveness of his moral aspirations are necessarily mitigated. The spiritual holds itself in check in order to make room for the worldly, and the purely emotional path to moral impact is downplayed in favor of the concrete representation of exemplary models. But although the tone and method of the didactic impulse change significantly, nevertheless the core didactic impulse survives into Wieland's mature work. In other words, Wieland's gradual movement toward a more worldly and imitative mode does not equate to a movement *away* from his earlier idealistic aspirations. Instead, earthly life enters into his poetics alongside his previous commitments, carving out a space for itself and engaging with rather than dislodging his virtuous enthusiasm. The dualism of Wieland's developing literary stance is apparent in a March 1758 letter to Zimmermann. On the one hand, Wieland realizes that he went too far in his self-righteous attacks on the Anacreontic school. He repudiates his "Platonisme" and regrets the aggressive words of his "Dedication": "je souhaiterois de n'avoir traité Uz avec tant de rigueur" 'I wish I had not treated Uz with such harshness" (1:326). Nevertheless, Wieland refuses to let go of his regard for the beautiful and the true: "Mais ne confondés pas le Beau ideal des Peintres et des Poëtes… avec ce Platonisme ou ce Fanatisme philosophique… Sans ce Beau ideal point de Correge, point de Raphael, point de Thomson!" 'But do not confuse the ideal beauty of the painters and the poets… with this Platonism or this philosophical fanaticism… Without this ideal beauty there is no Correggio, no Raphael, no Thomson at all!' (1:326-27). Wieland retains a commitment to the ideal even after he begins to value the earthly realm. His fundamental love of virtue undergoes some adaptations, but it persists despite his repudiation of "Platonism." And so although Wieland's devotional writings are drawn from a completely different literary mode than his later narratives, they do give us a sense of the fervent moral commitment that continues to motivate the composition of *Agathon* more than a decade later, even after Wieland's new appreciation for the material realm has forced his moral stance to make some accommodating adjustments.

Latent Empirical Inclinations

In summary, the Wieland of the early to mid-1750s was oriented almost completely toward the spiritual rather than the worldly realm, was concerned with what humans *should* be rather than what they are, and in the pursuit of his ideals tended to encourage rather than to control his outpourings of enthusiastic sentiment. But in the late 1750s, Wieland began to recognize the excessive and slightly ridiculous aspects of his youthful infatuation with virtue and gradually developed a new interest in the material world. This turn toward the world of lived experience was not a completely new development, however; instead it was a return to earlier

underdeveloped inclinations that had been temporarily obliterated by the insistent authority of Bodmer's tutelage. Just as Wieland's love of virtue lived on even after he turned to a more pragmatic realism, so his realism was an equally persistent tendency that was overshadowed for only a few years at the most. Both Wieland's idealistic striving and his worldly orientation are fundamental and coexistent poles of Wieland's poetics, so that the frequently-invoked "turn" of the late 1750s was neither a repudiation of his moral interest, nor the sudden appearance of a wholly new earthly inclination; it was merely the reappearance and maturation of a temporarily repressed tendency that then made it possible for both fully-expressed tendencies to enter into their difficult equilibrium. An autobiographical reflection from a February 1759 letter gives evidence of the dual nature of Wieland's inclinations. In a passage already quoted above, Wieland professes his love for "the true and the beautiful"—but he immediately balances this with a statement about his more empirical interests: "Ich fühlte von jugend an eine gewiße Sympathie mit der Natur und dem Menschlichen Geschlecht" 'From youth onward I felt a certain sympathy with nature and with the human race' (1:408). Before Bodmer fixed his acolyte's gaze on heaven alone, then, Wieland was drawn to "nature" and humanity. It is this vague "sympathy" that eventually develops into a significantly empirical poetic principle.

Wieland's first published composition indicates his interest in something that at least goes under the heading of "nature," but also reveals the weakness of his connection to the tangible world. In 1751 he published *Die Natur der Dinge* (*The Nature of Things*), a philosophical poem in six books meant to provide a Christian challenge to the Epicureanism of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. The poem goes into extensive scholastic detail as it refutes the detailed views of various contemporary philosophies, but its overall intention is to sketch the magnificence of God's creation, which Wieland describes as "die vollkommenste Welt welche möglich ist" 'the most perfect world possible' (I(1):5). This sort of language makes it clear that Wieland's "nature" is more of an idealized intellectual construct than an approximation of actual lived experience. Wieland's concept of nature is similar to Gottsched's as described in the previous chapter: Wieland marvels at the way vast numbers of particular entities come together to create a complexly ordered, hierarchical system whose perfection is found in the harmony of its many interacting parts. This is the philosophy of an academically gifted young man who has just enthusiastically discovered some of the more fascinating aspects of early Enlightenment metaphysics—it is certainly not the vision of a seasoned observer of the world. The idealizing drive behind this portrait of "nature" is particularly clear when Wieland, even though he admits that "vollkommene Menschen" 'perfect humans' are "ganz und gar unmöglich" 'absolutely impossible' in our actual world, defends their portrayal with the argument that they could be "in der Venus wirklich" 'real on Venus' (I(1):8).

Certainly, Wieland's interest in nature here is that of a dreamer rather than that of an empirical observer, as he himself recognizes when, in a later afterword, he dismissively characterizes *Die Natur der Dinge* as the "Frucht eines enthusiastisch-philosophischen Gespräches zwischen einem noch sehr jungen und sehr platonischen Liebhaber, und seiner Geliebten" 'fruit of an enthusiastic-philosophical conversation between a still very young and very Platonic lover and his beloved" (I(1):128). (It was a conversation with Sophie Gutermann that spurred Wieland to write this work.) For now, Wieland's interest in nature is nothing but an over-philosophized aspiration. But there were signs of a more substantially materialist orientation in the young Wieland. During his years at Kloster Berge, he read forbidden texts by Voltaire, Pierre Bayle and other Enlightenment thinkers, which won him a reputation for dangerous *Freigeisterei* (freedom of thought, especially with regard to religious doctrine). Klaus

Schaefer has noted the "Zwiespalt" 'rift' that this secular mode of thought created with Wieland's equally intense Christian piety (8). A more striking example of nascent empirical tendencies can be found in a letter of May 1752, addressed to a Zürich pastor. In this letter Wieland addresses Bodmer's discomfort with a recent composition of his, an "ode to love" that had offended Bodmer's strict morality. In the course of a defense of Anacreontic poetry, Wieland criticizes Plato:

> Plato ist ohnstreitig ein übertriebner Philosoph den es zuweilen zu verdriessen scheint, daß wir Menschen sind. Seine Betrachtungen werden sehr oft zu Phantomen u[nd] Hirngespinstern. Es ist daher sehr gut daß mann, wenn mann zu tief in das Reich der Ideen hinein gekommen ist, wieder in die Körperwelt zurük kehre und Sich erinnere daß unser Körper etwas mehr ist als ein πνευματικον οχημα [spiritual vessel]… Soll ich aufrichtig reden, so halte ich die platonische Liebe, die uns blos intellectualisch haben will, vor eine chimere aller chimeren. Nach meinem System giebt es keine unverkörperten Geister, und die Engel umarmen sich eben so wohl als wir.
>
> Plato is doubtlessly an overdone philosopher who often seems irritated that we are human. His observations very often turn into fantasies and phantoms of the imagination. Therefore it is very good, when one has entered too deeply into the realm of ideas, that one returns to the bodily world and remembers that our body is something more than a πνευματικον οχημα [spiritual vessel]… If I should speak frankly, I hold the Platonic love, that wants us to be purely intellectual, for the most chimerical of chimeras. According to my system there are no bodiless souls, and the angels embrace each other just as surely as we do. (1: 75, 78)

This remarkable assertion of the value of the bodily, the human and the secular was written just a few months before Wieland departed for Zürich. It contrasts sharply with the moral idealism that Wieland would espouse once he fell under the full influence of Bodmer, and also offers a foretaste of the worldly interest that would reemerge toward the end of the decade. Here Wieland defends the same Anacreontic school that would be the target of his vehement attack a few years later, and he voices some of the same motifs that would resurface again only in the late 1750s: the celebration of bodily experience, for example, and the rejection of Plato as a stand-in for all idealistic-enthusiastic excesses. We get a clear sense from this passage that a distinct materialist curiosity, however inconsistent and underdeveloped, coexists in Wieland alongside his inclinations toward pious *Schwärmerei*. Of these two proclivities, the eminent and influential Bodmer encouraged only the latter, and so for the first few years in Zürich Wieland's lofty flights of piety were overdeveloped at the expense of his undernourished empirical interests. But the teenager's assertive interest in the body would soon reappear in more mature form. This passage demonstrates that Wieland's eventually revived interest in the earth was not a completely new development. Both Wieland's worldly and his otherwordly interests have deep roots, and both are fundamental to his literary outlook. Sengle is probably correct in viewing the intense piety of the Zürich period as an aberration (52); the core dynamic of Wieland's poetics is neither the absolute domination of the moral interest, nor the one-sided enthronement of the new earthly interest, but instead the productive conflict of both poetic orientations.

During the early Zürich years, Wieland's interest in nature is not completely latent, but it comes out on a very abstract level that for the time being forestalls any conflict with his moral orientation. Wieland's main references to nature occur when he describes religion as a natural truth. Here "nature" and "truth" obviously have a strongly conceptual and normative meaning rather than any empirical, earthly orientation. In writing works that uphold the Christian religion to which he is so fervently committed, Wieland of course doesn't see himself as producing unreal flights of fantasy; instead he is expressing what are, from the Christian point of view, the fundamental truths about the makeup of the world. We see this in an early letter when Wieland writes that the purpose of his poetry is to give wisdom "ihre wahre Gestalt" 'her true form' (1:107; August 1752); we see the same notion repeatedly in the "Dedication" to the *Empfindungen*, where Wieland declares his desire to imbue his readers with love for "die himmlischen Wahrheiten" 'the heavenly truths,' with "Liebe zu diesen unschäzbaren Wahrheiten" 'love for these inestimable truths' and describes his psalms as nothing but the description of feelings aroused by "die Wahrheiten, die ich anschaute" 'the truths that I beheld' (I(2):343, 344). In these sorts of statements Wieland's interest in physical nature has been reoriented toward spiritual truth. For even during the excesses of the Zürich period, Wieland, despite his enthusiasm and his preoccupation with otherworldly realms, was not a positive fantast; he was earnestly committed to what he sensed was real and avoided imaginative play with falsehoods. His writings are the depictions of truths beheld, but of course there are very different kinds of truth. During his most religious phases, Wieland's literary imitations were concerned only with moral truths, with the prescriptive truths of the way the world truly *should* be. Later Wieland becomes convinced that literature must be connected to the way the world really *is*, and he pursues a descriptive-objective truth in his writings. But in the beginning stages of his career, the prescriptive understanding of truth allows for a certain sleight of hand regarding the traditional principle of imitation of nature. When "truth" comes to refer to a set of spiritual and moral concepts, then the most dedicated imitator of nature ends up looking past the material level to the theological underpinnings of the world. In this way, the young Wieland could conceive of his high-flown, ethereal writings as actual imitations of the real, since these idealistic visions have been redefined as the most essential aspect of reality.

The above discussion makes it clear why Wieland experienced no literary conflict between didactic and imitative principles in the early stages of his career. The key point is not just that his commitment to "nature" receded into the background under the influence of Bodmer. Even more important is the way that the imitation of nature is construed: if nature is understood as a idealized system of harmonic correspondences, and if in any case literary imitation aims at moral rather than objective truths, then the imitation of nature will never lead the writer to any matter that substantially conflicts with the didactic intentions of the text. For now, Wieland's concept of mimesis is one that aims the literary mirror at conceptual rather than material truths. In order to attain the more empirical imitative mode that motivates *Agathon*, Wieland's as yet underdeveloped interest in nature needs to undergo two key shifts. First, his concept of mimesis needs to change, reorienting itself from the spiritual to the worldly realm and from moral truth to physical, earthly truth. This shift is discussed in the following section. Secondly, Wieland's concept of nature itself must change: instead of the abstract system of harmonic correspondences outlined in *Natur der Dinge*, Wieland needs to look at the world and see the actual concrete outlines of human experience with all of its imperfections. This move is the topic of the third section below.

2. Coming Down to Earth: The Shift in Wieland's Concept of Mimesis

The steady stream of religiously themed works that Wieland published during his time at Bodmer's side established his reputation in German literary circles—but this reputation as a sentimental moralist is one Wieland was increasingly anxious to lose. Having benefited from Bodmer's influence—and having returned the favor with two years as an obliging, respectful, and industrious literary colleague—Wieland began to distance himself from the Bodmer circle in order to develop a more complex and independent literary approach. The first step in this process came in June 1754, when Wieland moved out of Bodmer's house, found lodgings of his own in Zürich, and began work as a tutor for several local families. This gave him the space to question and modify the poetic convictions to which he had forcibly adhered during his years as Bodmer's acolyte. A September 1756 letter addressed to Bodmer documents Wieland's new tone: the obsequious notes of the early correspondence are replaced with a casual attitude, a breezy apology for not being able to visit his former mentor more frequently, and finally some mild criticism of Bodmer's latest literary project (1:280-81). This recognition of Bodmer's drawbacks was not new—Wieland had quietly criticized Bodmer's biblical epic *Noah* to third parties in August 1752 (1:106-9) (at the same time as he was lavishly praising the work to the Zürich circle)—but he had necessarily repressed this independent judgment for the previous two years. Now, in a more self-sufficient situation and with a few years' more experience, Wieland was ready to develop his poetic style according to his own inclinations—and this entailed a move to a more worldly poetics.

The Correspondence with Zimmermann

The shift was gradual, sporadic and exploratory. As already mentioned, moral idealism was by no means anathema to Wieland, but merely one-sided and overwrought; it needed to be mitigated rather than abandoned. One of the major influences and the central interlocutor in Wieland's literary re-evaluation was his friend Johann Georg Zimmermann. Zimmermann was a well-educated doctor in Brugg, Switzerland who had a much better grounding than Wieland in the physical sciences; he later became court doctor at Hannover and published well-regarded physiological-psychological works on loneliness and melancholy. Wieland's correspondence with Zimmermann began in April 1756 (the two did not meet in person until three years later). At first, Zimmermann approached Wieland with great admiration, seeking guidance from him as a poetic eminence. But the two soon developed a close, frank correspondence on equal terms, with Zimmermann frequently challenging Wieland's ethereal outlook. The initial impetus for their correspondence already hints at the effect it would have on Wieland: Wieland, via Breitinger, requested from Zimmermann a copy of David Hartley's *Observations on Man*, a work with a much more materialistic orientation than the sentimental and religious texts on which Wieland had focused in the preceding years. In fact this work nicely encapsulates the change that Wieland would make over the next few years: as Wieland's focus shifted from the heavenly to the earthly realm, it was above all the human, the individual "man," that constituted the center of his interest.

At first, Wieland resisted Zimmermann's arguments and defended his own otherworldly orientation. I find it likely that Wieland's move to empiricism was delayed because what he

initially encountered was a very scientifically oriented materialism, whereas only a *humanly* oriented worldliness was ultimately able to attract and hold Wieland's creative interest. Hartley's book had an enticing title, but Wieland found it too physiological, as is apparent in his response. "Ich bin," he writes, "über die Erklärung der Phänomenen in der Materiellen welt nicht sehr neugierig" 'I am not very curious about the explanation of phenomena in the material world' (1:257; May 1756). The core motivation of *Agathon* would instead be the "explanation of phenomena" in the mental and emotional life of the human. Hartley's attempts to explain how psychological states arise from vibrations of fibers offended Wieland's conviction that the soul is primary over the body. Wieland was interested not in nerve fibers, but in the inner life of the individual.

Taken aback by a type of hard science that never appealed to him, Wieland sounded mainly defensive tones during the first stage of his new engagement with empiricism. In July 1756 Wieland criticized Zimmermann's excessive interest in science and proclaimed that metaphysics is more important: "Warum sind sie so böse auf Logik und Metaphysik!... Nur die Wissenschaft ist etwas werth, sagt mein Leibniz, die uns in eine andere Welt folget" 'Why are you so hostile to logic and metaphysics?... The only worthwhile science, as my Leibniz says, is that which follows us into a different world' (1:267, 268). Clearly, Wieland still aggressively defends the primacy of a higher world over the actual world. And in September 1756, Wieland stands up for mystics, insisting that, "der unfehlbare Weg zum höchsten Grad der Glükseligkeit in dieser Welt zugelangen, der Mysticismus ist, welcher ohne eine gänzl[iche] Verläugnung aller irdischen Dinge und unsrer Selbst nicht bestehen kan" 'the infallible path to attaining the highest degree of happiness in this world is mysticism, which cannot exist without a complete denial of all earthly things and of our self'; mystics should therefore not be denigrated as "Phantasten und fanatiques" 'fantasts and fanatics' (1:279). The context of the letter shows that Wieland is not actually advocating this world-denying approach for everyone, but is merely asserting that the lifestyle of the uneducated hermit is as valid as that of the scholar or scientist; therefore the comment is not quite as extreme as it seems. Still, the praise of the "andere Welt" and the rejection of "irdische Dinge" demonstrate a reflexive entrenchment of Wieland's idealistic convictions in the face of a strong challenge.

But soon Wieland's defenses of mysticism give way to defenses of himself *against* charges of mysticism; the "grosse Wandlung" 'great change' referenced by Sengle (89) has now genuinely commenced. In a notable passage from a November 1756 letter to Zimmermann, Wieland realizes that, despite all his sympathy for idealistic strivings, he really does not want to be stereotyped as some sort of celestial dreamer:

> Aber gehen sie nicht, nach Ihrer eilfertigen Art zu schliessen, und machen mich von neuem zu einem Seraph, Heiligen oder LuftGeist, — ich bin ganz und gar ein Mensch und schäme mich dessen nicht im mindesten. Mit Grunde können Sie aus dieser neuen Schrift nichts weiters schliessen, als daß ich ein sehr empfindliches Hertz, eine lebhafte Einbildungskraft und eine aus Uberzeugung entspringende Liebe zur Wahrheit habe.
>
> But do not, in your hurried way of jumping to conclusions, go and make me anew into a seraph, a saint or a spirit of the air—I am entirely and completely a human and am not in the least ashamed of that. You have reason to conclude nothing more

> than that I have a very sensitive heart, a lively imagination and a love for the truth that springs from conviction. (1:288)

Note that it is a sense of the human experience, as opposed to some material-scientific treatise, that motivates this first remarkable expression of Wieland's empirical re-orientation: instead of using any strictly physiological terms, Wieland underlines his existence as a *Mensch*. Now that the generally human rather than the scientific realm is in the forefront, Wieland's earthly tendencies are for the first time presented as an equal counterpart to his idealistic proclivities. In this quotation Wieland asserts his humanity as confidently as he asserts his noble strivings. His idealism is still fundamental, but it now coexists with a grounded and self-aware humanity.

This letter is shortly followed by a one-year gap in the Wieland-Zimmermann correspondence. When the letters resume in early 1758 Wieland's new empirical stance is even more firmly established. Even though he still stands up for mystics and saints (1:320-22; Feb. 1758), Wieland rejects his earlier exclusive preoccupation with the sphere of elevated abstractions (and in another sign of increased worldly sophistication, he has begun to write in French):

> Je ne suis pas aussi Platonique que Vous me croyés Monsieur le docteur. Je commence de plus en plus de me familiariser avec les gens de ce bas-monde. Et pour Vous dire tout en peu de mots, j'aime le Beau, le Bon, le Grand, le sublime, l'agreable, le joli, par tout ou je le trouve… J'aime la Nature humaine, je ne meprise aucun homme à un tel degré pour ne rendre justice à ce qu'il a de bon etc… Je ne suis pas dans toutes les idées de Mr. Bodmer… Je crois comme Vous, que le Sage cultive tous ses Sens interieurs et exterieurs, qu'il exerce toutes ses facultés, qu'il jouit de toute la Nature….
>
> I am not as Platonic as you believe, Monsieur Doctor. I am beginning more and more to familiarize myself with the people of this world below. And to tell you everything in a few words, I love the beautiful, the good, the great, the sublime, the pleasant, the pretty, wherever I find it… I love human nature, I despise no man to such a degree that I cannot do justice to the fact that he has some good, etc… I do not take Bodmer's point of view in all areas… I believe, as you do, that the wise man cultivates all of his senses, interior and exterior, that he exercises all his faculties, that he takes pleasure from all of Nature… (1:326; March 1758)

And again a month later: "Je n'aime plus les Contes de Fées, je ne trouve plus du plaisir à la Vie de la Ste. Therese, je n'ai plus grande envie de voyager avant le tems dans les Spheres invisibles, je ne veux plus que tout le monde soit Caton, et je ne vai plus instruire les jeunes filles dans les misteres de la Philosophie de Platon. Voila bien de changemens…" 'I no longer like fairy tales, I no longer take pleasure in the life of St. Theresa, I no longer have much desire to travel before my time in the invisible spheres, I no longer want everyone to be a Cato, and I will no longer instruct young girls in the mysteries of Plato's philosophy. There you have it, plenty of changes…' (1:333; April 1758). These passages are full of the characteristic moves of Wieland's re-orientation: the contrast of this "lower" world with the spiritual realms that formerly monopolized his interest, the emphasis above all on the humans found in this world, and the labeling of the earlier, rejected phases as "Platonic." Although Wieland is still drawn to "the

great, the sublime," etc., the terms he uses have aesthetic and sensual rather than moral and ethereal associations. Wieland seems embarrassed by the excesses of his earlier writing and takes pride in this new, very explicit and self-aware, turn to the actual world of human experience.

A new mentor makes his appearance in the above passage: Shaftesbury. While explicitly distancing himself from Bodmer, Wieland mentions that his new favored lifestyle, with the "cultivation of all senses" etc., is based on Shaftesbury's figure of the "virtuoso." Shaftesbury remained a favored figure for Wieland throughout his life, but it seems that he must have been an especially useful mediator at this particular juncture, as Wieland is just beginning to open up to the sublunary world. Shaftesbury's virtuoso is a distinctive combination of both idealized and earthly elements, of worldly sophistication and sensuality together with moral ideals and love for art and beauty. As such, Shaftesbury provided a model that allowed Wieland to replace the completely ethereal otherworld with a somewhat beautified version of *this* world. For it is important to note that Wieland's move to empiricism is now only at a halfway stage. As mentioned above, Wieland needed to change both his concept of mimesis and his concept of nature. In the late 1750s, only the first has occurred. That is, Wieland no longer conceives of mimesis as the imitation of intangible moral and spiritual truths, or as the imitation of some other realm more "real" than our own earth; instead he is interested in the poetic imitation of lived human experience. His poetic mirror, in short, has moved from the heavens to the earth. But the impact of this shift is mitigated by the fact that Wieland's image of the earth is distorted—he conceives of nature in excessively idealized terms. Despite the brief acknowledgment above that not everyone can be Cato (the embodiment of perfect stoic virtue), Wieland only really wants to portray the attractive and admirable aspects of the world. This idealization is apparent in the quotation above, where, after proclaiming his interest in the "lower world," Wieland invokes "the beautiful, the good," etc.—a whole string of exclusively positive adjectives that suggest his aestheticizing, one-sided interest in the world. This poetic doctrine comes out even more clearly in a letter discussing the characteristics of a good poet: "Si quelqu'un a le Genie des beaux arts, qu'il étudie la Nature, qu'il forme ses idées et ses sentimens sur ce qui est vrai et beau et sublime dans Elle, qu'il apprenne d'elle comment il faut se prendre pour plaire, pour surprendre, pour toucher etc." 'If someone has a genius for the fine arts, let him study Nature, let him form his ideas and his feelings according to that which is true and beautiful and sublime in Her, let him learn from her how one must go about things in order to please, to surprise, to move etc.' (1:337; April 1758). For the time being, when Wieland speaks of nature, he means only "beautiful nature," and, just as in his earlier "Platonic" stage, his mimesis is closely tied to abstract and inspiring principles rather than to concrete experience. This selective, abstract mimesis is a perfectly valid poetic approach, of course, but it is far from the more objective versions of mimesis that would generate poetic conundrums in *Agathon*, and it would ultimately prove unsatisfying to Wieland and to other authors of the period who wanted to use literature to engage more directly with the real conditions and problems of lived experience.

Nevertheless, all this talk of the "lower world" and all these vigorous rejections of a former "Platonism" constitute an important change. Wieland's idealistic side is still prominent, and he continues to be inspired as much by lofty principles as by the tangible realm, but at least he now seeks his inspiring ideals mostly in nature and in human life rather than in an imagined spiritual realm. And as a result, those inspiring ideals themselves undergo a qualitative change: Wieland's moral focus has transformed into an *aesthetic* focus; he writes more of the beautiful and the sublime than of the pious and virtuous, and the "truth" that he seeks to portray is artistic rather than religious. Or at least (since moral interests do continue to be important for him)

Wieland's concept of the ideal has expanded to include sensual and aesthetic values. As a result, the poetic outlook of the late 1750s constitutes a middle stage in which Wieland eases the transition from heaven to earth by first opening himself only to the attractive aspects of earth. Moral idealism shades into an earthly, aesthetic-sensual idealism that would eventually lead to something close to a worldly realism. The full encounter with nature would not occur for a few more years, but for now at least Wieland is embracing the sensual and material aspects of the world and has returned, after the aberration of the Bodmer years, to the stance expressed in the pre-Zürich letter of May 1752 quoted in an earlier section: Wieland finds Platonism to be too ethereal and has shifted the literary mirror toward earthly existence.

Psychology vs. La belle nature in Wieland's Dichtkunst

The intellectual shifts that Wieland processes in his correspondence come out very clearly in the published texts of the late 1750s. Almost all of them are situated on the middle ground of a "natural" and earthly, yet idealized, setting. The first major text of this transitional period is Wieland's often overlooked poetic handbook, the *Theorie und Geschichte der Red-Kunst und Dicht-Kunst* (*Theory and History of the Rhetorical and the Poetic Arts*), published in 1757. This work is one of a series of texts Wieland composed for the benefit of his private students in Zürich, and it provides an excellent snapshot of the transitional, vacillating and eclectic character of his poetic conceptions during this period. Some aspects of the treatise are taken directly from Bodmer and Breitinger, as when Wieland equates poetry to painting, emphasizes the lively effect of poetry, or declares that the object of poetry is the possible. In these passages Wieland regurgitates the principles that must have been firmly drummed into him during his first few years in Zürich. But the ideas inherited from Bodmer and Breitinger begin to seem like empty phrases in this text. What comes to the fore instead in the *Dicht-Kunst* are Wieland's new interests in the human, and particularly in human psychology, together with a Neoclassically-inflected understanding of poetic imitation. All of this demonstrates how Wieland's former mentors are losing their sway over his poetic views.

Whereas Bodmer and Breitinger preferred to speak of hypothetical "possible worlds," Wieland invokes "Natur": "die Natur muß demnach die Quelle aller erfindungen des Poeten seyn" 'nature must accordingly be the source of all of the poet's inventions' (III(4):338; sect. 6). And while Bodmer and Breitinger called for "das Wunderbare," Wieland spends more time elaborating a category called "das Historische." The historical mode, in his account, occurs when a poet fleshes out an event by describing its "Ursachen und ressorts mit ihren besondersten Umständen auf eine psychologische Art" 'causes and motivations with their most particular circumstances, in a psychological manner' (III(4):344; sect. 10). Despite the many possible ambiguities in the meaning of "nature," these terminological shifts indicate a distinct move from a poetics of rhetorical effect to a poetics with at least a theoretical aspiration toward objective imitation. And the mixed influences behind Wieland's changing outlook also emerge—the reverence for "Natur" is drawn from the Neoclassical tradition of Gottsched and the French before him, while the call for a history of causes and effects reflects a major recent trend in the rise of the bourgeois German novel (see Vosskamp 186-96 for more on this trend). But from the point of view of Wieland's later literary development, the most significant motif in the *Dicht-Kunst* is the focus on psychology. This focus emerges in the definition of the historical quoted above, where Wieland points out that it is specifically the *psychological* causes of action that

interest him. Psychology is also suggested by the key word "Seelenmahlerey" 'portrayal of the soul,' which appears in the *Dicht-Kunst* when Wieland (here departing from Bodmer and Breitinger's idea that poetry is equivalent to painting) describes how poetry is superior to painting because of its ability to depict the mental world: "Der Name eines Seelenmahlers gebührt in seiner stärksten Bedeutung dem Poeten, der uns in das Innerste seiner Personen hineinführen… kann" 'The title of a painter of the soul, in its strongest sense, befits the poet, who can lead us into the innermost part of his characters' (III(4):338; sect. 5). This same psychological focus is alive and strong in *Agathon*, where Wieland tells us his goal is to use "Seelen-Mahlerei" to illuminate the "Triebfeder" (impetus or driving force) behind his hero's actions (356; ch. 8:7). Meanwhile, alongside the psychological focus of the *Dicht-Kunst*, we find a strong assertion that the human being is central to literature. Wieland in fact spends an entire section of the treatise asserting that humans are the most effective subjects for poetic composition. Even though all aspects of nature can please us, Wieland notes that, "Vornehmlich aber hat uns die Natur eine sehr starke Sympathie mit allen lebenden Geschöpfen, besonders aber mit denen von unsrer espèce gegeben" 'but first and foremost nature has given us a very strong sympathy with all living creatures, especially however with those of our species'; therefore, he writes, the depiction of human relations will most effectively activate an emotional response in the reader (III(4):340; sect. 7). Furthermore, Wieland scolds the poet, "der uns also Character, Sitten und Leidenschaften schildert, die der menschlichen Natur gar nicht gemäß sind…" 'who then describes for us characters, customs and passions that accord in no way with human nature' (III(4):338-39; sect. 6). Such a writer "ist kein Nachahmer der Natur, sondern ein Sudler und Grotesquenmahler" 'is no imitator of nature, but instead a second-rate scribbler and a painter of grotesques' (ibid.). The latter quote makes it particularly clear how Wieland equates imitation of nature with imitation of *human* nature. Thus, although the *Dicht-Kunst* includes plenty of inconsistencies and borrowed concepts with respect to the theory of poetic imitation, the emphasis on human psychology is one theme that genuinely resonates with Wieland's own poetic sympathies and that find ample expression in his later prose fiction. Overall, the new interest in the life of humans on earth that Wieland had expressed in his correspondence with Zimmermann comes out repeatedly in the *Dicht-Kunst* and overshadows the vestiges of Bodmer's poetics of the marvelous.

But the aesthetic idealization of the world typical of this stage of Wieland's poetics is also strong in the treatise: side by side with his homage to the psychological, Wieland invokes the stylized conception of nature found in French Neoclassicism, specifically quoting the phrase "la belle nature" (III(4):335; sect. 1). This idealization is seen when Wieland defines the object of poetic imitation as "das Wahre und Schöne in der Natur" 'the true and beautiful in nature' or when he describes how the the poetic imitator gathers together the individual perfections of nature while removing all defects (III(4):339; sect. 6). Wieland's budding interest in the psychological apparently has not led him to explore any of the darker corners of human nature, since in these passages he maintains allegiance to Neoclassicism's selective and highly refined version of mimesis. Futhermore, since this version of imitation reflects only the appealing parts of nature and humanity, it hardly conflicts with the didactic notion that literature should present prescriptive models. Wieland therefore has no trouble asserting this didactic theory in the *Dicht-Kunst*: he declares that poetry improves our taste, our morals and our practical judgment (III(4):342; sect. 8) (note the confluence of both moral and aesthetic ideals typical of this stage). In particular, Wieland calls on poets to depict virtuous individuals so that readers can see "das Schöne, Erhabne und Göttliche, das in der Tugend liegt, gleichsam mit Augen" 'the beauty,

sublimity and divinity found in virtue, as if before our eyes' (ibid.). This lofty didactic poetics, which expresses the idealistic striving that abides in a constant parallel to Wieland's mimetic inclinations, integrates harmoniously with the doctrine of imitation, since Wieland's concept of "nature" has been scrubbed free of any aspects that would undermine the inspiring effect of the poetic image. Overall, the *Dicht-Kunst* reflects the current middle stage of Wieland's poetic development: his concept of mimesis has shifted from angels to humans and from spirits to nature, but his understanding of nature is too selective and idealized to offer any empirical challenge to his moral vision.

The 1757 treatise does however contain a small hint of the conceptual problems that would flare up more intractably later. Wieland seems slightly uneasy with the neat trick whereby nature is redefined to be equivalent to beauty and truth. He contradicts himself on this point in the section on the objects of imitation. Wieland's initial impulse is to take a broader, more objective approach: "das Object der Poesie ist also die ganze Natur… Alles, wovon man sich eine Idee machen kann, kann auch… von einem Poeten geschildert werden" 'the object of poetry is therefore the whole of nature… Everything of which one can conceive an idea can also be described by a poet' (III(4):338; sect. 6). Here literature reflects the world with no qualifications. But the idealizing impulse soon makes its appearance, in a fairly slippery formulation. Having just declared that the poet depicts *all* of nature, Wieland is unwilling to limit imitation to only a *part* of nature, yet he is still committed to the notion that poetry must be beautiful. And so he resorts to a semantic trick: "Die Natur ist also allezeit schön" 'Nature is therefore at all times beautiful' (III(4):339; sect. 6). Wieland here acts as if the adjective in the phrase *la belle nature* is not actually a limiting descriptor, but instead a redundant epithet that points to the inherent quality of nature. As he continues, Wieland defines away the conflict between his objective and his idealizing inclinations with the bold assertion that the phrase "die schöne Natur" 'beautiful nature' is "ein Pleonasmus und… eine ganz ungeschickte… Redens-Art" 'a pleonasm and a quite awkward expression' (ibid.). This move is too obviously defensive and contrived, especially since Wieland immediately goes on to admit that "alle sublunarischen Dinge" 'all sublunary things' are subject to "Veränderung" 'change' and "Corruption" 'corruption' (ibid.), which do necessitate certain transformative operations on raw nature. These conceptual contortions indicate that Wieland already senses the tension between his idealizing-didactic impulses and his allegiance to imitation of nature. But for the time being he is content to whitewash the theoretical difficulties by adhering to an elevated concept of nature.

All in all, the 1757 *Dicht-Kunst* is a remarkable document that shows how early the poetic trends that shape *Agathon* made their appearance. Although Wieland still largely closes his eyes to the less attractive aspects of nature, he has already started to show some discomfort with the stylized and beautified Neoclassical version of imitation, and has also made human relations and human psychology the prime objects of poetry. All of this occurs, moreover, before he has done any work in the novel genre, where the above impulses would come to full fruition.

Angelic Humans in Lady Johanna Gray

For now, Wieland is still struggling with the traditional genres of drama and epic. His 1758 tragedy *Lady Johanna Gray* is a fine example of how Wieland's current poetic views appear in practice as opposed to theory. The tragedy shows how far Wieland has yet to go, despite all his talk of psychology and imitation, before he achieves a semblance of empirical

plausibility. *Lady Johanna Gray* is a Protestant martyr play with a very passive and pious heroine whose virtue and faith emerge brilliantly when tested by suffering and execution. The subject matter is historical, drawn from the story of the Protestant Jane Grey's brief ascension to the throne of England in 1553 and her subsequent execution at the hands of the Catholic Queen Mary. The play has explicit didactic intentions, which Wieland voices in a preface to the text:

> Die Tragödie ist dem edlen Endzweck gewidmet, das Grosse, Schöne und Heroische der Tugend auf die rührendeste Art vorzustellen, die Empfindungen der Menschlichkeit und der sympathetischen Theilnehmung an allem, was die Menschen angehet, aufs lebhafteste zu erwecken und zu unterhalten, und überhaupt die Tugend in Handlungen und nach dem Leben zu mahlen, und den Menschen Bewundrung und Liebe für sie abzunöthigen.
>
> The noble purpose to which this tragedy is dedicated is to depict, in the most touching way, the greatness, beauty and heroism of virtue; to rouse and engage, in the most lively way, feelings of humanity and of sympathetic compassion for everything that concerns people; and in general to paint virtue in actions and according to life, and to induce admiration and love for it from people. (II(3):147)

On first reading, this passage seems little changed from the poetics of the early 1750s: just as in the earlier writings, Wieland is swept up in sentimental enthusiasm for lofty ideals. But the shifts that had occurred over the past couple years do make themselves felt in this play. First of all, the mere fact that the play has an earthly setting and a human heroine, however improbable they are in the specifics of the depiction, constitutes a significant step toward empiricism compared with the letters from heaven and the contemplations of divinity found in the texts discussed in the previous section. Wieland is following through on his intention to shift his focus to the "lower world." His more objective concept of imitation makes itself heard in the claim seen above that the action of play is presented "according to life," even if that life becomes distorted in his portrayal. At least Wieland has a renewed aspiration to direct his mimetic mirror toward the world rather than toward abstract heavenly ideals. Furthermore, Wieland's new emphasis on humanity in particular, on "everything that concerns people," comes out in the frequent invocations of "Menschen" in the above quotation. Even the mechanism of the didactic effect has undergone some change in Wieland's new outlook. In his earlier works, Wieland wanted to work exclusively through the intangible communication of sentiments; the reader was expected to be infected by a pious ecstasy, effusively expressed, but with little connection to actual images. But in the account given in the above quotation the didactic effect depends much more on actual portrayals of the desired ideal—virtue is to be "painted" in actions and characters. The sentiments do still play an important role in the pedagogical effect, but even they have become more concrete: instead of a diffuse ecstasy, Wieland now has a more precise theory of emotional impact, according to which our shared humanity is the source of the passions aroused when we see our fellow men and women on stage. In short, in *Lady Johanna Gray* Wieland is more interested in objective imitation, has chosen earthly, human subject matter, and is relying more on concrete imitations for the inspiring didactic effect.

In the course of the play, however, these mimetic intentions are almost nullified by ridiculously idealized portrayals that attracted the mockery and criticism of both Lessing, as quoted earlier, and Moses Mendelssohn. Wieland's supposed humans are, as Mendelssohn writes

in the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, "vollkommen tugendhafte Personen" 'perfectly virtuous individuals' (qu. Lessing 4:1200; see Mendelssohn's *Bibliothek* vol. 4.2, 785-802). Johanna is described as, "Du schönste, reinste Seele, die sich jemals / In Engelsbildung dieser Erde zeigte" 'You, the purest, most beautiful soul, that ever / Revealed itself to this world in angelic form' (II(3):154; act 1 scene 2) and as an, "Engel, welchen noch / Auf kurze Zeit die Sichtbarkeit umschleyert" 'angel, still cloaked in visible form for a short time yet' (II(3):202; IV.6). The departed King Edward was also a paragon of perfection: "Solch einer Tugend / War diese welt nicht werth!" 'This earth was not worthy of such a virtue!' (II(3):149; I.1). What jumps out in these quotations is the eager recourse to a higher realm. Yes, Wieland gives us humans instead of spirits as literary characters, but these so-called humans are more like angels briefly cloaked in materiality. And the earth that has supposedly captured Wieland's interest is in this play nothing but a temporary and unworthy setting for such superior characters. Once again we see that while Wieland's concept of mimesis has shifted toward "nature," his concept of nature is still elevated into an image of perfection. This idealizing approach prevents Wieland's mimetic conception from having much practical force as yet, so that the didactic intention easily gains the upper hand in the course of the play. Wieland's shallow and highly stylized concept of nature offers little resistance to the didactic demand for visionary moral images. His poetic ambition was to come down to the earth, but all Wieland has done here is transform the earth into the same heaven that he was supposedly leaving behind.

In fact the plot and theme of *Lady Johanna Gray* are built around the repudiation of the earth. One of the main characters, Johanna's husband Guilford, has a pronounced attachment to the material realm. In contrast to Johanna's quiet acceptance of martyrdom, he encourages his wife to seize her chance at earthly prosperity, and, until he is finally won over by Johanna's sublime example, has a very difficult time reconciling himself to the fact that he must let go of his physical life in the prime of youth. When Johanna invokes providence, Guilford reminds her that providence, "gebraucht / Zu ihren unsichtbaren Thaten stets / Die sichtbare Natur, den Lauf der Dinge / Der Menschen Arm und Witz und Leidenschaften" 'uses / for its invisible deeds always / visible nature, the course of things, / the arms and wits and passions of men' (II(3):155; I.2). This actually sounds like an admirably practical point of view, one that we could imagine Wieland espousing in one of his anti-Platonic letters to Zimmermann. But Guilford's philosophy is refuted by the end of the play when Johanna, at the height of her heroism, proclaims that, "Das, was wir hier in dieser Schattenwelt / Das Leben nenn, ist kein wahres Leben" 'That which we call life here in this world of shadows is no genuine life' (II(3):211; V.3); and earthly existence is, "Ein düstrer Traum" 'a murky dream' (ibid.). In this play the earthly realm is slandered and truth is placed back in the realm of intangibles. The whole text wears its earthly setting like some sort of burdensome probation and yearns to be elevated into the immaterial. *Lady Johanna Gray* shows how shaky Wieland's newly developed poetic convictions are. In the letters above, Wieland seems genuinely excited about his reorientation toward the material realm, but the texts of the period reveal that he does not yet know how to go about putting his convictions into practice. He can pay homage to "all of nature" and to the "lower world" in theory, but this new concept of mimesis means little when he allows his portrayals of "nature" to be almost as idealized as his portrayals of the spiritual realm were. And so *Johanna* is an aborted attempt to write a humanly grounded text: instead of depicting the earth, Wieland dramatizes the self-repudiation of the earth. He has come down to earth, but only in order to tell us that we should leave it behind.

Godly Mortals in Cyrus

Wieland's long narrative poem *Cyrus*, published in unfinished form in 1759, exhibits a dynamic similar to that of *Lady Johanna Gray*: pretensions toward realism are undermined by a highly idealized understanding of "nature." This time, however, the story is played out in epic rather than dramatic form, with an actively virtuous hero rather than a passive martyr. The protagonist of the poem is the sixth century BCE Persian king Cyrus the Great, who is depicted waging an appropriately high-minded and humane war against the Assyrians. It seems that in *Cyrus* even more than in *Lady Johanna Gray* Wieland firmly intended to display a new poetic approach marked by a focus on verisimilitude. This point comes out clearly in a substantial explanatory preface to the main text, in which Wieland shares with the public many of the same "earth-oriented" ideals of which he was writing to Zimmermann. In the preface Wieland repeatedly asserts his new interest in the human and his new distaste for the supernatural, and dubs this new approach "Socratic": "Die Flüge die er in jüngern Jahren nach den etherischen Gegenden unternommen, hatten seine Einbildungskraft ermüdet; die Sokratischen Schriften hatten seine Philosophie humanisiert" 'The flights that he undertook in younger years to the ethereal regions had tired his imagination; the Socratic writings had humanized his philosophy' (II(3):89). The reference to ethereal "flights" points back to the *Briefe* or the *Empfindungen* with their stories of journeys through the far reaches of the universe. The new "Socratic" approach, meanwhile, was, according to Wieland, inspired mainly by readings of Xenophon and Euripides, who apparently showed him a new way of engaging with human concerns. As he turns to the human, Wieland, in a pointed rebuke to his former mentors Bodmer and Breitinger, rejects the use of the marvelous:

> Wir wollen nur bemerken, daß er [der Autor]… sich diejenige Art des Wunderbaren, die aus dem Gebrauch der Maschinen, d. i. der Einführung der Götter und Engel als handelnder Personen, entspringt, fast gänzlich versagt hat… Er glaubte nur, Cyrus könne der wunderbaren Schönheiten entbehren, die er aus dieser Quelle von Erfindungen hätte schöpfen können. Er nahm sich vor, in diesem Stücke der Ordnung der Natur, so nahe als immer möglich wäre, zu folgen, Er läßt alles durch Menschen verrrichten, was durch Menschen verrichtet werden kan.
>
> We only want to note that he [the author] has almost completely denied himself that sort of the marvelous that arises from the use of machines, that is from the introduction of the gods and angels as active characters… He believed simply that Cyrus could do without the marvelous beauties that he could have acquired from this source of invention. He resolved in this composition to follow the order of nature as closely as might ever be possible; everything that can be performed by humans, is performed by humans. (II(3):91)

Oettinger makes much of the theoretical rebellion signaled by this critical jab at "gods and angels" (50). Wieland is explicitly disparaging the imaginative style favored by Bodmer and Breitinger and seems to have wearied of the supernatural motifs found in their favorite authors, Klopstock and Milton. Verisimilitude rather than marvelous novelty is the new guiding principle of his poetics.

Yet these striking new poetic resolutions crumble in practice. True, the characters in *Cyrus* are human, the action takes place on earth, and the plot involves no divine powers or otherworldly spirits. But a purely technical avoidance of the supernatural is a meager qualification for verisimilitude. Particularly for a writer as interested in the human as Wieland claims to be, a verisimilar text must achieve plausibility in human character and action, and this is where *Cyrus* falls short. As in *Johanna*, the characters are impossibly idealized. Cyrus's military campaign, as Wieland hastens to make clear in the opening canto, is motivated purely by liberal ideals of freedom and self-determination, and his army is a model of restraint and personal dignity (while the enemy are slavish and lustful). Cyrus himself is turned into a demigod: he is described in the first few lines of the text as "der göttliche Cyrus" 'the godlike Cyrus' (II(3):92). This apotheosis is developed even more explicitly later when Cyrus is described from the perspective of his soldiers:

> Jeder ein Held, und Cyrus, wie unter den Helden ein Gott glänzt…
> Sie blicken in stummer Erstaunung
> Oft auf Cyrus und schlagen geblendet die Augen dann nieder,
> Zweiffelnd, ob nicht vielleicht der hohen Unsterblichen einer,
> Die nach dem Winke des obersten Gottes die Sphären regieren,
> Sichtbar geworden und Cyrus genannt die Sterblichen führe.
>
> Each a hero, and Cyrus like a god radiant among the heroes…
> They often look at Cyrus in mute astonishment
> And then cast down their dazzled eyes,
> Doubting, questioning whether perhaps one of the high immortals,
> Who rule the spheres under the guidance of the foremost god
> Has become visible and leads mortals under the name of Cyrus. (II(3):96)

This is the same tendency observed in *Lady Johanna Gray*: the ostensible humans hover on the brink of divinity. Despite his new interest in verisimilitude, Wieland's idealistic aspirations gain the upper hand and he cannot resist stylizing his characters into what people *should* be rather than what they are, with the natural result that his portrayals end up oriented more toward the divine than the mortal. We may accept Wieland's claim that he has turned his gaze toward humanity, but clearly his perception of humanity is distorted by his rosy visions of the sublime heights humans could theoretically attain.

In *Cyrus*, the same logical conundrums that will cause trouble in *Agathon* force Wieland to abandon his resolute, yet inadequately grounded, aspirations toward verisimilitude. At first, however, he tries to ignore any potential problems. In his correspondence, Wieland describes his goal in a way that suggests that the real and the ideal can be harmonized: he writes of his desire for "eine[n] *menschlichen* Heldengedicht" 'a *human* heroic epic' (1:322; Feb. 1758) that would portray "die wahre Tugend des Menschen" 'the true virtue of the human' (1:319; Feb. 1758). These phrases show that although Wieland was unwilling to renounce his lofty visions, he was earnestly committed to giving them a new human applicability: he wanted to show the ideal as it would appear on earth rather than in heaven. This is a nearly impossible stance to maintain, but Wieland closes his eyes to the conflicts between his mimetic and his didactic stance. The preface to *Cyrus* breezes past all theoretical difficulties with certain baldly improbable assertions, claiming on the one hand that the hero will be "de[r] beste der Menschen und der Könige" 'the

best of men and of kings,' uniting the virtues of all previous epic heroes in a single figure, and on the other hand that this will be done "ohne die Wahrscheinlichkeit zu verletzen" 'without injury to verisimilitude' and without creating what Diderot called a "caricatura en beau" 'beautified caricature' (II(3):90). The latter phrase suggests that Wieland himself was beginning to recognize that believable human characters, and not merely the avoidance of the marvelous, are essential to verisimilitude. But he apparently convinces himself that this believability is compatible with the superlatives that characterize his hero.

In practice, however, either the lofty vision or the desire for verisimilitude has to give way. In the case of *Cyrus*, it is the standards of plausibility that are weakened in order to harmonize competing poetic aspirations, and so we are given heroes who are more divine than human. These idealizations are foreshadowed by the models Wieland cites in his preface. Instead of looking toward empirical reality, as one would expect from a more literal understanding of "Natur," Wieland revives the Scholastic version of mimesis and orients himself largely according to earlier literary models. He describes the Classical Greek model of the human as the ultimate achievement and has high praises as well for Shaftesbury's description of the ideal man (ibid.). He specifically praises Richardson's Clarissa and Grandison—the exact type of novelistic hero that he would later find ridiculous and useless—as fine examples of what he is now trying to achieve. And finally, *Cyrus* itself is directly modeled after a literary rather than a historical text, namely Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a highly idealized, didactically oriented account of the great king's life that offers a very shaky foundation for a text that purports to offer breakthroughs in verisimilitude. The recourse to literary models exposes the superficiality of Wieland's desire to celebrate genuine humanity: for now, even his source material needs to come to him with some pre-existing aesthetic polish. Inevitably, *Cyrus* ends up giving us poetic heroes rather than the un-marvelous humans we were promised.

In the *Dicht-Kunst*, *Lady Johanna Gray* and *Cyrus*, Wieland still dwells in a poetic middle ground between fantasy and objective imitation. Although his concept of mimesis has shifted toward the earth and toward humans, and although he has begun to assertively speak the language of verisimilitude, he lacks the empirically perceptive concept of nature needed to follow through on his supposedly worldly approach. He has banished the overtly supernatural from his poetry but is still left with implausible caricatures for characters. These texts may show us humans acting virtuously, but they have not arrived at the humanly *possible* version of virtue that would be the structuring motivation of *Agathon*.

3. Recognizing the Earth: The Shift in Wieland's Concept of *Natur*

Araspes und Panthea

Klaus Oettinger interpreted the preface to *Cyrus* as a central moment in Wieland's empirical shift (50), but a reading of the actual text of the poem makes it clear that Wieland's empirical aspirations are stronger in theory than in practice and are undermined by an idealized Neoclassical understanding of nature. The most decisive shift in Wieland's poetics can be more accurately pinpointed as occurring just after *Cyrus*: it occurs in the dramatic dialogue *Araspes und Panthea* (*Araspes and Panthea*), published in 1760. In this text, just as in earlier texts, Wieland aspires to imitate an earthly rather than a transcendent truth. But the key move that makes *Araspes und Panthea* stand out is that Wieland has adjusted his concept of nature along

with his concept of mimesis. For the first time, he recognizes that human experience does not match the idealized visions that had possessed him for so long and he begins to more consistently direct his verisimilitude toward *Natur* rather than toward *schöne Natur*. As a result, he confronts the fact that an accurate portrayal of humanity will necessarily conflict with his desire to portray beauty and virtue; thus he sets in motion the dynamic that will culminate in *Agathon*.

The recognition that motivates this tale is a sexual one. *Araspes und Panthea* tells the story of a young soldier in Cyrus's army (Wieland has again drawn his plot from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*) who is assigned to guard the beautiful and cultivated Panthea, the captured wife of one of the enemy generals. The soldier, Araspes, initially overestimates his own sexual virtue and scoffs at any suggestion that that the company of this woman could distract him from his duty. He conceives of love as a soulful, Platonic connection, and gushes in expressions that recall the Wieland of the early 1750s: Panthea is "das Urbild der Vollkommenheit, das in meiner Seele schwebet" 'the archetype of perfection, hovering within my soul' (II(3):8); "Wer könnte Panthea wie eine Sterbliche lieben?... Sie ist so ganz Seele, daß ihr Leib nur ein Abglanz derselben scheint…" 'Who could love Panthea in her mortal form?... She is all soul, so that her body seems a mere reflection thereof' (II(3):29). This remarkably naïve soldier is shown to be wrong by the end of the story, as he is overcome with irresistible desire for Panthea's material form. Once he acknowledges this physical attraction, he reverses his earlier outlook and now defiantly embraces the sensual, earthly aspect of existence: "Wie? meynest du, ich sollte mir selbst verbergen können, daß Panthea eben so irdisch ist, als die übrigen Weiber? Glaube mir, sie hat keine Ursache, sich der Menschheit zu schämen; und da ich jezt mehr als jemals empfinde, wie schön es ist, ein Mensch zu seyn, so kömmt es mir nicht zu, sie anders als nach menschlicher Weise zu lieben" 'What? do you think I should be able to hide from myself that Panthea is just as earthly as all other women? Believe me, she has no reason to be ashamed of her humanity; and since I feel now more than ever how beautiful it is to be a human, it befits me to love her in no other way than in a human way' (II(3):66).

This is the first time that Wieland's turn to the earth is expressed in the plot of one of his literary works. Earlier, he had voiced similar ideas in his letters and his theoretical statements, only to repudiate them in the structure of his literary compositions. But now Wieland gives more than lip service to verisimilitude: his text pivots around the recognition that to be human is a sensual experience. Nature stops being a stylized ideal and begins to take on at least some of the tangibility of lived experience. Wieland tells us in a preface appended later that this new outlook grew out of his experiences in Bern, Switzerland, where he had taken up a tutoring position after leaving Zürich in 1759 (II(3):88). In Bern Wieland became friends with a certain Julie von Bondeli, an educated and intellectually stimulating young salon hostess. Wieland even became engaged to her briefly, and although his letters of the period continue to include more soulful gushing than physical eroticism, his feelings for Julie apparently helped him follow through more consistently on his hitherto mostly theoretical interest in the material world.

The shift that happens in *Araspes und Panthea* is interesting enough on its own, but it is particularly thrown into relief by the remarkable timing of the work's composition. Wieland began working on *Araspes und Panthea* in 1756 before he turned to *Cyrus*. He then set the work aside for a few years as he threw himself into the attempt to write the grand heroic epic of the Persian king, then finally resumed work on *Araspes und Panthea* only after having abandoned *Cyrus* in exasperation in 1759. In other words, Wieland left unfinished the text that was to present the perfect human (*Cyrus*) in order to complete the text whose theme is the fallibility of humans (*Araspes und Panthea*). This sudden switch, and the stark contrast between the

abandoned and the newly resumed and completed text, back up the idea that *Araspes und Panthea* is the pivot point between two poetic outlooks. Up until he stopped work on *Cyrus*, Wieland clung to a vision of *schöne Natur* that allowed him to reconcile his moral-didactic aspirations with his theoretical commitment to verisimilitude and *Natur*. When he turned back to *Araspes und Panthea*, he did so with a newly objective and more genuinely human version of verisimilitude. For the past few years, his idealistic enthusiasms had merely been displaced onto an idealized concept of "nature," but this concept finally collapsed under the pressure of Wieland's genuine and growing interest in human nature as it really is. *Araspes und Panthea* marks the pivot point when the corporeality of existence became impossible to ignore.

The most interesting result of this shift is the way that it for the first time puts Wieland's mimetic approach in a position to clash with his didactic aims. Wieland now recognizes the flawed aspects of nature and therefore has a difficult time maintaining the virtuous perfection of his earlier compositions. And so *Araspes und Panthea* is the first text to display the various vacillations and contortions necessary to cope with such a conflict. One of Wieland's two poetic commitments has to give way. In the prefatory dedication to the text, it is the didactic principle that suffers. Here Wieland seems to completely abandon his visions of moral edification as he heaps scorn on the idealistic poetic model that motivated *Cyrus*: Driven, Wieland writes, by "eine Art von Enthusiasmus" 'a sort of enthusiasm,' he had the "Verwegenheit… einen grössern und bessern Helden zu schildern als Achilles, Aeneas, der rasende Roland und der gute König Arthus gewesen seyn sollen" 'temerity… to portray a greater and better hero than Achilles, Aeneas, Orlando Furioso and the good King Arthur are supposed to have been' (II(3):2). In this passage Wieland recognizes the absurdity of his excessively eager strivings. After having tried and failed, in the text of *Cyrus*, to follow through on his noble intentions, he begins to sense the creative sterility of such sublime ambitions. In a world-weary tone, Wieland swears off his entire idealistic enterprise:

> Seit dem ich die Welt und mich besser kenne, habe ich gefunden, daß es leichter sey, uns selbst zu verbessern als andere. Die Entwürfe, die Sitten der Völker zu verschönern, die Unschuld des goldnen Alters herzustellen, die Oran-Outangs zu Menschen und die Menschen zu Engeln zu erhöhen, sind gut, schön und erhaben. Sie zeugen, wenn sie von einem Jünglinge gefaßt werden, von der Güte seines Herzens; von einem Alten, daß er die Welt niemals anders als aus seiner Celle betrachtet habe.
>
> Since I have come to know the world and myself better, I have found that it is easier to improve ourselves than to improve others. The plans for bettering the morals of the nations, for restoring the innocence of the golden age, for elevating orangutans to humans and humans to angels, are good, beautiful and sublime. When a youth seizes onto these ideas, they testify to the goodness of his heart; when an elder does the same, they prove that he has never observed the world but from his cell. (II(3):2)

Wieland's only desire now is "gelesen zu werden" 'to be read' (ibid.). Besides the exasperated rejection of all grand schemes for literary education, two other features stand out in the above quotation. First, we see a refreshed reference to empirical observation. Wieland had long been calling on poets to follow nature, but only in a sort of formulaic way; now, however, the

commonplace notion of *Naturnachahmung* gains an emphatic worldly edge once Wieland clarifies that it is not adequate to look at the world from a monk's cell, nor, presumably, through the prism of one's idealized conception of nature. Empirical observation is the new foundation of Wieland's concept of mimesis and of nature: one must go out into the world in order to understand it. Secondly, this is one of the first passages where Wieland takes on an ironic and mocking tone, felt above all in the reference to orangutans. This tone is the hallmark of Wieland's new disillusioned outlook, and it will become much more prominent as Wieland gains a greater sense of the gap between his ideals and observed reality (see the discussion of irony in *Agathon* below). In this preface to *Araspes und Panthea*, then, Wieland adopts the stance of a seasoned man of the world and seems to entirely sacrifice his virtuous aspirations to his sober new view of the world.

As usual, however, the literary text does not match the theoretical boldness of the opening statement. Although the plot of *Araspes und Panthea* demonstrates that Wieland certainly has a more realistic understanding of human sexuality, he has not abandoned his moral aims in the way the preface implies. Wieland's commitment to moral betterment was deeply rooted enough that the frustration of one failed composition (namely, *Cyrus*) was not enough to induce him to leave his idealism behind. The moral aim comes out in the characters of *Araspes und Panthea*, who despite their flaws still function as largely idealized models of virtue. Wieland's concession to the inevitability of human sexuality does not drag him down to the level of common everyday vulgarity: his characters are much more high-minded than the average person and do their utmost to respect sexual virtue (and these heroes of antiquity express themselves, incidentally, in an incongruous eighteenth-century sentimental idiom that further detracts from the plausibility of the text). Yet these characters are now supposed to offer readers an *attainable* model, not one based on the false notion that people can maintain a stony indifference to physical existence. Thus, since the didactic aim refuses to be repressed, while the newly realistic style of imitation is too freshly resolved upon to be fully compromised, *Araspes und Panthea* has to find a different solution to the conflict between visions and reality. Only one solution can be found—to flee from the problem. Caught between their noble aspirations and the inevitability of their human sensuality, Wieland's heroes can do nothing but run away from compromising situations. All of the wise and experienced male characters in *Araspes und Panthea* declare from the outset that they must simply avoid contact with Panthea. Araspes also, after repeated attempts at denial, realizes that he too must be sent away on a military mission in order to distract himself from his carnal desires. In this way, the text acknowledges human sexual fallibility while still allowing its characters to avoid defilement. Of course, flight is not a very functional method for the maintenance of virtue. But the point is that Wieland is at least striving to present something that is *possible*, i.e. a model that is admirable yet attainable. As we will see, even after the lengthy and convoluted explorations of *Agathon*, he never finds a better method for reconciling the call of virtue with the demands of humanity than simply to flee.

In sum, *Araspes und Panthea* launches Wieland on the quest to unite two principles that exclude each other. First of all, by incorporating a more realistic acknowledgment of human sexuality, the text makes a crucial shift toward a more plausible concept of the "nature" that literature imitates. *Araspes und Panthea* is by no means a model of empirical realism, but it does display a more robust commitment to objective verisimilitude. At the same time, Wieland is unable to abandon virtue in the way his preface suggested, so that his didactic aims enter into a newly intractable conflict with his mimetic methodology. The interacting poetic principles in *Araspes und Panthea* thus lay the ground for *Agathon*. Wieland himself recognized the

connection between the two texts: he mentioned, in a preface added for a later republication, that the circumstances that gave birth to *Araspes und Panthea* also engendered the state of mind "in welcher die Idee der Geschichte Agathons in seiner Seele lebendig zu werden anfing" 'in which the idea for the history of Agathon began to come alive in his soul' (II(3):88). Parallels are particularly obvious between *Araspes und Panthea* and the story of Agathon and Danae that makes up the whole first section of *Agathon*. Further disillusionment with regard to "nature" and further adjustments in Wieland's poetic practice would come over the next few years. But in *Araspes und Panthea*, with the dramatization of the corporeal insistence of love, Wieland has achieved a much more plausible concept of nature, a more empirical approach to mimesis, and a more direct confrontation with the gap between what is and what should be.

4. Routes out of Swiss Poetics

In the process of composing the texts analyzed above, Wieland has moved far from the poetics of Bodmer and Breitinger. The most important change is his abandonment of the poetics of the marvelous in favor of an objective mimesis, a mimesis of the existing world rather than of imagined worlds and visionary ideals. But Wieland's enthusiastic turn toward the earth, as described above, had little practical consequence because the "nature" that he aimed to imitate was the stylized Neoclassical ideal of *la belle nature.* Only when his concept of nature shifts along with his concept of mimesis does he confront the representational difficulties arising from the conflict of mimesis and moral instruction. Over the same period, a few other minor theoretical shifts occur, as mentioned above: Wieland's idealism, most likely due to the influence of Shaftesbury, acquires an aesthetic aspect to go along with the moral aspect; and Wieland's rhetorical method shifts gradually, as he relied less on the purely emotional impact of his writings and is more and more concerned with presenting fleshed-out representations of the virtuous life in his main characters, who act as heroic models to be emulated by the reader or, by the time of *Araspes*, as fallible characters whose struggles the reader can identify with.

As he develops a more mature, independent and individual poetic approach, Wieland begins to be disturbed by the fact that the German literary world associates him so closely with Bodmer. He aims to distance himself from Bodmer diplomatically and respectfully, as seen when Wieland writes to Zimmermann of the fresh start he hopes to find in Bern:

> Ne parlons point désormais de Mr. Bodmer. Il a des Merites, il a des Vertus, il a été mon bienfaiteur… Nous pardonnerons à ce bon Vieillard d'étre Poëte en depit de la Nature… Je ne parlerai de lui à Berne qu'avec des marques de reconnaissance et d'éstime, je parlerai peu de ses ouvrages, je me montrerai par degrés tel que je suis, le voile tombera, le Fanatique, le Bodmerien deviendront ce que tous les Phantomes.
>
> Let's not speak of Mr. Bodmer at all henceforth. He has some merits, he has some virtues, he was my benefactor… We will pardon this good old man for being a poet in spite of nature… I will speak of him in Bern with nothing but signs of gratitude and esteem, I will speak little of his works, I will by degrees show myself as what I am, the veil will fall, the fanatic, the Bodmerian will share the same fate as other phantoms. (1:430; April 1759)

The one-sided, lofty and gushing moralism of the early Zürich period was apparently an aberration, a "phantom" now left behind as Wieland reaches back to his youth and picks up the lost strands of a more grounded poetics, and then develops that embryonic interest into a genuine engagement with the real concerns of human experience.

As Wieland pulls away from Bodmer, many other figures of contemporary and ancient poetics nudge him in new directions. Shaftesbury, Euripides and Xenophon have already been mentioned as iconic figures in Wieland's new approach; of the latter Wieland wrote, "daß ich auf Xenophons Menschen mehr halte als auf alle Heilige der Romischen Kirche" 'that I place more worth on Xenophon's people than on all the saints of the Roman church" (1:293; Dec. 1756). Wieland also effusively praises Shakespeare's portrayals of humanity (e.g. 1:337; April 1758) and later publishes the first extensive German translation of Shakespeare's dramas. In addition, encouraged by Zimmermann, Wieland read widely in the works of the French Enlightenment and materialism. His changing outlook with respect to his French contemporaries is mapped particularly well in his shifting estimation of Voltaire: after dismissing him as "ein mittelmäßiger Philosoph" in June 1756 (1:263) he completely reverses that verdict two years later (1:336; Apr. 1758). Wieland also mentions Diderot, D'Alembert and Helvétius with respect and growing interest (e.g. 1:399 and 1:404; Feb. 1759). These new names replace references to spiritually oriented writers such as Milton, Elizabeth Rowe or James Thomson, who had been prominent literary models for Wieland in his early Zürich years. Wieland's new reading material is both an index of and an impetus for his poetic reorientation—writers like Xenophon, Shakespeare and Euripides show him how to put human figures at the center of poetry, while Voltaire or Helvétius give him a potent dose of irony and cynicism regarding the spiritual capacities of humankind. Besides these new literary and intellectual stimulants, changes in Wieland's social milieu doubtless contributed to his desire for a more humanly relevant poetry. After leaving the ascetic confines of Bodmer's house, Wieland was eager to acquire more real experience in society. In Zürich he acquired a circle of older female friends whom he referred to as his "Serail" (1:296; Jan. 1757); in Bern he mingled with Julie von Bondeli and her circle. All this contact with people rather than with the books and ideas that had been the "friends" of his youth may have made it difficult for Wieland to maintain a serious interest in the kind of otherworldly, devotional writings that had occupied him earlier.

Whatever the reasons are for Wieland's literary metamorphosis, the fact is that his newly substantial and worldly conception of verisimilitude helped him find a productive exit from the confines of Bodmerian poetics. "Confining" is not normally a word used to describe the Zürich school; instead Bodmer and Breitinger are commonly interpreted as widening the range of poetry, "emancipating" the literary imagination from the demands of mimesis and didacticism and pointing the way toward the aesthetics of the later eighteenth century (e.g. Schmidt, Alt, Siegrist, Zeller). But Bodmer and Breitinger's emancipation is so convoluted and limited that it can just as well be seen as a dead end. Bodmer and Breitinger were awkwardly stuck between invention and imitation: they called on the poet to seek out the marvelous, but then limited the use of the imagination to certain tired conventions; they paid lip service to the traditional principle of imitation, but gutted it of all meaning by permitting the imitation of endless "possible worlds" with no necessary relation to our own. In short, they coupled a distended version of verisimilitude with a feeble version of poetic invention. To be fair, such inconclusiveness might be inevitable during a period of transition; nevertheless their poetics has a certain awkward timidity that needs to be resolved in one direction or the other. One possible

exit is toward the full celebration of creativity, in which the poet is viewed as a genius free from all models and restraints; this Romantic strand is the one most frequently highlighted by literary scholarship. But a second option would be to reestablish the principle of literary verisimilitude in a more consequential and grounded way, dispensing with the Swiss school's exclusive emphasis on the new and the marvelous, and refreshing stale Neoclassical conventions by urging the poet to follow more closely actual nature rather than *la belle nature*. This is the path on which Wieland has started. While his writings give plenty of evidence of imagination, one of his main aims in the 1760s is to use his poetry to paint the inner life of the human in its interaction with the conundrums of lived experience. Wieland finds this new approach invigorating enough that he now dismisses Bodmer as just a well-intentioned old man and privately mocks his tedious method: "il ne faut pas faire parler ses heros le langage des Gens raisonnables, il faut prêcher et endormir!" '[he] can't make his heroes speak the language of reasonable people, [he] must preach and lull people to sleep!' (1:420; Apr. 1759). As Wieland has realized, the turn to the real and the essential can be just as stimulating as an unbounded imaginative freedom, and he chooses the former even as the future trend of German poetry will tend more toward the latter. An engagement with the stimulating tangibility of everyday life would be carried out more consistently and fruitfully in the mid-nineteenth century, but it motivated a significant realist strand in mid-eighteenth-century Enlightenment literature as well.

Wieland broke out of the convoluted stylizations offered both by Neoclassical and Swiss poetics in order to make the fallible human the center of his prose writings. But having made an enthusiastic and increasingly rigorous turn to a more empirical poetics, he retained a lively desire to improve the imperfect conditions he observed around him. Wieland's newly articulated concepts of mimesis and of nature are ready to conflict with his persistent visionary aspirations in the next stage of his poetic production, after the return to Biberach.

PART II: IRRESOLVABLE TENSIONS IN *GESCHICHTE DES AGATHON*

In *Geschichte des Agathon* (*The History of Agathon*), the concept of the "possible" emerges in full force. The texts of the 1750s had advanced gradually toward a more plausible version of virtue, but the results were inconsistent. Wieland's 1766-67 novel now approaches this problem with new clarity and resolve: the dubiously human, saint-like figures of *Lady Johanna Gray* and *Cyrus* were no longer satisfactory, nor would it do to simply run away from the problem, as in *Araspes und Panthea*. Wieland seems to have realized how truly difficult it is, conceptually and poetically, to unite verisimilitude with didacticism; he also seems to have recognized that this task nevertheless lies at the center of his creative vision as the unavoidable confluence of his two deeply rooted poetic interests. And so the structuring aim of *Geschichte des Agathon* is to achieve a representation that is morally superior to the norm, yet at the same time attainable for fallible human beings—a representation, in other words, that is just *possible*. But the text ostentatiously and abjectly fails to achieve this goal, despite repeatedly insisting on its intention to provide such a practical model of virtue. When we read *Agathon*, then, we trace the fluctuating attempts to achieve a balanced position, attempts that always misfire as the text, rather than achieving union, simply oscillates between the two incommensurable camps of virtue

and realism. In fact, the text itself sets up the incompatibility of the two concepts it is supposedly trying to unite: the novel espouses such an inflexible standard of virtue, and such a pessimistic view of nature, that the failure to achieve harmony is predetermined. The novel culminates in the ironic capitulation of verisimilitude and the triumph of a manifestly implausible virtuous lifestyle. Meanwhile, on the path to this conclusion, the reader encounters a set of devices whose function is to mitigate the underlying conceptual friction and persuade the reader to swallow the text's contradictory claims. The ironic, playful tone employed by the narrator is one important mitigating factor; another particularly interesting stratagem involves semantic play with the terms "history" and "verisimilitude"—here Wieland exploits certain weaknesses at the heart of the whole project of poetic imitation, teasing us with the suggestion that the real and the plausible may actually point in different directions. The rest of the chapter will describe these features in more detail and show how they arise from the collision of ethics and mimesis. Taken as a whole, *Agathon* offers a remarkable display of the twists, turns and strains that result when the imitation of nature intersects with the aspiration toward moral improvement.

1. Delineating the Possible: The Preface to *Agathon*

The preface to *Agathon* directly lays out its theoretical premises. First comes the commitment to verisimilitude:

> Die Wahrheit, welche von einem Werke, wie dasjenige, so wir den Liebhabern hiemit vorlegen, gefodert werden kann und soll, bestehet darin, daß alles mit dem Lauf der Welt übereinstimme, daß die Charakter nicht willkürlich und bloß nach der Phantasie oder den Absichten des Verfassers gebildet, sondern aus dem unerschöpflichen Vorrat der Natur selbst hergenommen; in der Entwicklung der selben sowohl die innere als die relative Möglichkeit, die Beschaffenheit des menschlichen Herzens, die Natur einer jeden Leidenschaft… aufs genaueste beigehalten… und also alles so gedichtet sei, daß kein hinlänglicher Grund angegeben werden könne, warum es nicht eben so, wie es erzählt wird, hätte geschehen können oder noch einmal wirklich geschehen werde. Diese Wahrheit allein kann Werke von dieser Art nützlich machen, und diese Wahrheit getrauet sich der Herausgeber den Lesern der "Geschichte des Agathon" zu versprechen.
>
> The truth that can and should be expected from a work such as the one that we hereby present to the interested public consists therein, that everything agree with the usual course of the world, that the characters not be formed arbitrarily and not merely according to the imagination or the purposes of the author, but that they instead be drawn forth from the inexhaustible store of nature, that the inner as well as the relative possibility, the constitution of the human heart, the nature of each passion… be most exactly retained in the development of these same characters… and therefore that everything be written so that no adequate reason could be cited for why it could not have happened just as it was narrated, or will not so happen in reality once again. This truth alone can make works of this sort useful, and this is the truth that the publisher ventures to promise to the readers of the *History of Agathon*. (11-12)

The lengthy exposition in this passage indicates that Wieland's conception of verisimilitude is much better established and more deeply considered than it was several years earlier. His earlier homage to nature was enthusiastic but vague; here, on the other hand, Wieland recognizes that one cannot talk so glibly about poetic verity since actually it is not at all clear how a *fictional* work can be "true." And so Wieland takes the time to explain the nature of poetic truth. What he offers here is what in the previous chapter was called a theory of "statistical" verisimilitude: "true" literature should not portray the marvelous outliers and the rare wonders of the world, but instead present the sort of thing that commonly happens, as encapsulated in the phrase "Lauf der Welt" 'usual course of the world.' This passage nicely recognizes the unique modality of poetic truth: imitative literature does not literally reflect reality but instead operates in the subjunctive mood or at best in the future tense, i.e. depicting that which *could* happen or *will* happen sometime. This "statistical" approach to imitation holds poetic representation to a fairly strict standard of realism, but also grants some flexibility as it looks forward to the possible rather than backward to the actual. In a further sign of a more mature and rigorous notion of imitation, Wieland now explicitly states that a true commitment to verisimilitude cannot be distorted by the "Absichten" 'goals' of the poet: no longer can the representation be ostensibly verisimilar but actually governed by the rhetorical intention. This comment is a direct attack on the moral-devotional genres that Wielad has left behind, with their heavily distorted depictions of supposed humans. Wieland seems to have finally perceived the sharp conflict between mimesis and moral pedagogy and no longer glibly espouses both principles as if they fit together perfectly. All in all, in the preface to *Agathon* Wieland offers a sophisticated theory of poetic imitation that works out a way for poetry to be fictional without being false.

As firm as this statement seems to be, at its close the preface is already pointing toward the second shaping moment of *Agathon*. With the comment that poetic truth is supposed to make the text more "useful," the didactic impulse is already creeping in—a sure sign that this emphatic and well-considered theory of imitation will not in fact be allowed to prevail in a stable and secure fashion. The instructive function of *Agathon* is voiced clearly later in the preface: the narrator promises, "daß Agathon in der letzten Periode seines Lebens… ein ebeso weiser als tugendhafter Mann sein wird und… daß unsre Leser begreifen werden, wie und warum er es ist, warum vielleicht viele unter ihnen, weder dieses noch jenes sind; und wie es zugehen müßte, wenn sie es werden sollten" 'that Agathon, in the last period of his life, will be as wise as he is virtuous, and… that our readers will grasp how and why this is so, why perhaps many among them are neither the one nor the other, and what must happen for them to become so' (16-17). This statement mirrors the epigraph to the entire novel, which (drawn from Horace) likewise asserts strong didactic intentions: "quid Virtus, et quid Sapientia possit / Utile proposuit nobis exemplar" 'What virtue and what wisdom are capable of / Thereof it presents us a useful example' (9). Passages like these belie the objective methodology proclaimed earlier; instruction now appears to be as important as "truth" for this novel.

Making things even more complicated is the fact that the didactic method proposed here is precisely the sort that places the most constraints on the representation. Wieland might have chosen a didactic method based on rhetoric, i.e. on the general emotional or aesthetic effect of the text, or on the presentation of a negative example; either option would have left adequate room for the representation to adhere to "truth" without compromising the pedagogical intention. But instead in *Geschichte des Agathon* the literary representation is supposed to offer a direct positive image of the desired result. In other words, the hero is offered as a model for readers to

emulate. The hero, then, is clearly superior to the norm—in the quotation above most readers are notably presumed to be somewhat lacking in wisdom and virtue compared to the hero. But how can the character Agathon be the carrier of the novel's forward-looking message if he is also supposed to follow the "Lauf der Welt"? Is the hero supposed to be fallible and realistic or exemplary and inspiring? Both have been promised to us, and neither leaves much room for the other. The methodology of *Geschichte des Agathon*, in short, causes the two contradictory principles of the text to be centered squarely on the single hero. The war over the representation has commenced.

Before going on, a word must be said about Wieland's use of the terms "wisdom" and "virtue." In the two passages cited above, the text mentions wisdom and virtue as a pair. Although both seem to be idealistic terms that mutually enhance each other, Wieland actually conceives of wisdom as a check on virtue: wisdom refers to the sort of practical understanding that keeps a person from being carried away by lofty moral visions; wisdom guides the individual toward a pragmatic virtue that can function within the real parameters of the world and keeps the virtuous individual from turning into a *Schwärmer*. And so, even in the idealistically oriented statements of the novel's didactic purpose cited above, the practical and realistic orientation is incorporated, since the phrase "wisdom and virtue" is just another way of expressing the difficult balance Wieland aims to achieve between empirical realities and moral norms.

Thus, in the end, the resolute call for "truth" that opened the preface is soon pressured to remold itself in order to accommodate the portrayal of a wise virtue. At least in theory, then, the mimetic merges with the didactic principle to create the mutual border zone of the possible, a zone that is a step ahead of the real, but not nearly as elevated as the absolute virtuous ideal. And alongside the separate assertions of the verisimilar and the utilitarian aims of the text quoted above, the preface also contains a (typically wordy) passage that nicely delineates this liminal zone where the two principles meet:

> Man hat an verschiedenen Stellen des gegenwärtigen Werks die Ursachen angegeben, warum man aus dem Agathon kein Modell eines vollkommen tugendhaften Mannes gemacht hat. Da die Welt mit ausführlichen Lehrbüchern der Sittenlehre angefüllt ist, so steht einem jeden frei (und es ist nichts leichters) sich einen Menschen einzubilden, der von der Wiege an bis ins Grab, in allen Umständen und Verhältnissen des Lebens, allezeit und vollkommen so empfindt, denkt und handelt, wie eine Moral. Damit Agathon das Bild eines wirklichen Menschen wäre, in welchem viele ihr eigenes erkennen sollten, konnte er, wir behaupten es zuversichtlich, nicht tugendhafter vorgestellt werden, als er ist; und wenn jemand hierin andrer Meinung sein sollte, so wünschten wir, daß er uns… denjenigen nenne, der unter allen nach dem natürlichen Lauf Gebornen, in ähnlichen Umständen, und alles zusammengenommen, tugendhafter gewesen wäre, als Agathon.
>
> We have cited, at various points in the present work, the reasons why we have not made Agathon into the model of a perfectly virtuous man. Since the world is filled to the brim with detailed schoolbooks of ethical philosophy, anyone is free (and nothing is easier) to imagine a person who, from the cradle to the grave, in all of the circumstances and conditions of life, at all times, feels, thinks and acts

> perfectly like a moral standard. So that Agathon would be the picture of a real person, in whom many should recognize their own image, he could not, we confidently assert, be portrayed as more virtuous than he is; and if someone should be of a different opinion on this point, then we wish that he would name for us that individual among all who were born of natural processes, who, in similar circumstances, and everything taken together, would have been more virtuous than Agathon. (13)

In this very dialogic passage the objectively mimetic and the didactic principles enter into negotiations. On the one hand, we sense the speaker distancing himself from the unrealistically perfect stereotypes of other novels in the subtly negative tone with which he refers to "textbooks" and in the way he describes certain too-virtuous heroes as *Einbildungen*—this German word for imagination also carries negative connotations of self-delusion ("sich etwas einbilden"). (Although unnamed, Samuel Richardson, the leading touchstone for contemporary debates over the new bourgeois novel, was like a main object of this critique.) At the same time, the speaker clearly feels intense pressure to meet certain moral standards; his audience, after all, is chiefly a bourgeois readership that culturally defines itself by its virtue vis-à-vis the nobility. The two pressures engage in a tug of war: the author, while protesting unreal excesses, gives in to the pressure to make Agathon as virtuous as possible—we are told that he could *not* possibly be more virtuous than the way he is portrayed. But, again, Agathon is only as virtuous as is *possible*: practical and mimetic concerns hold him just barely on this side of the line between plausibility and impossibility. This is a borderline position *par excellence*: no one is more virtuous than Agathon. He is real, human and imperfect; he is no better than he could possibly be—but at the same time he has been pushed to the extreme point of the spectrum of human virtue and stands alone as *the* vanguard of human moral possibility. This is the extreme border position at which Wieland will strive to position his hero, in the hope that at this *one* point the principles of verisimilitude and morality might overlap each other. The liminal singularity of this position suggests how difficult the balancing act will be.

2. Cultural and Personal Contexts

The theories espoused in the preface to *Geschichte des Agathon* were not unique to Wieland. Very similar ideas had already been expressed by other voices in the mid-eighteenth-century discussion of the novel. Several examples can be found in Eberhard Lämmert's anthology *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland*. Lessing put it most succinctly in a 1751 review of a novel by F.-V. Toussaint: "leget man mehr als menschliche Tugenden zum Muster vor, so wird die Unmöglichkeit sie zu erreichen dem Leser allen Muth es zu versuchen benehmen" 'If one presents as a model virtues that are more than human, then the impossibility of attaining them will rob the reader of the courage to even make an attempt' (qu. Lämmert 91). Similar assertions from this same time period can be found in reviews by J. C. Dähnert, Albrecht von Haller and the Greifswalder Deutsche Gesellschaft (Lämmert 90, Vosskamp 180-81). Furthermore, these views are the expression of larger trends in the development of the Enlightenment-era novel. As Wilhelm Vosskamp has described in his classic work on novel theory, Samuel Richardson's novels had a Europe-wide influence in pointing the way toward a new sort of novel that was more middle class, more oriented toward virtue, and

more concerned with private life than the various gallant, courtly, heroic or picaresque novels of the late baroque and early Enlightenment period (142-86). Nevertheless, the impeccable morals of Richardson's characters had begun to seem excessive by Wieland's time; Henry Fielding subsequently prodded novelistic practice in the direction of a more everyday, realistic style that includes imperfect heroes.[5] The influence of Richardson and Fielding then converged in the idea that the respectable Richardsonian goals of moral instruction can be achieved more effectively with a hero of the more plausible Fielding type. This confluence of ideas generated the literary aspirations expressed in the preface to *Agathon*. Finally, on an even more general level, this realistic-yet-exemplary hero is an appropriate expression of major overall trends of the Enlightenment period, namely the high value placed both on empirical, experience-based knowledge as well as on pedagogy, progress and self-improvement. Thus, Wieland's individual poetic proclivities converge neatly with the cultural patterns of his milieu (without being completely reducible to them). This overlap of individual creative tendencies and external trends makes *Agathon* into probably the most intense and elaborate working out of the poetic intersection of realism and morality.

As these larger trends played out in the literary world, Wieland's more immediate environment provided some jolting experiences that solidified the intellectual shifts sketched in the first part of this chapter. In Zürich, as we have already seen, Wieland became enthused by the idea of a more objective type of mimesis. Then, with *Araspes und Panthea*, he started to back up his claims of verisimilitude with a more realistic, believable concept of nature. This latter development took on renewed intensity with Wieland's return to his hometown in southern Germany. His experiences in Biberach decisively opened Wieland's eyes to the less attractive aspects of a world that he had formerly envisioned as *die schöne Natur*. This newly pessimistic concept of nature anchors the mimetic pole of *Agathon*, making it that much more difficult to reconcile the novel's pretensions toward objectivity with its progressive moral vision.

After spending a year as a tutor in Bern (where he pursued a fairly chaste romance with Julie von Bondeli), Wieland came back to Biberach in the summer of 1760 in order to take up a position in the local government, a job that seemed to offer a welcome resolution to his difficulties in trying to decide what to do with his life. Severe disillusionment, but also a more immediate engagement with the social and sensual aspects of worldly life, followed. First of all, the sexual awareness that had appeared in *Araspes und Panthea* was reinforced by an affair with a local Catholic choirgirl, Christina Hogel, whom Wieland called "Bibi." In Bern, Wieland had maintained an ethereal vision of love, notably describing his fiancée Julie von Bondeli as virtue and wisdom incarnate, "die moralische Venus" 'the moral Venus' (1:527; Sept. 1759). In Biberach, on the other hand, Wieland actually fathered a child with Bibi and cohabited with her for a time, thus finally confronting love as a positive physical phenomenon. In a letter to Zimmermann, Wieland compares the joy given him by this "kleine Sängerin" 'little singer' to the tortures he experienced at the hands of "die Seraphischen und Cherubinischen Damen" 'the seraphic and cherubic ladies' such as Sophie and Julie (3:141; Dec. 1762). But the relationship with Bibi was ill-starred: Wieland was Protestant and Hogel Catholic. Wieland engaged in strenuous and prolonged negotiations in order to find a way to marry Hogel, going so far as to promise to raise their children in the Roman church (Sengle 136), but in the end he was

[5] Claire Baldwin, *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel*, provides a more recent, succinct account of roughly the same developments. Rolf Grimminger, "Roman," provides a thorough account of the many different strands of the late baroque novel that gradually give way to the bourgeois-sentimental novel.

persuaded to let her go. (A few years later he married the daughter of a respectable Protestant family and embarked on decades of apparently happy family life.) The affair with Bibi is significant first of all because it confirms Wieland's growing engagement with the sensual, physical world. Wieland soon shocked those who knew him as an ethereal moralist with a series of erotic rococo-style compositions (the "Comische Erzählungen"). He has now come down from the clouds enough to joke in a letter to Zimmermann about the erections these stories induce in male readers (3:345; June 1765). Secondly, the relationship with Bibi gave Wieland a taste of the severe practical difficulties and vexations that can result from a real-world love affair. All of this leaves its trace on the vision of the world provided in *Geschichte des Agathon*: in the novel love is presented as unavoidably carnal rather than intellectual, and relationships do not lend themselves to simple, respectable resolutions.

But alongside the sexual sphere, Wieland experienced a second key form of disillusionment in Biberach, namely a social disillusionment brought about by encounters with the all too prevalent veniality, pettiness and incompetence of humans in civic life. In the mid-eighteenth century Biberach enjoyed the self-governing status of an imperial free city under the Holy Roman Empire. In a rare arrangement, it was governed by a power-sharing system between the Protestant and Catholic communities, which, unsurprisingly, led to plenty of factional conflict. As a result of bureaucratic complications related to the need to balance Protestant and Catholic representation in administrative posts, Wieland was denied his salary for almost four years; the dispute was ultimately settled only by a decision at the highest levels in Vienna. This frustrating and protracted legal battle, as well as firsthand experience with the day to day problems of local governance, opened Wieland's eyes to the huge gap between human potential and its actual realization. He complained bitterly about Biberach from the start, looking back with longing at his time in Switzerland, which he called "die glüklichen Zeiten… im Schooße der philosophischen Ruhe" 'the happy times… in the lap of philosophical tranquility' (3:15; Oct. 1760). Wieland experiences Biberach as "die Hölle in die ich verstossen bin" 'the hell into which I am thrust' and provides the following depressing portrait of his experience:

> Der beständige Anblick unsrer Zerrüttung, unsrer schlimmen Oeconomie, unsrer verfallnen Policey, der gäntzlichen Unachtsamkeit womit man den Verfall der Stadt ansieht, des Unverstands unsrer Regenten, der Zügellosigkeit des Volks, der Verachtung der Gesetze, der willkührlichen Art zu gouverniren, der Chicanen wordurch die einfältigsten Sachen verwirret, und alle Bemühungen der wenigen Gutgesinnten vereitelt werden,—dieser beständige Blick in einen Abgrund von moralischem und politischem Verderben…
>
> The constant sight of our broken-down condition, of our bad economy, of our dilapidated police force, of the complete heedlessness with which people view the decline of the town, of the lack of understanding among our regents, of the lack of restraint among the common people, of contempt for the laws, of the arbitrary method of governance, of the chicanery through which the most simple matters become confused and the efforts of the few well-intentioned people are thwarted—this constant view into an abyss of moral and political ruin… (3:27-28; March 1761)

The shock with which Wieland reacted to Biberach demonstrates how superficial his supposed turn to the earth was while he was still in Zürich. There, he praised the human and envisioned humanity in the godlike mold of Cyrus; beginning with his return to Biberach, by contrast, Wieland's portrayal of the social world will be informed by the spectacle of human failings, and his portrayals of civic activity will be marked by the constant frustration of the well-intentioned and the obstruction of the competent.

After a few years, Wieland's complaints give way to a weary resignation, the sign that his expectations for the world have been permanently lowered. Now, when Wieland speaks of having come down from the seraphic realm, as he does for the umpteenth time in a November 1762 letter to Zimmermann, these protestations finally have the convincing, practical force that they lacked in the 1750s. Wieland gives Biberach credit for the decisive change: "Ce qui a le plus contribué à operer ou plutot à achever entierement cette metamorphose, ou si vous voulés ce retablissement dans ma forme naturelle, d'ou la Magie de l'Enthousiasme m'avoit fait sortir, c'etoit principalement la suite de desastres, de peines et de miseres qui m'a poursuivi depuis mon retour dans ma vilaine patrie" 'That which has contributed the most to carry out, or rather to entirely complete, this metamorphosis, or, if you will, this reestablishment in my natural from, from which the magic of enthusiasm had induced me to depart, was principally the series of disasters, of troubles and of miseries which have pursued me since my return to my ugly fatherland' (3:129-130). In short, Biberach brought Wieland an entirely new social or civic disillusionment as well as a much more robust sexual disillusionment than he had yet experienced, both of which added formidable intensity and depth to the empirical dabblings first seen in Zürich and Bern. Wieland now conceives of two different earthly challenges to his former high ideals: the problem is not only that the pursuit of a pure, elevated, immaterial virtue is foiled by sexual desire, but also that the messy and selfish character of surrounding society thwarts one's efforts to lead an upright and useful life. In other words, the idealistic individual is challenged by his or her internal sensual nature as well as by the disappointing character of the external social context. The personal experiences described above are entirely relevant to Wieland's poetic practice—the form that an objective mimetic intention takes is determined by a writer's concept of "nature" or of the material world; and the traumatic encounters in Biberach clearly forced Wieland to revise his vision of the world, making it much more difficult for him to claim that a rosy picture of human experience is plausible and true.[6]

It is a testament to the personal impact of Wieland's intellectual transformation that this move from foolish reverie to pragmatic wisdom became one of the most prominent themes in his writings of the 1760s. *Geschichte des Agathon* is just one of a trio of works that explore this opposition. The novel *Don Sylvio*, which was composed and published right in the middle of Wieland's work on *Agathon*, traces the story of a young man whose literal belief in fairy tales sends him on a quixotic expedition to recover a princess-butterfly, until a series of rough encounters forces him to recognize his error. The verse narrative *Musarion* tells of a group of philosophers whose professed asceticism is shattered by the glimpse of a beautiful woman's breasts. All of these texts express Wieland's current intellectual propensities in that they directly thematize the weaknesses of a purely ethereal philosophy. *Geschichte des Agathon* is part of this

[6] Sengle, Schaefer, Nowitzki and Böhm are the sources for most of the biographical information in this section. Sengle's biography is the most extensive and is still much more useful than the recent biography by Zaremba. Starnes's three-volume, day by day chronology of Wieland's life is also an incredible resource; it compiles and quotes from an immense number of primary sources and documents. The volume by Manger and Reemtsma, a publication of the Wieland museum near Weimar, uses images and artifacts to capture Wieland's life and times.

group, but it contains an extra twist—it is the only text that contains a compelling idealistic-moral counterweight to the empirical and worldly themes of the text. In *Don Sylvio* and *Musarion*, the triumph of the material world is a foregone conclusion, since the alternative, idealistic mode is represented by manifestly false fairy tales or by ridiculously bookish philosophies, respectively. In *Geschichte des Agathon*, however, the term that is opposed to materialism is virtue, and virtue cannot be dismissed so easily, even though one might cast off its excessively effusive and impractical aspects. As a result, *Geschichte des Agathon* contains the dialectic that points toward the in-between mode of the possible, while the other texts do not; it revolves around a much more lively and irresolvable dynamic that asks us to reflect on how we can reconcile our aspirations with earthly realities. The novel also has a genre-based commitment to psychological and social realism not found in the picaresque or rococo style of the other two texts (in which happy marriages and vaguely satisfactory civic roles result smoothly from the turn to the world). *Geschichte des Agathon*, then, has both a more pessimistic form of realism and a more intellectually compelling challenge to pure materialism than the other texts. As a result it is the only one of the three works that confronts the intricate difficulties involved in reconciling empirical wisdom with the still-valid demands of virtue and morality.

3. Theory Becomes Theme

An idiosyncrasy of *Geschichte des Agathon* is that it negotiates its conceptual tensions on two levels at the same time—on the level of form and theory, and on the level of theme and content. On the theoretical level, a set of mimetic and didactic poetic principles constantly shapes the representations in the course of the narrative. These theoretical concerns are also voiced explicitly, not only in the preface that was discussed above but also in narratorial asides throughout the novel.[7] These theoretical preoccupations alone would have been enough to make

[7] The most prominent and eloquent metapoetic statement in the novel proper comes toward the end of book five. The passage largely mirrors the same ideas that have already been discussed with respect to the preface, but I include it here because it is so well-expressed and because it illustrates how even in the course of the narrative the narrator explicitly reminds us of the theoretical concerns of the novel. In this passage the narrator is just about to relate how Agathon succumbed to Danae's seductions. In order to lessen the moral shock of this failure of virtue, he reminds us that he has commited himself to the portrayal of real people, faults included. The statements here reflect the position laid out in the preface as they mock the ridiculously virtuous style of many novels, stand up for the importance of the *human* above all, and assert the moral utility of an approach that provides plausible models for imitation: "Vielleicht ist kein unfehlbarers Mittel mit dem wenigsten Aufwand von Genie, Wissenschaft und Erfahrenheit ein gepriesener Schriftsteller zu werden, als wenn man sich damit abgibt, Menschen (denn Menschen sollen es doch sein) ohne Leidenschaften, ohne Schwachheit, ohne allen Mangel und Gebrechen, durch etliche Bände voll wunderreicher Abenteure, in der einförmigsten Gleichheit mit sich selbst, herumzuführen. Eh ihr es euch versteht, ist ein Buch fertig, das durch den erbaulichen Ton einer strengen Sittenlehre, durch blendende Sentenzen, durch Charaktere und Handlungen, die eben so viele Muster sind, den Beifall aller der gutherzigen Leute überraschet, welche jedes Buch, das die Tugend anpreist, vortrefflich finden… Umsonst mag dann ein verdächtiger Kunstrichter… beweisen, daß die unfruchtbare Bewunderung einer schimärischen Vollkommenheit, welche man nachzuahmen eben so wenig wahren Vorsatz als Vermögen hat, das äußerste sei, was diese wackere Leute von ihren hochfliegenden Bemühungen zum Besten einer ungelehrigen Welt erwarten können"; and further: "Alles was wir mit diesen Bemerkungen abzielen, ist allein, daß die romanhaften Helden, von denen die Rede ist, noch weniger in dem Bezirke der Natur zu suchen seien als die geflügelten Löwen und die Fische mit Mädchenleibern; daß es moralische Grotesken seien, welche eine müßige Einbildungskraft ausbrütet, und ein verdorbner moralischer Sinn… destomehr vergöttert, je weiter ihre verhältniswürdige Mißgestalt von der menschlichen Natur sich entfernet, welche doch, mit allen ihren Mängeln, das beste, liebenswürdigste und vollkommenste Wesen ist, das wir würklich

Agathon an interesting object for the present study. But this novel takes things a step further by projecting its structural concerns onto the representational level. Just as the novel on its formal-theoretical level navigates the conflicting demands of mimetic verity and virtuous inspiration, so on the thematic level the hero of the novel constantly strives to balance the call of virtue with the pragmatic realities of his experience. *Geschichte des Agathon* tells the story of a young man (the "Agathon" of the title) in post-Periclean Classical Greece who, as a result of nature and upbringing, has the passionate desire to live a spiritually elevated life. In the course of the novel his enthusiasm is confronted with challenges from the two real-world spheres mentioned above, the sexual and the civic, so that he is pressured to abandon his devotion to lofty virtue, but can never bring himself to do so. The hero, then, confronts the experiential analogue of the poetic problems behind the text—just as, conversely, Wieland's own life experience had shaped the transformation of his poetic principles.

The two levels are so intertwined that they blend together and are best read as exact parallels of each other. The parallel is nicely apparent in the quotation chosen above as an epigraph to this chapter, since the quotation applies equally to both levels. It describes how the force of experience leads someone to question idealism—but nevertheless the idealism is never entirely abandoned. The narrator applies this comment to Agathon in one of the later parts of the novel, but certainly it is an equally accurate summary of the development of Wieland's literary principles—the author similarly became suspicious of his early Platonism without being able to fully let it go. Thus hero, narrator and author face the same conceptual tensions. In this quotation and throughout the novel, metapoetic considerations map onto the personal concerns thematized in plot and character. Agathon's Platonic reveries correspond to the author's intention to point us toward a virtuous ideal; and when Agathon confronts the fallen realities of carnal desire and human society, this corresponds to the author's recognition that a verisimilar text cannot depict the complete triumph of virtue in its hero. Both the character Agathon and the author/narrator seek the elusive mode of the possible, where the real and the ideal meet each other, and both experience a similar split in consciousness—for the hero, between the faulty outer world and his subjective-internal ideals, and for the author, between the mandate to be true to that faulty world and the wish to impose a moral vision on that world. Just as poetry cannot portray idealized

---

kennen—und daß also der Held unsrer Geschichte, durch die Veränderungen und Schwachheiten, denen wir ihn unterworfen sehen, zwar allerdings, wir gestehen es, weniger ein Held, aber destomehr ein Mensch, und also desto geschickter sei, uns durch seine Erfahrungen, und selbst durch seine Fehler zu belehren."
'There is perhaps no more infallible means for becoming, with the least expenditure of genius, knowledge and experience, an acclaimed writer, than if one contents oneself to take some people (since they are supposed to be people) who have no passions, no weakness, not the least fault or sin, and lead them about through several volumes full of marvel-filled adventures while maintaining the most monotonous uniformity of character. Before you realize it, a book is ready that, with the edifying tone of a strict moral lesson, with dazzling aphorisms, with characters and actions that provide just so many models, captures the approval of all those good-hearted people who judge to be excellent any book that praises virtue… In vain then will a suspicious critic… demonstrate that the fruitless admiration of a chimeric perfection, which one neither intends to nor is able to imitate, is the most that these decent people can expect to come of their high-flown efforts for the good of an unteachable world'; and further: 'All that we aim at with these remarks is just to say that the romantic-novelistic heroes of whom we now speak are even less to be sought in the realm of nature than the winged lions and the fish with maidens' bodies; and that they are moral grotesques, which an idle imagination incubates and which a spoiled moral sense idolizes all the more, the farther their misshapen figure departs from human nature, which after all, with all of its faults, is the best, dearest and most perfect creature that we know in reality—and that therefore the hero of our story, in the course of the changes and the weaknesses to which we see him subjected, is certainly, we confess, less of a hero, but all the more a human, and is therefore all the more suited to instruct us via his experiences and via his mistakes themselves.' (160, 163; ch. 5.8)

images if it also claims to plausibly depict the norms of the world, so the individual cannot maintain a purely ideal existence in the face of inevitable personal and social failings. And so in the following discussion both levels will always be in play at the same time: every time Agathon is forced to retreat from his enthusiasm by a sobering real-world experience, Wieland is also being forced to back away from an ecstatic-visionary poetic mode into a sober realism; and every time Agathon reaffirms his commitment to virtue, Wieland is reaffirming his desire to give readers an inspiring model rather than just a flat reproduction of the world. The presence of these two layers turns *Agathon* into a particularly dense exploration of the tensions between imitation and imagined ideals, and the regular metapoetic commentary provided by the narrator makes sure that both levels of the text are in the forefront of the reader's experience. Critics who emphasize the psychological realism of the novel (above all its first major interpreter, Friedrich von Blanckenburg) tend to overlook its poetic implications, but in fact *Geschichte des Agathon* is as much a novel about novels as it is a novel about the human experience. This *Bildungsroman* (or, more aptly, *Desillusionierungsroman*), as it tells the story of an idealistic and dreamy youth's failed attempt to achieve a mature and realistic integration into the world, also acts out the attempt of the novelistic genre to move from the overdone didacticism of Richardson to a position that could be morally respectable, but also plausible and relevant.

Hippias vs. Agathon: Proxies for a Poetic Debate

A good starting point for a sketch of the personal and the poetic quest of this novel is a dialogue between Agathon and his philosophical archrival Hippias. Hippias is a rich resident of Smyrna, an Anatolian city where Agathon ends up on the slave market after having been abducted by pirates. Drawn to the striking appearance and demeanor of this young man, Hippias purchases him and attempts to make him into a sort of protégé, instructing Agathon in the "wisdom" he has gained over the course of a successful life. Hippias professes a purely materialistic and hedonistic philosophy, one which prescribes amoral methods for the attainment of a purely sensual "happiness." Agathon meanwhile, despite having already experienced considerable setbacks to his idealistic aspirations by this point, is still firmly set in the "Platonic" viewpoint that privileges spiritual elevation over material pleasure. Agathon has just been daydreaming in the garden about becoming a disembodied spirit when Hippias interrupts him with the offer to lead him "aus den unsichtbaren Welten in die würkliche" 'from the invisible worlds into the real one' (64; ch. 2.6). The ensuing set of conversations is significant both because it establishes the two philosophical poles of the novel and because the two interlocutors conduct their debate with terms that have strong poetic overtones, thus underlining the confluence of the poetic and the experiential levels in the novel.

The contrast between Hippias and Agathon is set up in terms that recall the multiple-world cosmology of Swiss poetics: Agathon corresponds to the poet who continually fabricates other possible worlds, while Hippias is the rational and empiricist with a pragmatic focus on this world. The overtones of poetic theory are prominent, for example, when Hippias mocks those who indulge in moonlight reveries: "Die Phantasie muß ihnen andre Welten erschaffen, die Unersättlichkeit ihres Herzens zu befriedigen" 'The imagination must create other worlds for them in order to satisfy their insatiable heart' (ibid.). Neither "Phantasie" nor "andre Welten" were established concepts in late Classical Greek philosophy—but they certainly were central terms in eighteenth-century European poetics. And so when Hippias attacks a certain

philosophical approach to life, the culturally-aware reader will also sense an attack on the Swiss school of poetics. Both the realist philosopher and the imitation-oriented poet view imagination as a sign not of creativity but of inadequate engagement with the one truly existing world. Hippias's discourse also includes an oblique attack on Wieland's youthful writings, as he derisively associates Agathon with the sort of life-denying standpoint that was so prominent in Wieland's work during the early 1750s. The pious perfection that Agathon seeks, for example, "ist… vor dem Tode keiner andern Glückseligkeit fähig als derjenigen, deren sie durch eine freiwillige Absonderung von allen irdischen Dingen… fähig gemacht wird" 'is… able to achieve no other happiness prior to death than the sort that it achieves by means of a voluntary separation from all earthly things' (85; ch. 3.3). We saw the separation from the earth that Hippias mocks in Wieland's *Briefe von Verstorbenen*, *Lady Johanna Gray* or *Empfindungen eines Christen*. The 1752 *Briefe von Verstorbenen,* in fact, can be read perfectly as if they were composed by the young Agathon. Hippias's discourse, then, casts Agathon as the embodiment of Wieland's early Zürich-era outlook. The hero of the novel exhibits the same virtuous enthusiasm, the same exclusive fixation on high-flown visions, and the same contempt for material concerns that Wieland exhibited during his time in Bodmer's house. Having personally distanced himself from the overdone enthusiasm of his early youth, Wieland seems to project it, with a perception born of distance, onto the misguided hero of his novel, so that Agathon's personal journey is also the story of Wieland's intellectual and poetic transformations.

Just like the attack on Agathon, Hippias's assertion of his own point of view has theoretical implications that are more current in eighteenth-century Germany than fourth-century Classical Greece. In promoting a realist approach to life, Hippias employs many of the same terms that Wieland latched onto after moving away from Bodmer. Hippias praises those whose philosophy is grounded "nicht auf abstrakte Ideen, sondern auf die Natur und würkliche Beschaffenheit der Dinge" 'not on abstract ideas, but on nature and the real constitution of things' (101; ch. 3.5). Philosophers of Hippias's sort "finden die Menschen an einem jeden Ort, so, wie sie sein können" 'find humans in every place to be just the way that they are able to be' (ibid). Invocations of the real, of nature and of the human were central concepts in Wieland's embrace of a more empirical poetics, so that Hippias's Classical hedonism acts also as the voice of the eighteenth century's nascent interest in a more consistently applied and terrestrially oriented verisimilitude. The most striking poetic tones in this dialogue, however, come when both Agathon and Hippias use the key poetic term "Wahrscheinlichkeit" (verisimilitude). Each seeks to back up his own viewpoint by asserting its plausibility, Agathon claiming that it is "allemal unendlich unwahrscheinlich" 'always infinitely implausible' that the world could have arisen from impersonal material forces, while Hippias retorts with some hypothetical cases that undermine the "Wahrscheinlichkeit deiner Meinung" 'plausibility [verisimilitude] of your opinion' (61; ch. 2.6). Both of them share the obsession with verisimilitude seen in eighteenth-century poetic circles, with Agathon interpreting the term in the loose, abstract sense typical of the earlier part of the century while Hippias judges verisimilitude according to the earthly, human standards of the post-Fielding novel. The terms of this conversation demonstrate how a contemporary metapoetic debate lurks just beneath the surface of this fictional late Classical Greek debate on the path to the good life. Elsewhere in the novel, the characters are much more likely to draw parallels to Greek thinkers such as Plato, Aristippus or Pythagoras; in contrast, this early scene-setting confrontation stands out for the way that expressly literary terms rise to the surface and dominate the discourse.

If Agathon stands for the Bodmerian Wieland and Hippias for the disillusioned realist, one might conclude that Hippias's views are the ones that will prevail. But the essence of *Agathon* is dialectical conflict, and the goal of the novel, as already described, is the synthesis of these two extreme viewpoints into a workable, pragmatic virtue. Accordingly, neither philosophy is shown to be fully acceptable. Each viewpoint is put in the mouth of a patently unreliable figure: Agathon obviously has his head too far into the clouds, and Hippias is an unattractive, purely self-serving character, willing to exploit and manipulate others for the sake of his selfish pleasure. Wieland has put the philosophy to which he is currently more sympathetic (the empirical) into the mouth of an unsympathetic character, while the idealistic philosophy that he has left behind is given to an appealing (if naïve) character. This strategy prevents the reader from being able to latch firmly onto either point of view and maintains the inconclusiveness that is necessary if the novel is to find the perfect harmony of Agathon's virtue and Hippias's worldly wisdom.

4. A Swinging Pendulum: The Path of the Narrative

Such a synthesis, however, remains elusive throughout the entire novel: the two philosophies repel each other in the same way that these two characters talk past each other, so that the vision of the "possible" that Wieland presents in his preface turns out to be nothing but wishful thinking. Just as in Wieland's earlier works, the poetic execution fails to live up to the prefatory theory. Instead of providing a stable vision of the possible, the text vacillates between allegiance to verisimilitude and allegiance to virtue, always reasserting one term when the other seems to have gotten the upper hand—but always expressly postponing the planned harmonic resolution.

This battle between the mimetic and the didactic is played out primarily in the person of the hero, in keeping with Wieland's interest in a primarily *human* verisimilitude. The external circumstances which the hero faces in *Agathon* are in fact quite unlikely, marked by incredible coincidences drawn from the repertoire of novelistic clichés—for example the abduction by pirates already mentioned above. Wieland uses this implausible framework of events as a backdrop for getting at the worldly truth that matters most to him, which is the truth of human character and society. It is in this realm of human nature, and in the person of the hero Agathon, that we observe the constant tension and fluctuation between the desired model and the undeniably faulty reality.

The Rigid Alternatives of Agathon's Back Story

At the opening of *Agathon*, the real and the ideal are separate and self-contained, as it is only in the course of the novel that they will be pushed to seek mutual accommodation. As the novel starts, Agathon is unquestioningly devoted to his elevated visions, while on the level of poetic theory the debt to verisimilitude is easily discharged by indicating that this hero manages to be so ethereal only because he is so naïve and sheltered. The diametrically opposed positions that characterize the beginning of the novel come out in the dialogue between Hippias and Agathon described above, which opens the first major episode of *Geschichte des Agathon*. In addition, a flashback midway through the novel gives us some background information on

Agathon's childhood that helps us understand how he developed into such a dreamy idealist and how he arrived at Hippias's house with his idealism unshaken. Due to some complications in his family background, Agathon grew up at the oracle of Delphi, where he was surrounded by beautiful art and inducted into the ascetic and otherworldly Orphic philosophy. This environment encouraged Agathon's propensity toward idealism, so that he developed an exclusive obsession with an imagined higher spiritual realm (ch. 7.1-7.4). This time at Delphi, nevertheless, was not devoid of encounters with the uglier side of humanity. However, these prosaic experiences involved such a degree of debauchery that, rather than introduce Agathon to the positive claims of the material world, they tended to reaffirm his devotion to pure spirituality. One of these encounters involves an older priest who deceives Agathon with the promise that certain rituals could lead to a personal encounter with Apollo. This turns out to be a ruse intended only to seduce the beautiful Agathon, as the priest dresses up like the god and makes some odd (presumably sexual) requests. Another sexual advance comes from the Pythia herself, the divinely inspired voice of Apollo. She pursues Agathon with insinuating comments and compromising stratagems, but Agathon is nothing but repelled by her propositions. So the imperfections of the world do make their way even into the highest levels of the sacred temple of Delphi, but not in a way that could negotiate with Agathon's idealism and coax it toward a more balanced position. Agathon is repelled by the two people who tried to seduce him, and therefore his own sexuality is not aroused and he can go on believing that love is a purely spiritual and elevated experience. This point of view is bolstered by his relationship with Psyche, a young girl who is a fellow resident of Delphi. Agathon feels an intense love for Psyche, but they express their love via shared spiritual ecstasies rather than physical interaction (this is fortunate since Psyche later turns out to be Agathon's long-lost sister). In sum, Agathon's experiences at Delphi confront him with stark choices between polar opposites: ugly unwanted advances versus disembodied, spiritual pleasures. It is no surprise that Agathon merely doubles down on his commitment to elevated virtue, since the material world gives him no motivation to attempt an accommodation.

Agathon, as the mid-novel flashback tells us, eventually left Delphi in search of his close female friend Psyche, who had been expelled by the Pythia. His wandering leads him to discover that he is a citizen of Athens and he ends up assuming a prominent and successful role in that city, studying with Plato, generously donating money to worthy projects, and executing an incredibly successful semi-pacifist foreign relations strategy (ch. 7.6-7.7). But Agathon's success breeds enemies, and despite his unquestionable virtue and his pure intentions he is slandered by fabricated charges and exiled from the city. This experience had the potential to effect a social disillusionment as a counterpart to the sexual encounters just described, but, just as in Delphi, Agathon manages to escape without adjusting his own idealistic strivings at all. Alone outside Athens (this is where the first chapter of the novel picks up the narrative), he decides to flee to eastern lands and pursue a life of quiet contemplation. This is not a move that can advance the project of the novel at all. Instead of learning to work within the real parameters of human society, Agathon aims to remove himself from all human companionship. In so doing, he constructs an abyss between his superior self and the rest of humanity, for whom he now feels intense contempt, and fails to recognize the human fallibility that also lurks within himself. A hermit figure who has set himself off from all the rest of the world certainly cannot serve as a workable model for Wieland's readers to emulate; such an ascetic recluse would be the epitome of the elite and unattainable. Nor would this figure resolve one of Wieland's most important concerns, the question of how an individual can uphold virtue while still interacting

pragmatically with earthly society. Agathon as a desert prophet would offer a rigid image of pure idealism, not the image of the pragmatic possible toward which this novel is directed. Neither Delphi nor Athens makes any dents in Agathon's world view. They only underline the idealism of his opening personality and serve as miniature previews of the two more extensive episodes, one sexual and one social, that make up the bulk of the novel and that offer more serious challenges to the rigidity of Agathon's outlook.

The Sexual Episode

Agathon does not get the chance to pursue a life of contemplation, since shortly after deciding to travel to the East he is abducted by pirates and sold to Hippias in Smyrna. Despite the dramatic batterings of fortune, he arrives in Smyrna with his idealistic outlook unshaken. But now that the first major episode is in motion, the work of the novel needs to commence: Agathon must be positioned in the way outlined in the preface, as a hero who is ahead of the rest of humanity but still plausible and attainable, i.e. still marked by human fallibility.

Up until now, despite the prominent theoretical claims of the preface, the text has largely succumbed to the impulse to create a remarkable hero. Agathon is exceptionally talented, exceptionally beautiful and exceptionally sensitive—a hero in the inspiring mold of Wieland's *Cyrus* of 1759. This elevation of the hero persists to some degree throughout the novel: all of Agathon's enterprises are wise and well-planned, everyone who meets him is struck by his beauty, and he displays impressive skills in everything from music to public speaking. Agathon's very name, in Greek, signifies goodness. This idealization comes out strongly when, on first being introduced to Agathon, we are told, "Agathon war von einer so wunderbaren Schönheit, daß die Rubens und Girardons seiner Zeit, weil sie die Hoffnung aufgaben, eine vollkommnere Gestalt zu erfinden… die seinige zum Muster nahmen, wenn sie den Apollo oder Bacchus vorstellen wollten" 'Agathon possessed such a marvelous beauty that the Rubens and Girardons of his time, having given up hope of inventing a more perfect form, took his form as a model when they wanted to depict Apollo or Bacchus' (24; ch. 1.2). This comment explicitly places Agathon within the sphere of the Bodmerian *Wunderbare* and is typical of the novel's recurring impulse to place Agathon above the rest of humanity. (The image of the perfect hero probably stems also from the novel's peripheral tendency to indulge in playful novelistic clichés.) Such a marvelous hero serves the novel's goal of moral inspiration and establishes a strong idealistic pole in the text.

But of course this idealized representation is not at all in line with the text's ostensible desire for an imperfect and attainable protagonist, and as a result the idealistic pole is regularly subject to attack from the realistic tendencies of the novel. Agathon's surfeit of elevated qualities must be alloyed with a few human frailties—not so many that he becomes ordinary, but enough to make him human. The result is a constant instability in the text, as the moralizing tendencies of the narrative create a conventionally admirable hero who is then knocked off his pedestal when the impulse toward plausibility reasserts itself. Wieland describes the balancing act that he attempts in one of the very few points in his correspondence of the 1760s where the novel is mentioned: "Obgleich Agathon ein sonderbarer Mensch ist, so ist er doch ein Mensch; und diese Tugendhelden, die keine Schwachheiten, keine Begierden und kein Fleisch und Blut haben, sind bloß abstracte Wesen" 'Although Agathon is a peculiar person, still he is a person; and these heroes of virtue, who have no weaknesses, no desires and no flesh and blood, are merely abstract

beings' (3:111-12; Sept. 1762). This quotation accords with the theory of the "possible" sketched above: Agathon is certainly allowed to be unusual, but his remarkable traits need to coexist with just enough faults to give him "flesh and blood." The novel executes this plan inconsistently, by juxtaposing contradictory extreme statements rather than by hewing carefully to a precisely chosen middle position. And so after having depicted such an ethereal young man at the start of the narrative, the novel is ripe for some qualifying episodes. Agathon needs to confront his own humanity in order to advance in his personal journey, and the novel, in order to advance its theoretical goals, needs to show us that this hero is truly human.

The first concession to verisimilitude comes just after Agathon has been exhibiting some very implausible behavior. Surrounded by beautiful and available women in the orgiastic atmosphere of Hippias's household, the (definitely heterosexual) Agathon shows no interest and remains faithful to his departed Psyche (ch. 2.4). The narrator acknowledges that this is hard to believe, commenting that the chapter in question, "bei einigen den Verdacht erwecken wird, daß diese Geschichte erdichtet sei" 'will arouse the suspicion of some that this story is fabricated' (53; ch. 2.4). This playful admission on the part of the narrator might briefly win the reader's indulgence, but Agathon can only be maintained on his improbable pedestal for so long. Soon it is time to provide the first hint of Agathon's fallibility. Agathon's devotion to Psyche, we are told a few chapters later, is by no means "die Würkung derjenigen heroischen Treue und Standhaftigkeit in der Liebe, welche in besagten Romanen zu einer Tugend von der ersten Klasse gemacht wird" 'the effect of that heroic loyalty and steadfastness in love, which in the aforementioned novels is made into a virtue of the first class' (133-34; ch. 4.6); instead Agathon's performance is merely the product of sensual pleasure calculations: "Psyche erhielt sich im Besitz seines Herzens, weil ihm die Erinnerungen, die er von ihr hatte, angenehmer waren, als die Empfindungen, die ihm irgend eine andre Schöne einzuflößen vermocht" 'Psyche maintained possession of his heart because the memories that he had of her were more pleasant than the feelings that any other female beauty was able to evoke' (ibid.). This is an abrupt shift from the Agathon we have known up to this point: suddenly we are dealing with a character who is susceptible to sensuality and self-interest. The *external* picture is still the same—Agathon displays impeccable loyalty and chastity—but the internal motivations have decisively shifted to present a much less virtuous picture, thus preparing the way for the later lapses in virtue that will help the reader relate to Agathon as a fellow human. Note that this first mildly disparaging reference to Agathon comes directly after the narrator has reminded us of the novel's theoretical interventions in literary history. These passages allow the narrator to boast a bit about the superior verity of his story, distinguishing it from the implausible texts of the preceding novelistic tradition, while also defending himself preemptively from the attacks of moralists by reminding everyone that there is an important theoretical reason for this display of fallibility.

The newly sensual version of Agathon comes to full fruition after he meets Danae, an independently wealthy friend of Hippias who is a sort of elevated hetaera. Hippias intends to use Danae to win a victory over Agathon by forcing the stubborn young man to give up his annoyingly elevated philosophy of life. The plan succeeds partially, in that Agathon falls deeply in love with Danae, but Danae also loves Agathon back in a way unforeseen by Hippias—the couple develop a relationship that seems to be based on more than the self-interested sensual pleasure that is Hippias's sole concern. But Agathon and Danae's relationship, even if it has a certain noble appearance, is still fully physical. Agathon forgets Psyche as he discovers the pleasures of human sexuality. The two lovers withdraw from the rest of the world as they immerse themselves in a realm of tender affection, sex, art and nature amid the luxurious

surroundings of Danae's estate. Agathon, then, has recognized his own susceptibility with regard to the material pleasures that were once so far beneath him and has come down to earth with respect to the sexual sphere that is the focus of the first part of the novel.

This sexual self-discovery necessitates a philosophical transformation. The narrator tells us:

> Daß dieser [Agathon] aus einem spekulativen Platoniker ein praktischer Aristipp geworden; daß er eine Philosophie welche die reinste Glückseligkeit in Beschauung unsichtbarer Schönheiten setzt, gegen eine Philosophie, welche sie in angenehmen Empfindungen, und die angenehmen Empfindungen in ihren nächsten Quellen, in der Natur, in unsern Sinnen und in unsern Herzen sucht, vertauschte…
>
> …that [Agathon] became a practical Aristippus instead of a speculative Platonist; that he exchanged a philosophy that locates purest happiness in the contemplation of invisible beauty for a philosophy that seeks this happiness in pleasant feelings, and that seeks pleasant feelings in their nearest sources—in nature, in our senses and in our hearts… (174; ch. 5.11)

Agathon, then, has made the same crucial shift toward the physical world that Wieland made in the years leading up to *Agathon*. But this quotation reveals a problem with Agathon's current state: we see that he has exchanged one entire philosophy for another, completely abandoning his former elevated ambitions. The point of the novel, however, is to *mingle* virtue and practicality. Agathon's absolute reorientation from the heavens to the earth is unacceptable—a certain degree of moral elevation must be maintained within one's worldly life. Marriage would of course be the ideal course for achieving a respectable combination of moral rectitude and worldly practicality, but unfortunately Danae, as an older woman with a lower-class background and a string of lovers in her past, is not a suitable wife for Agathon (who descends from an upper-class family). The novel here seems to block the path to the very resolution that it seeks by putting Agathon in a situation where his only choices are either ascetic renunciation or a morally problematic liaison that, in addition, cuts him off from civically useful activity. The relationship with Danae offers no stable resting points; it is just one extreme position in Agathon's newly destabilized philosophical outlook, which has now been shocked by the discovery of sexual desire into pendulum-like swings between absolutes of asceticism and sensualism.

Faced with a stark choice between Plato and Aristippus (a Classical Greek philosopher known for a flexible, practical Epicureanism), Agathon chooses the latter, and for several months indulges unthinkingly in a life devoted to pleasure. The aesthetic beauty of his surroundings most likely helps blind him to the fact that he has sacrificed the moral beauty of his former spiritual pursuits. But soon both Agathon (in his personal philosophy of life) and the novel itself (in its theoretical balancing act) realize that this move toward worldliness and verisimilitude has overshot the golden mean. The pendulum is now poised to swing back to the side of virtue. This shift is sparked when Hippias remarks that Agathon, who is now a regular guest at Hippias's lavish and lascivious banquets, has become "einer von den Unsrigen" 'one of our sort' (187; ch. 6.3). Since the relationship with Danae has not changed Agathon's contempt for Hippias, this comment shocks him into a reexamination of himself. The "konvulsivische Bewegungen der wiederauflebenden Tugend" 'convulsive movements of virtue coming back to life' (187; ch. 6.3) generated by Hippias's comment are bolstered by the heavy-handed symbolism of a dream in

which Psyche beckons Agathon forward to a literal pillar of virtue, while he remains stuck in mud. Agathon struggles against his growing realizations for some time, finding various rational arguments to support the idea that, despite the relationship with Danae, he remains superior to Hippias. But the final blow to Agathon's self-image comes when the nefarious Hippias casually provides some information about Danae's past, presenting her history in the worst possible light. The crowning revelation is the fact that Hippias himself was once Danae's lover. This carnal parity is too repulsive to ignore: "Götter! die Buhlerin eines Hippias! Kann etwas unter diesem untersten Grade der Entehrung sein?" 'Gods! The mistress of someone like Hippias! Can anything be lower than this lowest degree of dishonor?' (318; ch. 8.2). The insistent bodily connection represented by the shared lover makes it impossible for Agathon to continue believing himself superior to Hippias. Taking advantage of the fact that Danae is out of town, he heads for the harbor and, happening upon an acquaintance there, embarks on a ship to Syracuse. The brief indulgence in "Aristippus" has apparently been exchanged for a renewed allegiance to "Plato."

The key factor at each stage of Agathon's gradual withdrawal from Danae is the question of his own worth relative to Hippias. Agathon can accept the fact that he has sunk far below the elevated spiritual standards of his recent past, and can remain with Danae in Smyrna, as long as he can convince himself that he is decisively superior to Hippias. And in fact such a middle position, halfway between the eunuch and the amoral lecher, is precisely the desired endpoint both of Agathon's development and of the novel's poetic stance—the goal of the novel is to achieve a reasonable harmony of the two antagonistic philosophies. But the text, as we have seen, continuously bifurcates into polarized extremes and thereby undermines its own ostensible purpose. Accordingly, Agathon's position in Smyrna proves unable to satisfy the demands of virtue and of practical wisdom at the same time as Agathon discovers that he has in fact fallen far below the balanced ideal. Our hero is, as it turns out, equal to rather than slightly superior to Hippias. Although an argument could be made for the moral respectability of Agathon and Danae's relationship compared to Hippias's serial sexual exploitation of women, the sex-centered moral code of the eighteenth century was not up to this task. Instead, Agathon realizes that he has sunk all the way down to the level of Hippias and accordingly needs to redeem himself with an equally extreme swing back toward virtue. Instead of achieving a balanced position, Agathon reverts back to his youthful aspirations and sets off with grand visions of benefiting society via a project to enlighten the prince of Syracuse.

One factor that had disturbed Agathon during his relationship with Danae was that he was leading a life of use to no one but himself. It was not just the illicit sexuality, but the absence of any possibility for the sort of civic involvement that had occupied Agathon in Athens, that made the relationship morally reprehensible. A crucial constituent of Agathon's idealism is the desire for morally grounded civic activity that would, in enlightened fashion, truly benefit the both local citizens and the larger world. This social sphere will be the concern of the second major episode of *Agathon*, as the sexual concerns of Smyrna give way to the political concerns of Syracuse. Agathon has heard from his harbor acquaintance that Dionysius, the young prince of Syracuse, has committed himself to a virtuous lifestyle after having previously ruled in a debauched and short-sighted manner. Prince Dionysius had invited Plato to his court to help him pursue his reformed lifestyle, but the Athenian philosopher was unable to make any progress in the face of plotting courtiers and the prince's own superficiality. Agathon now hopes to succeed where Plato failed.

Interlude at Sea

But before Agathon arrives in Syracuse, the sea voyage gives the narrator a chance to examine Agathon's current mental state as he heads off to his new adventure. We learn that the Smyrna episode has left a strong mark on Agathon's outlook, but without pointing toward any viable resolution of his competing impulses. Two polarized tendencies now coexist within Agathon. His youthful virtue revived when he left Danae, but at the same time the incontrovertible fact of his sexual discovery remains. Instead of moving Agathon closer to the respectable worldliness that the novel aims at, the Smyrna experiences have given him nothing but an agonizing split consciousness. This schizophrenia comes out in the narrator's comments on the hero, which reflect a theoretical wavering between verisimilitude and moral vision. First of all the narrator, sensing perhaps that the post-Danae revival of virtue has granted Agathon an implausible moral elevation, makes a concession to plausibility and to the fallibility of the hero. Agathon's departure, we are told, is "weder seiner Vernunft noch seiner Liebe zur Tugend zuzuschreiben" 'should be attributed neither to his reason nor to his love for virtue" (328; ch. 8.4). Instead, pride and jealousy were the real motivations for his actions, as seen in the way his self-image was wounded by the idea of sharing a lover with Hippias. As is frequently the case, this acknowledgement of human fallibility is accompanied by a metapoetic reference to the literary stakes of the novel—the narrator offhandedly disparages the "Mischmasch unbestimmter und nicht selten willkürlicher Begriffe, schwärmerischer Empfindungen, andächtiger Wortspiele, grotesker Charaktern und schwülstiger Deklamationen" 'mishmash of vague and not infrequently arbitrary concepts, enthusiastic sentiments, pious word play, grotesque characters and bombastic declamations' (329; ch. 8.4) that currently inundates the German literary world. With these comments, the novel reaffirms its mimetic, earthly pole, pulling the pendulum back again from the upswing of enthusiastic idealism that occurred during the departure from Smyrna.

Now, as the text's concern with verisimilitude has for a time regained the upper hand, Agathon engages in some incisive self-criticism and recognizes the drawbacks of his former enthusiasm. He now blames *Schwärmerei* for his infatuation with Danae, and criticizes it in terms that parallel the literary world's new interest in realism. For example, he denounces the "Einbildungs-Kraft" 'imagination' for its tendency to bring about an "unvermerkte Unterschiebung des Idealen an die Stelle des Würklichen" 'unnoticed imputation of the ideal in place of the real' (343; ch. 8.6); he muses that the Orphic theology that he once revered has "wahrscheinlicherweise… nicht viel… Realität" 'probably [in all verisimilitude]…. not much reality' (345; ch. 8.6); and he concludes finally that it is "ein widersinniges und vergebliches Unternehmen… sich besser machen zu wollen, als uns die Natur haben will, oder auf Unkosten des halben Teils unsers Wesens nach einer Art von Vollkommenheit zu trachten, die mit der Anlage desselben im Widerspruch steht" 'a senseless and futile endeavor… to want to make oneself better than nature intends us to be, or to strive, at the expense of half of our essential being, for a type of perfection that is contradictory to the tendencies of that same being' (ibid.). Using words like "nature," "imagination," "verisimilitude" and "reality" that have strong resonance in eighteenth-century literary theory, Agathon makes the same move in his personal outlook that Wieland made in his poetic outlook, rejecting the impracticality of his former high-flown aspirations. But only one piece of this epiphany will have any staying power once Agathon tries to translate these new insights into lived practice. That aspect is the rejection of *Schwärmerei*: Agathon will never again engage in the naïve, gushing exaltation of virtue that

characterized his youthful daydreaming. The novel can abandon *Schwärmerei* without difficulty because it is not the same thing as actual virtue. While *Geschichte des Agathon* would never let go of the view that genuine *virtue* must be the fundamental motivation of any decent person, *Schwärmerei* may be nothing but a useless and immature emotional reaction to virtue. The rejection of Schwärmerei, then, represents the once small space in which the novel does experience success. *Geschichte des Agathon* never achieves the kind of "wise virtue" it desires, that is, a virtue that has achieved a reasonable accommodation with our human nature and a workable integration into the true circumstances of the world. But the novel does at least attain a somewhat more sober virtue, one that understands and has experienced the true earthly challenges to our moral aspirations and that therefore pursues virtue without the excesses of *Schwärmerei*. This achievement, however, does not amount to much as long as the larger problem of how to integrate virtue into the world remains unresolved.

The above passages suggest that the text, during the sea voyage, has repositioned itself back toward the worldly end of the spectrum. But besides the small advance related to the rejection of *Schwärmerei*, the seafaring interim overall succumbs, as already stated, to the irresolvable dichotomies of virtue and human fallibility. The above musings on Agathon's part may seem like a remarkable advance toward a more mature, pragmatic realism, but the novel goes on to expressly deny such a balanced position with the sort of perverse stubbornness that resurfaces every time we seem to be making progress toward the sought-after harmony. Just after reflecting on the need to make concessions to humanity and nature, Agathon recommits himself to virtue as unbendingly as ever: "Kurz, seine Erfahrungen machten ihm die Wahrheit seiner ehemaligen Denkungs-Art verdächtig, ohne ihm einen gewissen geheimen Hang zu seinen alten Lieblings-Ideen benehmen zu können… [Agathon war] von der Schönheit der Tugend und der unauflöslichen Verbindlichkeit ihrer Gesetze mehr als jemals überzeugt" 'In short, his experiences led him to question the truth of his former mode of thought, but were not able to deprive him of a certain secret fondness for his old favorite ideas… [Agathon was] more than ever convinced of the beauty of virtue and of the indissoluble binding force of her laws'(346; ch. 8.6). In other words, the reasonable, earthly outlook of the previous passages has apparently pulled the novel too far into the clutches of the fallen world, so that this reaffirmation of virtue is needed to pull the narrative back toward the idealistic end of the spectrum. The seafaring episode closes with a move that further underlines the continued absolute split between virtue and pragmatism. A ship, we are told, is not a hospitable setting for deep philosophical reflections, and so Agathon just decides to postpone any decisions about the "Mißhelligkeiten zwischen dem Kopf und dem Herzen" 'disagreements between the head and the heart' (ibid). Agathon's internal conflicts will simply remain unresolved. The first of the novel's two major episodes, then, has passed with little of the *Bildung* that characterizes the *Bildungsroman*. Instead, the problem that the novel has set out to solve is suspended in the inconclusive, mutual incompatibility of human plausibility and transformative vision. In an analogue to the seesaw motion of the ship that keeps Agathon from pursuing his reflections, the text, instead of bringing the poles of the real and the ideal closer to each other, swings wildly back and forth between the two spheres, offering readers an emulsion of opposites rather than a harmonizing combination.

The Political Episode

The solid land of Syracuse, it turns out, does not make it any easier for Agathon to achieve the accommodation of wisdom and virtue than it was when he was on the ship. At the court of Dionysius, he experiences a disillusionment with respect to society and general human nature that adds itself to the personal sexual disillusionment experienced in Smyrna. But instead of learning how to adapt his moral sense to social realities, Agathon only confronts more starkly than ever the incommensurability of the two.

The story of Syracuse opens with extensive attacks on the impracticality of excessive idealism. As usual, the narrator is a firm and convincing advocate of a pragmatic approach as long as the discourse is theoretical rather than practical. Plato himself, whose name stood for the whole complex of visionary moral striving that characterized the youthful Agathon, is now the personal target of the narrator's scorn. Whereas earlier comments focused more on the undeniable sexual nature of the human and on the internal physical fallibility of the individual hero, here, in keeping with the theme of this episode, the narrator discusses the foibles of the human as a social and political actor and asserts the need for idealistic reformers to accommodate their visions to the foibles of other members of the community. The narrator tells us that Plato's attempts to reform prince Dionysius were doomed by the lofty expectations typical of impractical reformers. Pragmatic realism would have been wiser: "Es ist genug, wenn das Ziel, wie Solon von seinen Gesetzen sagte, das Beste ist, das in den vorliegenden Umständen zu erreichen sein mag" 'It is enough if the goal, as Solon said of his laws, is the best that can be achieved in the existing circumstances' (369; ch. 9.1). After Agathon has run into some difficulties with his projects, the narrator gives yet another directly expressed discourse on the need for practicality:

> Die Menschen in derselben [in der würklichen Welt] sind nun einmal wie sie sind; und der große Punkt ist, diejenige die man vor sich hat, nach allen Umständen und Verhältnissen so lange zu studieren, bis man so genau als möglich weiß, wie sie sind. Sobald ihr das wißt, so geben sich die Regeln, wornach ihr sie behandeln müßt, wenn ihr euern Zweck erhalten wollt, von sich selbst; dann ist es Zeit moralische Projekte zu machen.
>
> The people in it [in the real world] are the way they are; and the great point is to study those that one has in front of oneself, in all of their circumstances and relationships, until one knows as exactly as possible what they are like. As soon as you know that, the rules according to which you must handle them if you want to obtain your goal are given automatically. (383; ch. 9.3)

The narrator here makes very reasonable arguments for the need to temper one's reforming zeal with sober realism, and in doing so echoes the fundamental, pragmatic approach of the novel itself—this text, like a wise reformer, has determined that only a plausible, attainable hero will provide a model that readers can put into practice. And so the Syracuse episode opens with a convincing restatement of the novel's desire for an amalgam of wisdom and virtue. But again, the actual representation of this theory proves elusive.

In Syracuse, Agathon does make a valiant effort to follow the sensible approach advocated by the narrator. But since Agathon operates in the realm of narrated experience rather

than theoretical discourse, things do not work out as smoothly as the introductory passages would suggest. The problem is not that Agathon is unable to be flexible in his expectations. “Er kannte,” the narrator tells us, “nach allen Erfahrungen, die er schon gemacht hatte, diesen Unterschied der Menschen von dem was sie sein könnten, und vielleicht sein sollten, bereits zu gut, um seinen Plan auf platonische Ideen zu gründen” ‘He knew… after all the experiences he had come through, how people differ from what they could be, and from what they perhaps should be, and knew this already too well to base his plan on Platonic ideas’ (442; ch. 10.1). Agathon, then, is making more of an effort than ever to achieve a wise virtue that can coexist with the individual and social failings of humans. He engages in pragmatic calculations that prioritize ends over means, for example encouraging Dionysius to have an affair with a pleasant young girl in order to prevent him from more harmful entanglements. Agathon’s sober compromise is a promising sign of maturation and progress.

But the novel, as always, cuts off the path to the harmonic resolution it ostensibly seeks. In the Syracuse episode it finally becomes clear that the gap between virtue and reality is simply too wide to be bridged. We can no longer blame Agathon for his failure to integrate into the world, because even his best efforts fail to overcome that gap. Agathon’s plan, we are told, had “keinen andern Fehler… als daß Agathon noch nicht völlig so übel von den Menschen denken konnte, als es diejenigen verdienten, mit denen er zu tun hatte” ‘no other defect but the fact that Agathon was not yet able to think fully as badly of people as he should have if he had given the people around him what they deserved' (441; ch. 10.1). So even Agathon’s substantial accommodations are not able to find common ground with reality. Agathon avoided Plato’s excesses as he drafted his plan, but his newly pragmatic acceptance of human foibles still does not adequately take into account the miserable state of humanity.

Agathon could respond by lowering his vision of humanity yet a few more notches in order to finally match his reforming visions to reality. But, as we are told, to compromise his ideals any more would be to destroy them: “[Seine] Meinung von seinem Prinzen war in der Tat so bescheiden, daß er sie nicht tiefer herabstimmen konnte, ohne alle Hoffnung zu Erreichung seiner Entwürfe aufzugeben; und doch zeigte sich in der Folge, daß er noch zu gut von ihm gedacht hatte” ‘[His] opinion of his prince was in fact so modest that he could not adjust it any lower without giving up all hope of achieving his projects; and yet it was subsequently revealed that he had still thought too well of him’ (443; ch. 10.1). We see that Agathon has compromised his progressive project as much as he possibly can in order to work with this unreliable prince and his court, but the utmost compromise is not enough. In this quotation, the vision of "the possible" collapses as the reality of the world is shown to be stubbornly outside even the most watered-down version of virtue. All options have failed: the novel had opened with the hope that we could find an ideal that is just faulty enough to be human; by the middle of the novel, the more modest hope was to find a reality that had just enough progressive vision for it to be morally acceptable; and finally after the Syracuse episode we see that there is no space at all that satisfies the demands of morality and objective reality.

Agathon’s moral compromises buy him some time, and for almost two years he enjoys tremendous influence in Syracuse and does enact many beneficial reforms. But, inevitably, his progress is finally nullified by the plots of self-serving and unscrupulous courtiers. Agathon ends up in prison. The failure of all his plans, even after he had compromised his own character for the sake of progress, sends Agathon into a depression. All attempts to achieve a balance between worldly wisdom and virtue having failed, Agathon is once again faced with the choice between two irreconcilable viewpoints, that of virtue and that of cynical realism. The gap between the two

is vividly reaffirmed as the narrator tells us how Agathon stands at the "Spitze des tiefen Abgrunds, der zwischen dem System der Tugend, und dem System des Hippias liegt" 'tip of the deep abyss that lies between the system of virtue and the system of Hippias' (499; ch. 10.5). This abyss mocks all prior attempts to harmonize virtue with realism. Overcome by the irredeemably fallen nature of the world, Agathon comes very close to adopting the cynical viewpoint and admitting that Hippias has been correct all along. And along with Agathon, the theoretical backdrop of the novel also reaches a moment of decision: all attempts at painting a plausible picture of virtue have failed, and the text must choose between a completely fallen human and a hero who stands on the other side of the abyss from the rest of humanity. After lingering ominously in descriptions of Agathon's despair, the novel finally chooses the latter approach: Agathon is ultimately repelled by the idea of himself as a Hippias figure and recommits himself to his idealism in spite of its incommensurability with reality.

But Agathon's choice means that he is no longer the plausible, accessible hero the novel had been boasting of all along. We now see Agathon placing himself above all other people, arrogantly chastising himself for having judged others "nach mir selbst" 'according to myself' (498; ch. 10.5). Apparently, Agathon is an alien among humanity—and the reader cannot learn from Agathon's experiences if Agathon operates according to a unique set of parameters. The concept of the hero to whom we can relate is gone, and in its place is an elite figure who dwells on a different plane from the rest of society.

Utopia

After two extensive narrative episodes, the attempt to balance virtue and pragmatism has failed. The novel, despite a series of emphatic, critical comments about the imperative need to turn lofty heroes into wise pragmatists, and to replace ecstatic moral visions with objective imitation of nature's foibles, ends up dramatizing the failure of its own project. The solution to the problem it set for itself with such apparent resolve was, as is now clear, undermined from the start by an even deeper conviction about the implacable contradictions between the spiritual and the material, the visionary and the realistic, the moral and the mimetic. Although this underlying conviction was never expressed directly, and although the novel repeatedly insisted on its desire to bridge the gap, the absolute incompatibility of what is and what should be emerged in practice every time the novel tried to provide a narrative representation of the middle ground it posited. The novel's recurring theoretical claims now appear to be bombast born of insecurity. And so the novel ends with an ostentatious capitulation: forced finally to choose between virtue and realism, the reforming spirit of the eighteenth century has no choice but to select the first option. *Geschichte des Agathon* closes, then, with an episode that throws verisimilitude out the window and embraces an impossible idealism.[8]

The novel closes, essentially, with a *deus ex machina*. Even the narrator admits that the plot twist is improbable:

[8] Rüdiger Campe goes against the grain and argues that this closing episode actually resolves the novel's contradictory views on the status of improbable events. Campe claims the ending of the novel is an instance of "unwahrscheinliche Wahrscheinlichkeit"; in other words, Agathon's actions are completely probable within the context of an improbable situation (*Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit* 331-338). Although this is a compelling reading, in my view it does not represent a successful achievement of the novel's aim, which was to find a path to virtue that does not depend on implausible circumstances, and that is accessible to the ordinary person in the ordinary world.

> In diesem eilften Buch, wir müssen es gestehen, scheint der Autor aus dieser unsrer Welt, welche, unparteiisch von der Sache zu reden, zu allen Zeiten nichts bessers als eine Werkel-Tags-Welt… gewesen ist, ein wenig in das Land der Ideen, der Wunder, der Begebenheiten, welche gerade so ausfallen, wie man sie hätte wünschen können, und um alles auf einmal zu sagen, in das Land der schönen Seelen, und der utopischen Republiken verirret zu sein.
>
> In this eleventh book, we must confess, the author seems to have strayed out of this world of ours, which, to speak impartially about the matter, at all times has never been anything better than a workaday world, a little way into the land of ideas, of miracles, of events that turn out exactly as one could have wished, and, to sum it all up, into the land of beautiful souls and utopian republics. (512; ch. 11.1)

The "utopian republic" that Agathon has entered is Tarent, a small republic governed by a wise older man named Archytas, who happens to have been a friend of Agathon's father. Archytas's family has saved Agathon from his prison depression and from his despair over the sorry state of the world by negotiating his release and inviting him to make a life in their well-governed and modestly prosperous province. As Agathon approaches the shore of this new land, the text enters the utopian mode. A host of factors make Tarent the "land of miracles" referenced in the quotation. Archytas has apparently achieved an ideal, enlightened legal code, and the citizens he governs are all practical tradesmen with freedom-loving yet respectful dispositions. The perfection of the civic realm is matched by the domestic realm: Archytas's servants are all happy to serve him, and his loving son has a tender and beautiful fiancée. Finally, Archytas himself represents the ideal that Agathon has been seeking all along: he is wise and practical but also virtuous, as well as cheerful, good-looking and cultured. In Tarent, Agathon finally experiences a life with the combination of virtue and worldly wisdom that he has been seeking all along.

Agathon attains this goal, of course, only via the surrender of plausibility and the rejection of the real world—as the quotation above states, the author has left "our world." Agathon's happiness can only be preserved in the utopian bubble of Tarent. The narrator paints a foreboding picture of what would happen if he ventured back into the real world:

> Ihn wieder in die weite Welt zurückzuführen, wäre nichts anders gewesen, als ihn der augenscheinlichsten Gefahr aussetzen, in seiner antiplatonischen Denk-Art durch immer neue Erfarhungen bestärkt, und… nach und nach auch um diesen kostbaren Überrest seiner ehemaligen Tugend gebracht zu werden, den er glücklicher Weise aus der verpesteten Luft der großen Welt noch davon gebracht hat.
>
> To lead him back again into the wide world would entail nothing other than to expose him to the most evident danger of being confirmed in his anti-Platonic mode of thought by more and more new experiences, and of being gradually deprived of even this precious remainder of his former virtue, which he by a stroke of fortune had still managed to bring with him out of the polluted air of the great world. (515; ch. 11.1)

This passage clearly expresses the exceptional status of Tarent. The marvelous mode, the Bodmerian vision of other worlds that Wieland had been trying to avoid all along, turns out to be the only poetic mode in which the moral aspirations of the text can be realized. At the end of the novel, the struggle between the imitative and the didactic modes is finally resolved in favor of the latter. The search for the middle ground of possibility between what is and what should be is given up, and we see the world purely as it should be.

One could argue that the republic of Tarent does represent the "possible" in the sort of borderline version outlined in the analysis of the preface to *Geschichte des Agathon*. Even though the circumstances in Tarent are unlikely, perhaps they are just barely attainable. After all, there is, strictly speaking, nothing supernatural about Tarent; it is just a community of plain humans living in a reasonable way. The narrator might choose to develop in more detail just what arrangements allow ordinary humans to live so happily. But the text, as before, refuses to develop the possibility of the possible, and instead hammers the reader with undeniable demonstrations of the gap between moral utopia and fallen reality. This occurs via a profusion of gratuitous implausibilities that make it impossible for us to interpret the Tarent episode as anything but make-believe. First of all, the young woman whom Archytas's son intends to marry turns out to be Agathon's long-lost love, Psyche, who herself landed in Tarent via a fortuitous shipwreck, a miraculous survival, and the chance discovery of her childhood nurse, with whom she moved to Tarent; Psyche, furthermore, in the most tired sort of novelistic cliché, turns out to be Agathon's long-lost sister. Now that this reunion has occurred, the narrator notes that the only missing figure is Danae—and so the novelist goes ahead and brings Danae to Tarent, using the favorite literary stratagem of a storm at sea. Agathon comes across Danae's forest dwelling by chance during a hunting expedition. She has now devoted herself to virtue (understood as sexual chastity) as a result of the moral shock of being abandoned by Agathon. This heap of implausible clichés is deployed with a virtuoso playfulness, so that they are amusing rather than tiresome, but the theoretical message is clear: the union of virtue and wisdom can only be achieved in the magical, incredible land where things turn out "exactly as one could have wished."

But even with all the tools of the imagination at his disposal, the novelist achieves a solution only to one half of the thematic problems of the text. The social conflict, i.e. the impossibility of being a virtuous individual amid a depraved society, has been resolved via the postulation of a utopia, but the sexual conflict, the problem of how to satisfy one's sexuality in a moral way, is left open at the end of the novel. The virtuous Danae refuses to renew her relationship with Agathon, which leaves him pining away for intimacy despite the general social happiness of his life. Within the social realm, as it appears, verisimilitude is willing to give up its claims, but not so in the sexual realm. While a perfectly governed republic is at least marginally conceivable, an asexual human male is apparently an absolute impossibility, and even the utopian mode balks at such an implausible portrayal. But the standards of sexual virtue are equally unbending, so that even in Tarent no common ground can be found between our sensual and our spiritual aspects. When it comes to human sexuality, the principles of verisimilitude and virtue remain suspended in unresolved tension.

In the Tarent episode, then, the mimetic pretensions of the novel surrender to the inflexibility of virtue in the *social* sphere and abandon any pretense to civic verisimilitude, thereby offering a playfully desperate mock solution to one half of the novel's problematic. In the sexual realm, on the other hand, neither virtue nor verisimilitude capitulates to the other, so that this aspect of the novel is left open. In neither sphere do we achieve the balanced, mutual accommodation that was the repeatedly stated goal of the text. The successive episodes of the

narrative, as described above, only swing back and forth between extremes of virtue and of fallen realism until the novel's project is finally abandoned in the Tarent episode. *Geschichte des Agathon* ultimately gives in to the tension of the two moments that it has itself constructed as incompatible.

5. Papering Over the Tensions

Verisimilitude as Deception

Geschichte des Agathon does not read like a failure. This very self-aware, metapoetic text employs some clever devices to at least partially mask the shock of its conceptual aporia. The most remarkable device is one that only occurs sporadically, but is fascinating for the light it sheds on the slippery foundations of mimetic theory. The text, namely, exploits the potential friction between the verisimilar and the real, actual or historical. A more conventional type of mimetic theory places these terms roughly in the same camp: the verisimilar is (etymologically) "like the truth"; the fiction holds itself, if not to the exact shape of events, at least to the sorts of things that commonly happen. But a different view of mimesis highlights the potentially specious nature of the verisimilar: a verisimilar text could have only the appearance of truth while actually being false. Many factors undermine the reliability of the verisimilar. For one thing, improbable things do happen in life ("truth is stranger than fiction"), thus rendering inaccurate a text that portrays only common, expected events. An additional problem is the fact that judgments of verisimilitude are subjective—reality is partially constructed. Hence, a text may reinforce cultural stereotypes, and thereby be deemed verisimilar by its audience, while in fact a text that feels odd and implausible, that shakes the reader out of complacency, might be a better vehicle for truth. (This historically recurring idea is the foundation of the theory of Shklovsky or Brecht, for example.) The point is that verisimilitude is ambiguous: in a negative sense, it can designate something that seems like the truth, but is actually deceptive; in a positive sense, it can designate something that genuinely is a close approximation of truth.

Wieland manages to take both positions in *Agathon*. Even though he usually refers to "Wahrheit" (truth), to "Natur" (nature) or to "die Welt" (the world) rather than to "Wahrscheinlichkeit" (verisimilitude), his basic mimetic stance nevertheless is based on a fairly conventional "statistical" understanding of verisimilitude as that which usually happens. In the preface to *Agathon*, as already described, he announces that the novel will follow the "Lauf der Welt" 'usual course of the world' (11-12). But at other times the narrator of the novel acknowledges that the story he is telling is quite unlikely, and then defiantly asserts that everything is true despite its lack of verisimilitude. In these passages, the novel shifts into a mode that opposes the real to the verisimilar, the true to the *seemingly* true. When the text does use the actual word *Wahrscheinlichkeit*, it often occurs in this latter, negative sense, as will be described below. *Geschichte des Agathon*, then, is variously presented as being either both plausible *and* true, or as being conventionally implausible but still emphatically true.

This conceptual variation is useful in mitigating the underlying contradictions of the novel. For the author does, on the one hand, need his text to be perceived as verisimilar in the positive sense, because his whole didactic method depends on the reader accepting the hero as a plausible model to be emulated. On the other hand, the author has trouble creating a plausible hero who is adequately moral, and so it would certainly be very useful if there were a tool for

indulging in implausibility while still asserting fundamental verity. The negative redefinition of verisimilitude is such a tool: the narrator baldly asserts that the events *are* true even if they do not *seem* true. Agathon's story, we are repeatedly told, is a "Geschichte" 'history,' not a "Roman" 'novel'[9] (and here *Roman* is used with the derogatory connotations of a fanciful and amoral romance). The narrator's claim of historical truth is based on the conceit that *Geschichte des Agathon* is drawn from an ancient Greek manuscript, and that the narrator is only the editor and publisher of these autobiographical writings. On this basis, the author is able to incorporate as many improbabilities as he wishes while still positioning himself as superior to the implausible clichés of the preceding novel tradition, since he is supposedly providing a completely objective picture of reality. In other words, the novel is free to indulge in whatever representations are required by the moral project, and meanwhile the reader is pressured to accept the verity of these improbabilities since a history must be true. Although the claim to historicity is made with a large dose of irony, it nevertheless offers support at times when the narrator needs to justify textual implausibility.

The strategy just described is deployed in an important part of the preface not yet discussed. Sandwiched between all the discussion of the new plausible, fallible type of hero is a clever logical move. As already mentioned, the preface had opened with the relatively mild claim that the text exhibits a poetic truth based only on "Möglichkeit" (possibility) and on the "Lauf der Welt" (usual course of the world). This idea is soon turned on its head. First, the next paragraph subtly advances the opening claim to a more absolute position: we are assured that the characters of this story are "wirkliche Personen" 'real people' and "keine Hirngespenster" 'no phantoms of the mind' (12). (Wieland backs up this assertion by hinting that Agathon is a portrait of himself.) The terminological shift is significant: *real* people have a more incontrovertible existence than the *likely* people of the opening paragraph. This move toward the real allows the narrator to make even bolder historical claims in the next paragraph: if these characters are real, then everything about them is true regardless of its implausibility. The "Lauf der Welt" standard from two paragraphs earlier is now contradicted by the bold assertion that the hero of the story will in fact show an uncommon degree of virtue—but since he is real, we must accept his actions as true:

> Es ist etwas Bekanntes, daß öfters im menschlichen Leben weit unwahrscheinlichere Dinge begegnen, als der Chevalier de Mouhy selbst zu erdichten sich getrauen würde. Es würde also sehr übereilt sein, die Wahrheit des Charakters unsers Helden deswegen in Verdacht zu ziehen, weil es öfters unwahrscheinlich ist, daß jemand so gedacht oder gehandelt habe wie er. Wenn es unmöglich sein wird, zu beweisen, daß ein Mensch… nicht so denken oder handeln können oder wenigstens es nicht ohne Wunderwerke, Einflüsse unsichtbarer Geister oder übernatürliche Bezauberung hätte tun können, so glaubt der Verfasser mit Recht erwarten zu können, daß man ihm auf sein Wort glaube, wenn er positiv versichert, daß Agathon wirklich so gedacht oder gehandelt habe.
>
> It is a known fact that often in human life much more improbable things occur than the Chevalier de Mouhy himself would dare to invent. It would therefore be a very hasty move to cast suspicion on the truth of our hero's character based on the idea

[9] See *Agathon* 11 (ch. 1.10), 37 (ch. 1.10), 53 (ch. 2.4), 517 (ch. 11.1).

> that it is often improbable that someone should have thought or acted in the way he did. If it will be impossible to prove that a person… was not able to think or act in this way, or at least would not have been able to do it without miracles, without the influence of invisible spirits or without supernatural enchantment, then the author believes he can rightly expect that people will believe him at his word when he positively avers that Agathon really did think and act this way. (12-13)

In this passage, the text openly rejects the standards of verisimilitude in order to be able to present an exceptional hero (the continuation of the passage makes it clear that the implausible aspects of Agathon's character are his unusual nobility and virtue). Far from finding the hero plausible, the reader is now likely to be skeptical that such a character is even possible, yet we are supposed to just accept the author's assertion that Agathon is real and that such heights of virtue are therefore empirically attainable. While the preface had started with the claim that the story is both plausible and real, we are now told that it is implausible but still possible and real by virtue of its historicity. This paragraph cleverly exploits the conflict between the real and the verisimilar in order to create a space for a hero who can be both real and incredibly ideal.

Reminders of the historical veracity of the narrative appear at several points in the novel.[10] Sometimes the claim is used to defend not the implausible virtue of the hero, but instead his potentially offensive moral failings; in any case, the motif offers a convenient retreat whenever the narrative comes uncomfortably close to extremes either of virtue or immorality. Most surprisingly, the historical claim comes up even amid the incredible events of the Tarent episode. It seems like a stretch to resort to the historical claim in order to excuse the massively improbable coincidences of the novel's end, but the narrator tosses out a playful comment anyway. The narrator excuses the utopian aspects of Tarent by claiming, "daß er niemalen daran gedacht hat, einen Roman zu schreiben… und da dieses Buch, in so fern der Herausgeber Teil daran hat, kein Roman ist, noch einer sein soll; so hat er sich auch um die so genannte Schürzung des Knotens… wenig zu bekümmern" 'that he never once thought to write a novel… and since this book, in so far as the publisher has a part in it, is not a novel, nor is supposed to be a novel, he has little need to worry about the so-called tying of the knot [i.e. denouement]' (517; ch. 11.1). The cheeky narrator asks us to accept this episode as true, even though he had already admitted that Tarent is a land of miracles. Such a tricky move can only be deployed in a limited way in the course of the novel, since it undercuts the much more dominant and crucial claims about the genuine relatable humanity of the hero. Nevertheless, the claim of historical truth occasionally allows the narrator to escape for a moment the pressure of verisimilitude.

The companion to the insistence on historical truth is the denigration of verisimilitude as specious. Subtle but fascinating attacks on verisimilitude can be found occasionally in *Geschichte des Agathon*, where they perform the same function as the historical motif, pressuring the reader to accept the superior truth of *implausible* representations. The two main occurrences are, first, the trial that leads to Agathon's exile from Athens (part of the back story that precedes the opening point of the novel). Here, verisimilitude serves the cause of injustice and deception: Agathon's prosecutor constructs a plausible story that is swallowed by the jury. The prosecutor "legte so viel Wahrscheinlichkeiten in die andere Waag-Schale, daß sich der Ausschlag von selbst geben mußte" 'placed so many probabilities [verisimilitudes] in the other pan of the scale that the decision was a foregone conclusion' (273; ch. 7.7). A similar injustice

[10] See *Agathon* 125 (ch. 4.3), 340 (ch. 8.6), 433 (ch. 9.5).

occurs when Hippias relates Danae's history to Agathon. In this case, everything Hippias says is true, but Hippias paints everything in the most negative tones, pushing his distortions "so weit… als es die Gesetze der Wahrscheinlichkeit nur immer erlauben konnten" 'as far… as the laws of verisimilitude could possibly allow' (315; ch. 8.2). These two passing comments give remarkable metapoetic import to the bits of narrative within the narrative.[11] In both cases, we see the dangers of verisimilitude: it can be either outright deceptive, or at least so flexible as to result in an essentially untrue impression. Even as the narrator has been ostentatiously proclaiming the need for fiction to be plausible, these small comments bubble up to the surface and point to an alternate, negative theory of verisimilitude. The subtle attacks on specious verisimilitude prod readers to place less importance on plausibility, and they prepare us for the suspensions of disbelief required by the narrative.

The Practical Uses of Irony

The assertion of historical truth is a clever device, but its effect is modest. It contributes a small amount to relieving the tension between the competing requirements for fallibility and nobility in the novelistic hero with its claim that the *real* truth is not plausible. But, as already noted, the text is too heavily invested in the plausibility of its hero to give the historical claim more than a peripheral role. Other escape valves for all of the built-up tension between the ordinary and the exceptional must be built into the text. The chatty and playful narrator whose commentary peppers the text plays an important role in winning the reader's indulgence. The narrator variously deploys winning charm, logical discourses and occasional guileless admissions of his own failures in order to keep the reader from being too upset about the fact that the novel consistently fails to give us the practical model that it so ostentatiously promises to provide. The most essential feature of this narrator, however, is his ironic humor. Irony is what allows *Geschichte des Agathon* to get away with violating its own explicit principles. The distinguishing mark of irony is the existence of two different levels of meaning—an overt statement together with the denial of that statement. This ability to embrace opposites makes irony so powerful for the situation in which this text finds itself: contradictory principles can now be asserted simultaneously, as long as they are accompanied with a knowing wink.

The most important deployment of irony in *Agathon* is found in the obviously improbable plot elements that coexist with claims of plausibility. I have already pointed out some of the incredible coincidences and unlikely novelistic clichés that advance the plot of the novel, as when Agathon gets kidnapped by pirates at the start of the novel or when he conveniently encounters a friend of his at the Smyrna harbor. The opening episode with the pirates in fact has more unbelievable twists than have not yet been mentioned, above all the fact that Agathon randomly bumps into his beloved Psyche on board the pirate ship, after having lost track of her for years. This conglomeration of unlikely events at the start of the narrative, drawn from the very same adventure-novel tradition that the author claims to reject, is a self-aware bit of play on the author's part. The preface has only just proclaimed its sincere and high-minded devotion to a morally utilitarian verisimilitude when the reader is hit with this series of ridiculous clichés. The

[11] See Baldwin for an analysis of *Agathon* that focuses on the narratives within the narrative. She stresses their metapoetic significance, but her interests are quite different from those of the present analysis—she offers a perceptive discussion of the eighteenth century's concern about literature's ability to arouse desire.

result of this startling juxtaposition is a strong opening signal of ironic intent: readers immediately lower their expectations for the theoretical consistency of the novel and open themselves up to a playful mode.

The irony is further sharpened several pages later when the narrator, after having given us an account of Agathon's interior monologue, expresses concern that the description of Agathon's thoughts, i.e. the narrator's magic ability to see into Agathon's mind, will lead readers to question the truth claim of the text: "Da wir uns zum unverbrüchlichen Gesetze gemacht haben, in dieser Geschichte alles sorgfältig zu vermeiden, was gegen die historische Wahrheit derselben einigen gerechten Verdacht erwecken könnte; so würden wir uns ein Bedenken gemacht haben, das Selbstgespräch… mitzuteilen …" 'Since we have made it an unbreakable law for ourselves to carefully avoid in this history everything that could arouse some justified suspicion about its historical truth, we would have had reservations about sharing Agathon's internal monologue…' (37-38; ch. 1.10). The narrator takes on a tone of innocent sincerity in order to pretend that narrative truth is once again an "unbreakable law" and goes on to explain that these interior monologues have an objective historical basis in a sort of journal written by Agathon. Of course, coming after the whole pirate episode, the mind-reading inclusion of Agathon's self-reflections is one of the least consequential ways that the story arouses "suspicion" about its verity. Furthermore, the narrator has in fact already admitted, in the very first sentence of the preface, that readers are unlikely to swallow the story about the Greek manuscript (which means that all of the clever play with verisimilitude and historical truth discussed in the preceding section is itself run through with irony from the start). All these contradictory claims in the opening few dozen pages of *Agathon* unmistakably establish the ironic undertone of the text. The overtly improbable plot elements combined with the repeated assurances of truth keep the reader from having any clear idea how to relate to this novel. The reader can get annoyed, or can just stop taking the text too seriously, and the amiable narrator will probably induce us to do the latter.

Once the irony of the text is established in the opening pages, the body of the novel becomes a bit more serious as it engages in the real work of trying to find a way for its virtuous hero to fit into the world. But the playfulness of the beginning is kept alive enough to prepare the reader for the denouement, where all of the narrator's promises are broken. The Tarent episode has abandoned all efforts at plausibility in order to give our hero a happy life in a fairy tale land. In order to smooth this abrupt transition, irony returns in full force. Every new coincidence and improbable reunion asks us to take it with a grain of salt. Danae, for example, is brought to Tarent "von irgendeinem dienstwilligen Sturmwind" 'by some obliging tempest,' which is, 'für die Geschichtsschreiber der Helden und Heldinnen beinahe der glücklichste unter allen Zufällen, welche man herbeibringen kann, um sich aus einer Schwierigkeit herauszuhelfen" 'for those who write the stories of heroes and heroines almost the happiest of all accidents which one can bring in to help oneself out of a difficulty' (533; ch. 11.3). In this quotation, the narrator resorts to tired cliches in a tone dripping with self-aware irony. The entire Tarent episode is shot through with tongue-in-cheek cliches that exploit the multiple levels offered by irony, asking readers to take the story seriously and not to take it seriously both at the same time.

And so irony, like the "dienstwilliger Sturmwind," comes in to save the day, offering to encompass all of the text's contradictions in its sardonic paradoxes. Because the reader receives an early signal that the narrator will be toying with us, the theoretical collapse seen in the closing episode is easier to accept (although this doesn't keep the narrator from also offering plenty of defensive explanations for this closing twist). The disintegration of the novel's theoretical intentions seems like less of a failure, since the text was apparently not even taking itself too

seriously; and the gratuitous ending is not quite so unsatisfactory since a certain good-natured inconsistency was indicated from the start of the novel. As a result, the reader lets go and enjoys the playfulness of the novel's close. After all the fruitless negotiations between imitation and virtue described earlier, irony is the glue that still manages to hold the text together. Irony allows the text to assert theoretical claims that are clearly very important to the author, even though certain predetermined incompatibilities doom that theory from the start; and irony gives the reader space to reflect on those claims without being too disturbed by their narrative failure.[12]

6. An Unfinished Project

Wieland himself was not satisfied with his novel, no matter how cleverly he managed to paper over its conceptual tensions. Although he is certainly a playful writer, he is also one with serious ambitions, and the idea proposed at the start of *Geschichte des Agathon* was more than just an ironic ruse. As a result, the *Agathon* project stayed with him for almost three decades as he continued to try to solve the problem of creating a model hero. A second, somewhat expanded version of the novel came out in 1773, followed by an even longer version in 1794.[13] In this third version, as Wieland writes in the preface, he believed he had finally brought the narrative into "die möglichste Übereinstimmung mit der ersten *Idee*" (591).

But the passing decades had not lessened the conceptual impossibilities of the novel's project, and the supposed resolution offered in the 1794 version is less appealing than the playful incongruities of the original edition. The third version is expanded mainly in the Tarent episode with the addition of the very Pietist-toned confessional autobiographies of Danae and of Archytas. Agathon's sexual conflicts are also "solved" in the 1794 version when the virtue that emanates from Danae's personal story inspires him to renounce all claims to her and apparently live as a bachelor. At the same time, Agathon explicitly returns to the exact same idealistic (Pythagorean and Orphic) philosophies that had inspired him in his youth, thereby rendering meaningless the whole earlier course of the novel with the experiences in Smyrna and Syracuse.

In short, in the 1794 edition of the novel the impossibly elevated version of Agathon triumphs completely, and the core theme of the novel, i.e. the question of how this elevated outlook can fit into the imperfect world, is undercut by the suggestion that an unbendingly high-minded virtue was the correct path all along. Meanwhile, the ironic, self-defensive "apology"

---

[12] Along similar lines, see Krause's "Theodizee-Krise" for an argument about the power of the aesthetic to offer a way out of the philosophical problems of the eighteenth century. *Agathon* is one of the novels that Krause briefly discusses.

[13] The multiple versions of *Agathon* confront scholars with the problem of determining which, if any, should be taken as the standard version. For some time after Wieland's death, the 1794 version was the only one easily available, since it was this version that was included in the *Sämmtliche Werke* (1794-1811; reprinted 1984). The "Akademie-Ausgabe" of 1909-1939 (reprinted 1986), also used the 1794 version. Sengle's 1949 biography, however, argued that the first version of *Agathon* is preferable, and perhaps due to Sengle's influence the original version became available in several editions in the later 20th century, e.g. in the stand-alone volume by Klaus Schaefer in 1961, the 1964 selected works edition by Martini and Seiffert, and finally also in Manger's 1986 volume, part of an uncompleted DKV edition of Wieland's major works. Other scholars continued to take the third edition of 1794 as authoritative, e.g. Wolfram Buddecke in his large monograph on *Agathon*. The current consensus seems to be that each edition should be valued as a separate work in its own right. This is the basis of Walter Erhart's approach, and the new "Ossmannstedter Ausgabe" plans to print both the first and the third version. The second version from 1773 has never been reprinted.

that had opened the Tarent episode in the original edition is removed in the final version. The result is that the 1794 edition is even more unrealistic, even more implausibly virtuous, than the first version, but without the playful irony that helped us accept this sudden utopia in the 1766-67 edition. Images of absolute virtue are now given to the reader with earnest solemnity. In the original edition, incredible violations of plausibility succeeded as aesthetic play, but now, in the absence of a softening humor, they appear tiresome. The 1794 version gives us precisely the caricature of virtue that Wieland had intended to avoid from the outset. As a result, the continuance of Wieland's *Agathon* project only underlines the impossibility of combining an unyielding portrayal of virtue with an imitative fidelity to the real conditions of humanity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the gradual development of a more meaningful and genuinely objective approach to literary imitation in the course of Wieland's early publications, followed by the collision, in *Agathon*, of this new mimetic principle with the visionary didacticism that continued to drive Wieland's poetic ambitions. In the course of the 1750s, Wieland enthusiastically exchanged heaven for earth and other worlds for this world, but he only gradually came to confront the consequences of this move after he realized that "Natur" was not composed solely of beautiful and harmonious forms. As he left behind the excessively abstracted Neoclassical vision of *la belle nature*, he took part in a general mid-eighteenth-century exploration of a realist mode, a mode that found it more interesting to use art to engage with the world as it is rather than to use art to perfect the world. But the contemplation of the world inevitably leads to ideas of how the world could be improved, so that the idealistic orientation that had been left behind reappears and now enters into a tense dichotomy with the images drawn from objective observation. The world as it is collides with the world as it should be. One of the best ways to understand Wieland's work is to place this dialectic at the heart of his fiction. Even when Wieland comes down to the earth, he retains his yearning for heavenly virtue, as expressed in the epigraph to this chapter. Rather than seek a one-way trajectory in the development of his outlook, we must keep both the empirical and the morally visionary impulse in mind if we hope to understand the warring tendencies and ironic fluctuations of Wieland's creative work.

Geschichte des Agathon is a scintillating literary expression of the tensions that arise from this situation, as it sets out to portray a hero who is both extraordinary and attainable. The novel is particularly intricate because its fundamental conceptual problems are not left implicit, but instead are projected onto the narrative and made into the explicit problem of the hero's personal development. The conflict of what is and what should be is thus worked out simultaneously on the level of poetic theory and of lived experience. As it works through these problems, the text displays the intensely unstable fluctuation of the starkly divided poles of aspiration and reality, and it also masterfully displays the literary devices that can be used to keep these conflicts from blowing the text apart. Philosophically, the novel misses its goal, but aesthetically it succeeds as a dramatization of the intractable impossibility of its original intention.

Although its underlying conceptual problems are real, *Geschichte des Agathon* seems to make them particularly unmanageable. It is certainly not unthinkable that virtue can be made plausible and that the seeds of progress can be found in the real world. But the novel, having proclaimed that such an attainable virtue is its central goal, proceeds to deny any potential harmony between what is and what should be. It pushes the actual world and the desired world apart to such inflexible extremes that, to use the narrator's metaphor, an unbridgeable abyss appears between them. In short, the text renders "the possible" impossible. The final most interesting question about this text, then, is the question of why it drives apart the two principles it claims to want to unify.

Some answers may be found in the novel's cultural context. In particular, Wieland's situation can be contrasted with that of Gottsched, who, writing just a few decades earlier, was somewhat more successful in bringing the imitative and the didactic together. Several reasons can be found to explain why Wieland had a more difficult time. First of all, the concept of imitation had shifted by the time Wieland began work on *Agathon*. The mid-Enlightenment shift toward a more objective understanding of "nature" and of poetic "imitation" gave Wieland less theoretical flexibility. While Gottsched's contemporaries were able to draw on the "structural" or "subjective" understandings of verisimilitude described in the previous chapter, which allowed somewhat unreal representations to nevertheless be interpreted as plausible, Wieland was working with a more objective version of verisimilitude that had a stricter standard for actual empirical correspondence with the external world.

Secondly, the concept of nature had also shifted in the time between Gottsched and Wieland, taking on a much more pessimistic inclination. The so-called "theodicy crisis" had raised doubts about the optimistic Leibnizian understanding of nature. Gottsched notably retained his allegiance to the Leibnizian philosophy for his entire career, while Wieland mostly left it behind after a brief youthful infatuation. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake had also shocked Europe with images of pointless suffering and destruction. And religious views probably also injected the culture with a contemptuous attitude about humanity, whether because of the Catholic mortification of the flesh or the Pietistic insistence on spiritual rather than sensual pleasure. For all these reasons and many more, "nature" often seemed to be a particularly ugly and disagreeable entity as the eighteenth century advanced. Such a pessimistic view of nature pushed the extremes of the real and the ideal farther apart and made it much harder to find a worldly version of virtue.

Finally, later eighteenth-century culture lent itself to a particularly elevated and inflexible understanding of virtue and civic improvement. Enlightenment culture's continued commitment to visions of progress and pedagogy set high standards for the idealistic end of the spectrum—after all, the growing disillusionment and pessimism of the period was itself probably the result of an overdone optimism about the ability of reason to improve social arrangements. And in the personal sphere, the eighteenth-century idea of morality was heavily defined by sexual chastity, as seen for example in the anguished maidens of the period's *bürgerliche Trauerspiele*. The word "Tugend" 'virtue' usually referred to sexual morality alone, which (if understood as either abstinence or a lifelong limitation to one partner) is one of the most difficult aspects of virtue to bring into harmony with the facts of human existence. This combination of factors made it very hard for any mildly plausible literary representation to satisfy the culture's incredibly lofty visions of how things should be, either in the sexual or the civic realm. Although this perfectionism had not necessarily become more pronounced for Wieland compared to Gottsched, he at least inherited the same difficult set of standards.

These three eighteenth-century cultural factors—a more objective concept of imitation, a more pessimistic concept of nature, and a more lofty concept of the ideal—likely contributed to Wieland's difficulty in conceiving the union of the existing and the desired state of the world. Last of all, Wieland confronted more problems because he was writing in a narrative form, while Gottsched's treatise is pure theory; as noted in the course of this chapter, Wieland, like Gottsched, was able to envision a union of imitation and didacticism in theory, but faltered continually in narrative execution.

Wieland's uncompleted project of visionary mimesis receded to the periphery of cultural interest in the decades that followed, as the periods of Classicism and especially Romanticism tended to celebrate an unapologetically otherworldly sphere of the aesthetic and the imaginative. But a project very similar to Wieland's search for a pragmatic form of virtue appears nearly a century later in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. The next two chapters will describe how the project of visionary mimesis—or "progressive realism," as I will begin to call it in its nineteenth-century version—takes on new forms in a new cultural context, while continuing to contend with the same conceptual conflicts that undermined Wieland's search for a plausibly virtuous hero. Nineteenth century Russian culture draws on conceptions of literary imitation, of the real and of the ideal that differ greatly from those of eighteenth-century Germany and that open up a more flexible theoretical space for the union of pragmatic realism and transformative vision. In practice, however, as we will see both in the criticism of Dobroliubov and the fiction of Dostoevsky, the plausible representation of a transformed reality continues to be as difficult in practice for them as it was for Wieland in his *Geschichte des Agathon*.

Chapter 3

Realist Convictions and Revolutionary Impatience in the Criticism of N. A. Dobroliubov

INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. "Visionary Mimesis" Recedes and Reemerges

The intractable aesthetic conflicts that shaped Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* were less in evidence in European culture of the later eighteenth century as the prevailing literary trends shifted to new interests. Wieland, influenced by the work of John Locke, David Hartley and Henry Fielding, among others, had introduced a mixture of empirical, scientific and materialist currents into the German literary world. At the same time, he retained the Enlightenment desire to improve his readers. Thus his novel, positioned at the difficult intersection of a mimetic and a transformative-moralizing aesthetic, vainly struggled to create a plausible yet perfectly virtuous hero.

The major literary works of the decades that followed, however, operated under a different set of literary imperatives that pushed the phenomenon of "visionary mimesis" into the background. Although interest in various sorts of ideal images remained strong, the mimetic half of the aesthetic dichotomy lost its power: later eighteenth-century German literature was less concerned with the traditional tenet of *Nachahmung der Natur* (the imitation of nature) and more drawn to unadulterated ideals and to the fantastic. Wieland's attempt to ground moralizing visions in pragmatic human realities, therefore, appeared precisely as the most prominent literary currents were moving in the opposite direction, toward the celebration of inspiring images and alternatives to the prosaic. The successive waves of *Empfindsamkeit*, *Sturm und Drang*, Weimar Classicism and eventually Romanticism brought with them new affective and aesthetic values that snuffed out the brief eighteenth-century flirtation with a more empirically and psychologically grounded approach to literary mimesis. Much work of this period, it is true, shed new light on family life amid the bourgeois classes, but these were not images of everyday human fallibility; middle-class writers presented an idealized, self-congratulatory version of themselves in the new *bürgerliche Trauerspiele* (bourgeois tragedies). German literature of the later eighteenth century is rife with ideal characters who are no longer constrained by the need to demonstrate their human plausibility. Lessing's Emilia Galotti and Nathan der Weise, Goethe's Iphigenie and Egmont, Schiller's Marquis von Posa, Maria Stuart and Wilhelm Tell are stable, unequivocally virtuous positive heroes of the sort that were unavailable within the aesthetic of Wieland's *Agathon*. And Novalis's quintessentially Romantic text *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is

focused exclusively on imagining a world of idyllic beauty and poetry—the object rather than the source of our yearning. Literary heroes of this period do face their share of conflict, but they are not bifurcated at their core by the clash between verisimilar fallibility and inspiring heroics.

Meanwhile, when the darker frustrations and failings of the Enlightenment project do appear in late eighteenth-century literature, they usually occur in self-contained opposition to the positive vision: the corrupt prince is contrasted with the virtuous *Bürger*, or the merciless oppressor with the enlightened freedom fighter. Instead of seeking a difficult accommodation with each other, as they did in the work of Gottsched or Wieland, the real and the ideal are bifurcated into a clear opposition. The literary hit of the later eighteenth century was Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, a novel whose hero is ruined by his bipolar mood swings, and who does not even try to bring his moments of exultation into contact with mundane realities. Readers of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century German literature can choose between virtue and vice in Schiller and Lessing's plays, between the alternating exultation and depression of Goethe's Werther, or between the aesthetic transfiguration and dreary mundanity offered in Hoffmann's stories—but we do not feel strongly pressured to embrace both at the same time. The texts of these periods lack the intense struggle, the attempt to combine everyday plausibility and inspirational virtue, that is key to "visionary mimesis."

It makes sense then that the work of Gottsched and Wieland, which sought to combine the real and the ideal, was mostly repudiated rather than built on by the next generation of writers. This rejection is understandable in the case of Gottsched's more derivative and backward-looking poetics, but was not necessarily a foregone conclusion for Wieland's lively, varied and experimental *oeuvre*. But Wieland's urbane attempts to combine worldly awareness with high-minded striving failed to resonate with a culture that seemingly had less of an appetite for compromises, and the quest for the plausibly virtuous hero was, in effect, set aside for several decades.

The Romanticism that arose in Europe in the late eighteenth century also flourished in early nineteenth-century Russia, when many of the foundational works of the modern Russian literary tradition were written. Writers like Pushkin, Zhukovsky and Lermontov left behind the Classicism that characterized the earliest texts of modern Russian literature and imbibed the Romantic motifs of Western European culture. Their works tend to favor exotic settings, elements of the supernatural, alienated Byronic heroes, unusual adventures and emotional angst. Meanwhile, the young intellectuals of the period occupied themselves with highly wrought, elevated and idealizing philosophical pursuits drawn from Schelling, Fichte and Hegel. Just as in Western Europe, the everyday, earthly realm was pushed to the periphery of cultural attention and the concepts of the real and the ideal were polarized. The sometimes excessive ethereal orientation of this period would motivate the radical realism of the next generation. But for most of the first half of the nineteenth century, the moderated realm of the possible, where idealistic visions seek an accommodation with lived experience, temporarily disappeared from the prevailing literary configuration.

But as literary fashions gradually shifted away from Romanticism, a more empirically understood type of mimesis reentered the scene. With the rise of realism in Russia beginning in the 1830s, literature once again became interested in representing rather than escaping from everyday experience. This everyday experience, however, was still full of the same frustrations that had motivated the Romantic attempt to leave the world behind. And so the turn toward reality engendered a concomitant desire to transform reality, and this visionary impulse existed alongside the more sober empirical orientation. Once again, then, the dialectic last seen in the

earlier eighteenth century reappeared as realism reopened the delicate negotiations between what is and what should be.

2. The Rise of Realism in Russia

Nineteenth-century literary realism got its start in France with the prose of Honoré de Balzac and Stendahl—the transitional writers whom Donald Fanger designated "romantic realists"—but it was in Russia where the combination of historical and cultural circumstances pushed realist literature to the fullest development of its internal contradictions. In Russia, the literary developments that began in the 1830s and reached a peak around 1860 transitioned away from the Romanticism of the preceding decades in order to promote a particularly uncompromising version of the mimetic imperative and a particularly insistent call for the transformation of contemporary reality, both of which injected remarkable passion and urgency into the search for a progressive yet plausible literary protagonist. And so, jumping forward from the eighteenth century, I pick up the thread of this investigation amid the cultural ferment of mid-nineteenth-century Russia, with the expectation that this changed milieu will offer new variations on and insight into the structural problem that confounded Gottsched and Wieland a century earlier in Germany.

The texts that are generally classified as "Russian Realism" grew out of the innovations of Nikolai Gogol and Vissarion Belinsky, the first a writer of prose and the second a critic. Their influential writings hastened the ongoing turn from poetry to prose and incited a new engagement with the most pressing social problems of contemporary Russia. Gogol produced idiosyncratic portrayals of various provincial or mundane corners of Russian life. Although the absurdity of his motifs and the comic abundance of his style certainly distance him from any sort of mundane naturalism, his leading works do highlight the miserable existence of low-ranking government employees, the idiocy of provincial officialdom, or the arbitrary caprices of serf-holding landowners in the rural expanses of the country. Contemporaries were struck by the seeming negative bias of his creative vision and by his willingness to expose the most unappealing facets of Russian society; thus, despite his fanciful style, he furthered the literary turn toward the problematic aspects of everyday life. The later critics who championed a social realism most vociferously all declared themselves to be fans of Gogol—and also followers of Vissarion Belinsky, the critic who hailed Gogol as the leading exemplar of a new "natural school" in Russian literature.

The famously "frenzied" (*neistovyi*) Belinsky was the founder not just of the socially oriented strand of Russian criticism, but of the overall tradition of serious, passionate and broadly read literary criticism in nineteenth-century Russia. He enacted the transition from Romanticism to the realism of the "natural school" not just in his journalistic career, but also in his personal intellectual journey. Belinsky came of age during a time when Russian culture was inundated with German Idealism. In the 1830s he was fascinated with the philosophy of Fichte, and, as a member of the circle around the young nobleman Nikolai Stankevich, Belinsky embraced Schelling's pursuit of the Absolute while engaging in lengthy, soulful self-

examinations in his correspondence with friends.[1] But Belinsky's encounter with Hegel, as well as his growing exasperation with the abstract and ethereal concerns of his friends (as the only non-noble member of the Stankevich circle, Belinsky more quickly came face to face with physical and financial exigencies), led to Belinsky's famous "reconciliation with reality" beginning in 1837 or 1838. From Hegel Belinsky took the notion that one must accept contemporary reality as an inevitable manifestation of rational necessity. This move plunged Belinsky into an incredibly conservative phase for several years, as he forced himself to refrain from what he saw as misguided attempts to protest against the current state of things. In the early 1840s, however, Belinsky found himself increasingly unable to ignore the injustices of history. Eventually he rejected the interpretation of Hegel that requires one to passively accept all aspects of reality and instead embraced the notion that the individual can play an active role in the steady progress of history. Andrzej Walicki has described how multiple leading figures of the Russian intelligentsia of the 1830s (such as Herzen and Bakunin) carried out this same reinterpretation of Hegel, moving from a passive reconciliation with reality to a philosophy of social action. The resulting combination of empirical outlook and change-oriented activism, together with a Hegelian faith in the forward movement of history, created the intellectual preconditions for the distinctive conflicts that marked Russian literary culture of the next several decades, with its tensions between what is and what should be, or between the present and the eagerly anticipated future.

In his mature works of the 1840s up until his death from tuberculosis in 1847, Belinsky encourages literature to embrace socially relevant content, and he holds up Gogol as the central exemplar of the "natural school." The high points of the later stage of Belinsky's career are his retrospectives of Russian literature for the years 1846 and 1847, as well as his participation in Nekrasov's edition of "physiological sketches" of Saint Petersburg in 1845-1846. In these works, Belinsky does not refer to his own aesthetic doctrine as "realism" (*realizm*). The primary word Belinsky uses to refer to the real is *deistvitel'nost'*, while the term "realism" only begins to appear sparingly in Russian criticism in the late 1850s. But since *deistvitel'nost'* is itself translated as "reality," Belinsky was essentially calling for realism, that is, for the empirical representation of common lived experience, even if he did not use the exact term. Belinsky also regularly refers to his preferred literary faction as the "natural school" (*natural'naia shkola*), insists that literature must have "content" (*soderzhanie*), celebrates "truth" (*istina*) in literature, and asks writers to "reproduce life" (*vosproizvodit' zhizn'*). Amid this array of various terms, Belinsky never rigorously works out his concept of realism; he ambiguously wavers between the strictly empirical notion of "physiological" reproduction and the much looser notion of "truth," and between the faithful reflection of reality and the more tendentious suggestion that literature must contribute to social change. These gray areas cannot be explored in detail here; the main point is that this blurring of concepts helps span the underlying theoretical contradictions that would become more troublesome in the work of later critics. With his brilliant and energetic influence, Belinsky firmly established the dual orientations toward the real and toward the socially progressive transformation of the real that mark Russian literature and especially Russian criticism through the 1860s.

[1] See Lydia Ginzburg's excellent exploration of the cultural implications of the correspondence between Belinsky and the members of the Stankevich circle in her *On Psychological Prose*. Standard sources on Belinsky include Terras and Mordovchenko; my discussion of Belinsky also draws on Offord, Walicki, Paperno, and Mathewson.

3. The Electrifying Context of "the 1860s"

Belinsky laid the groundwork for the criticism that will be the subject of this chapter, but the contradictions and the potentials of his approach could not be pursued during the years after his death in 1847 because of the stifling atmosphere created by the famously repressive Tsar Nikolai I, whose reign (1825-1855) had commenced with the shocking execution and exile of the noblemen who opposed him in the Decembrist uprising. Belinsky's own career was able to flourish during a brief, culturally fertile period in the 1840s, when, despite tight censorship, there was at least some room for public intellectual life as long as it refrained from directly addressing social or political questions. But almost immediately after Belinsky's death, the Western European revolts of 1848 induced the tsar to impose smothering cultural controls that discouraged any new developments in Russian criticism. This dark period lasted until 1855, when a confluence of events led to a remarkable and sudden explosion of energy in all periods of Russian public life. First of all, Nikolai I died in 1855 and was succeeded by his son Alexander II, who, while not exactly a resolute liberal, was at least more pliable than his adamantly conservative father. Alexander II immediately signaled that he was ready to consider major reforms, which in any case were half-forced upon him by historical exigencies. The second major event of this juncture was Russia's defeat in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. This stinging loss forced the nation to confront an array of social and economic inefficiencies that were perceived as having contributed to the military defeat: in the area of technology, Russia lagged behind its British and French opponents, Russian industry was underdeveloped, the country had no railroads other than those found in a few factories, Russia's economy was based on the compulsory labor of enserfed peasants, Russia lacked the financial infrastructure necessary to spur economic innovation, and its military was made up of forcibly conscripted peasants.[2] The death of the tsar and the defeat in the Crimean War sharply heightened the national concern with these problems.

The one reform that dwarfed all others was the proposed emancipation of the serfs, who farmed the land in conditions essentially equivalent to slavery. In 1856, in a speech to the Moscow gentry, Alexander II made it clear that the government did intend to carry out an emancipation "from above" (as opposed to succumbing to the recurring peasant revolts from below). In order to pave the way for reform, the tsar proclaimed an official policy of *glasnost'* (openness, free speech). He asked the provincial gentry to form committees to weigh in on the reform process and encouraged the press to discuss social problems openly—but not too openly, since the censors still kept the discussion of social and political questions within tight bounds.[3] The long repression of Nikolai I's thirty-year reign, followed by the sudden urgency of the nation's problems and the abrupt encouragement of open debate, generated an electrifying

[2] E. Lampert, *Sons Against Fathers*, provides an excellent overview of the reform era from a historical, social and cultural perspective. And Dobroliubov's "Literaturnye melochi" offers a vivid contemporary view of the huge range of social problems that were hotly debated in the press in the late 1850s.

[3] The commentary in the 1961-1964 edition of Dobroliubov's collected works provides detailed accounts of how each article made it through censorship. These descriptions are a great source for getting a picture of the changing boundaries of what was and was not acceptable in the public domain, and of the mixture of cooperation and conflict between the editors of *The Contemporary* and their assigned censor. Evgenev-Maksimov's detailed history of *The Contemporary* is also a rich, painstakingly complied source of information on interactions with the censors, as well as on every other aspect of the journal's operation.

atmosphere of optimism and patriotic social engagement in the years immediately after 1855. N.A. Dobroliubov vividly characterized the prevailing mood in one of his articles: "Любо смотреть было, в самом деле, на общее одушевление: самый робкий, самый угрюмый человек не мог, кажется, не увлечься, видя, как все единодушно и неутомимо хлопотали о том, чтобы раскрыть 'наши общественные раны'" 'Really, it was a joy to behold the general excitement: the most timid, the most morose person, it seems, could not help getting carried away at the sight of the way everybody tirelessly and unanimously busied themselves in the effort to uncover 'our societal wounds" ("Gubernskie ocherki," 2:120).[4] Throughout the educated segments of Russian society, the pent-up frustrations of the past thirty years spilled out in a flurry of social debate and national self-criticism.

This mood was intense enough to linger for several years, but it gradually ebbed as hoped-for changes turned into actual policies. The emancipation of the serfs was in fact carried out in the spring of 1861. Public debate had grown more rancorous and divided in the immediately preceding years as the government began to work out the concrete details of the emancipation; progressive circles were particularly upset over the limited amount of land given to the peasants and the high redemption taxes foisted upon them. After 1861, even as further reforms were carried out in the military, the universities, the courts, and the structures of local government, the national mood grew ever more tense. The reforms were now no longer a hope but a reality, and the revolutionary segments of society were bitter over the fact that the changes had not dramatically improved the lot of the peasants. In 1866, an attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander II put a decisive end to the preceding period of relative tolerance and energetic discourse. That lively cultural interval between Nikolai I's death in 1855 and the 1866 assassination attempt is conventionally called "the 1860s," even though its most vibrant period actually fell in the late 1850s. (The "1860s" designation provides a neat counterpoint to the more philosophical and Romantic "1840s," and the two contrasting periods of lively cultural activity are often set against each other as part of a conventional generational opposition.) The intense debate and extreme positions that characterized the 1860s provide the essential backdrop for the work of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dobroliubov, whose writings will be analyzed in this chapter.

In the 1860s, the historical circumstances described above combined with the literary currents that had been set in motion by Belinsky already in the 1840s to create a "perfect storm" for the sort of progressive realism that is the topic of the present investigation. At a time when the entire society was facing up to the problems of reality, and was clamoring to improve that reality, and when real reform actually seemed probable and imminent, the literary realm responded to these pressures and fed off of this energy, pushing Belinsky's vision of a literature of "reality" and social "content" to new extremes. The leading critics of the 1860s became more absolutist in their demand that literature act as a record of contemporary life and more impatient to discover traces of the approaching future in these mimetic texts. And the literary world was all

[4] All quotations from Dobroliubov's work are drawn from the nine-volume *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1961-64. Translations are my own. The 1961-64 edition restores some of the cuts made by censors to the articles originally published in *The Contemporary*; the editors draw on Dobroliubov's manuscripts as well as on the four-volume 1862 edition of Dobroliubov's works edited by Chernyshevsky, who himself already restored some of the censors' cuts. The six-volume 1934-1937 edition edited by Lebedev-Poliansky is also a very fine edition with ample commentary and a more independent viewpoint, but the 1961-64 edition includes more of Dobroliubov's unpublished works, together with the thorough commentary and editorial information typical of Soviet academic editions. More recent shorter collections, such as that of 1986-87, are drawn from the 1961-64 edition. Selections from Dobroliubov's work have been translated into English by Ralph Matlaw and J. Fineberg.

the more eager to jump into the social fray because of an idiosyncrasy of Russian cultural history: the pressures of censorship made literary fiction into one of the best available outlets for social discussion. At a time when direct discussion of contemporary issues was closely regulated, literature acted as a proxy for real life, and critics discussed the virtues and failings of fictional characters in order to make a social argument within the somewhat innocuous framework of a literary review.[5] This habit only became more pronounced in the 1860s. During this period, then, all factors converged to inject both the problems and the aspirations of the contemporary world into literature in the most immediate and concrete fashion.

4. The Radical Critics: Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov

The two leading critics of the socially oriented school of 1860s criticism were Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobroliubov; their group is generally referred to as the "radical" camp in English-language scholarship, as the "revolutionary-democratic" camp in Soviet scholarship, and as the "real" (*real'naia*) camp in some post-Soviet scholarship. I will use the first term. Both wrote for *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*), the main journal of the progressive camp. They combined progressive-revolutionary social views with the conviction that literature should take its themes and content from the areas of life that are of tangible, material concern to the broadest segments of Russian society. The two of them, however, represent a cultural phenomenon that goes beyond mere aesthetic positions. Both critics came from a context completely different from that of their opponents in the so-called "aesthetic" camp, who championed "pure art" and "art for art's sake" (*chistoe iskusstvo*, *iskusstvo dlia iskusstva*). The difference between the two factions was first of all generational: their opponents were men like Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Druzhinin, Pavel Annenkov or Vasily Botkin, who had come of age during the more philosophically oriented and more politically repressed 1840s. Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov were members of the younger generation of the 1860s, and their youthful outlook gave them an impatience for change, a demand for concrete action and a scorn for what they saw as the empty words, compromising moderation and passively abstract interests of their elders. Like the other members of their generation, they had a strong regard for the hard sciences, especially biology, while their elder opponents retained a Romantically inflected veneration of art and natural beauty. And the leading intellectual currents of their youth came from Büchner or Feuerbach rather than Schelling or Hegel.

Perhaps even more important was the class difference between the two camps: whereas the members of the "aesthetic" faction came mostly from wealthy gentry backgrounds, the two younger critics were both "seminarians" (*seminaristy*).[6] Their fathers were Orthodox priests, and they were educated in the separate system of religious schools established for members of clergy families (although both did manage to attend secular institutions for their post-secondary education). Irina Paperno has described how their class origin expressed itself in a wide range of cultural markers: while the men from a gentry background were practiced in the manners of high

[5] See Derek Offord, "Nineteenth-century Russian thought and literature," for a useful quick overview of the close connections between literature and social thought in the period.

[6] The seminarians belong to the broader category of "raznochintsy," the culturally influential group of mixed-rank, non-noble intellectuals, including doctors, teachers and other educated professionals.

society, "seminarians" did not know to dance, how to interact with women[7] or how to conduct themselves at social gatherings; they could read French fluently, but their pronunciation exposed them to ridicule. And they certainly were ridiculed by the older, gentry members of the intelligentsia, especially by those who had long been associated with *The Contemporary* and who resented the fact that N. A. Nekrasov, the journal's publisher, was increasingly casting his lot with the younger critics. For example, the gentry writers nicknamed Chernyshevsky the "bedbug-stinking gentleman" (*klopovoniaiushchii gospodin*, Paperno 77). From multiple points of view, the class origin of the radicals is key to the critical stance they assumed. They belonged to one of the few groups in Russian society that was well-educated enough to contribute to intellectual discourse without being directly implicated in the crippling system of serfdom; this outsider position meant that they could be radically progressive, and menacingly unrestrained, in their calls to upend the landowner-serf hierarchy. Lacking the financial security of the gentry, the radicals were able to position themselves as sharper materialists, concerned with the tangible factors of existence; lacking the upper-class familiarity with theater and music, they could compensate by emphasizing practical substance over abstract form in art. Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky were not, of course, complete philistines. Both were very well read in Russian and Western European literature, and Dobroliubov in particular could be sensitive to literary style and form when he chose to be. However, in the charged historical situation they found themselves in, and in confrontation with the opposing doctrines of "pure art," their personal background set them up to articulate the sharply pronounced theories of literary imitation and social progress that fit the spirit of the times so well.

Chernyshevsky was the elder of the two critics by eight years and the more philosophically oriented. His writings on literature mix insight with radical attacks on the status of art. His work takes the most left-leaning aspects of Belinsky's late criticism and pushes them to a literal and materialist extreme, while presenting his own approach as the rightful continuation of the great critic's legacy. Chernyshevsky's dissertation *Esteticheskie otnosheniia iskusstva k deistvitel'nosti* (*The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*), which he publicly defended in 1855, was the notorious first proclamation of the radical aesthetic views that would gain traction in the next several years. In this thesis Chernyshevsky eviscerates literature of any aesthetic or creative value; in fact the central aim of the dissertation is to prove that the thing called the "aesthetic," as elaborated by Hegel and his follower F. T. Vischer, does not exist. The one thing that does matter, according to Chernyshevsky, and the single source of everything beautiful and good, is "life," which apparently refers to tangible objects and experience as opposed to abstract mental constructs or artistic simulations. If life is the source of everything, then art has nothing to add. Life, Chernyshevsky proclaims, is superior to art. Consequently, as Chernyshevsky explicitly states, art's only remaining role is to be a "surrogate" to life, a second-rate reproduction that we turn to only when the original is not available to us. This is realism proclaimed in terms that necessarily destroy art. In contrast, Belinsky had never denied the added value of the creative act; he regularly followed up his statements about the need for art to turn to reality with a reaffirmation of the independent existence of art, and a reaffirmation of the imagination and of the artist's intuition. Belinsky's literary realism was meant to enrich art;

[7] For example, Dobroliubov, plagued by feelings of social inadequacy, and described by many who knew him as unattractive, experienced intense obsessions with various young women from polite society but was unable to act on them. So he turned to prostitutes, and in fact would have married one of them, a certain Theresa Grunwald, if Chernyshevsky had not forcibly prevented their rendevous. See Kioutchkine for more on Dobroliubov's erotic torments.

Chernyshevsky's aims to demote art. Chernyshevsky further staked out his critical position in his 1855-56 article series *Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury* (*Sketches of the Gogolian Period in Russian Literature*), where he continues to praise reality-oriented literature, although in less nihilistic terms, and establishes Gogol and Belinsky as the favored predecessors for the radical camp. Chernyshevsky, then, set the terms of the literary debates of the 1860s by pushing the doctrine of "realistic" literary imitation as far as it could go: for him, real life exists absolutely and objectively, and art *must* always be a literal reproduction of this reality, since it is impossible for the artist to add anything from his or her own subjectivity. For him, life becomes paler and less desirable when it makes the transition into art, but life is still the only source for any value that we do find in art.

Dobroliubov read Chernyshevsky's work while a student at the St. Petersburg Pedagogical Institute, where he studied from 1853 to 1857 after graduating from the seminary in his hometown of Nizhny Novgorod. Famous for his studiousness and his piety as a child, Dobroliubov retained the former quality but lost the latter during his years at the Pedagogical Institute. The abrupt deaths in 1854 of his father and his mother, which left him as the guardian of his seven younger siblings, hastened Dobroliubov's growing religious skepticism.[8] Socialism became the new object of his devotion, and he read forbidden works by Alexander Herzen, Ludwig Feuerbach and various Left Hegelians in a circle he had formed with several other progressive-minded students. He also studied Rousseau, translated Heine and kept up to date with the leading Russian journals. In another sign of Dobroliubov's growing social awareness and radicalization, he wrote and circulated among his fellow students a handwritten underground newspaper, which mostly consisted of anti-serfdom and anti-tsarist anecdotes likely culled from Herzen's *Kolokol* (*The Bell*). The death of Nikolai I fell right in the middle of these years, so that Dobroliubov's youthful political awakening coincided with the reformist excitement that greeted the coronation of Alexander II. Coming of age during this historical turning point, Dobroliubov and his fellow students felt the future landing in their hands: they were the young generation who would turn visions of reform into real action and remake Russia.

And so by the time Dobroliubov graduated from the Pedagogical Institute, he had imbibed the most progressive, revolutionary currents of his cultural milieu, and had resolved that the best way to satisfy his progressive yearnings was to become a critic for one of the "thick" journals of the period. Certainly such a career was one of the few available outlets for a non-nobleman with activist leanings, but Dobroliubov was not becoming a literary critic merely for political reasons. He was also genuinely interested in literature and literary history. He had spent his youth devouring the books in his father's library and borrowing books from all available sources: he read recent Russian works by Pushkin, Lermontov, Pisemsky and Marlinsky, delved into the eighteenth-century writings of Lomonosov, Derzhavin and Karamzin, read popular foreign writers like Alexander Dumas, George Sand, or Charles Dickens, and encountered classical antiquity in the work of Aristophanes and Horace. But the young Dobroliubov did not stop at merely reading these texts. He also, on his own initiative, took on the role of critic from a young age. Between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, Dobroliubov kept a register of the books he read and in many cases recorded pithy, perceptive evaluations of the work's strengths and weaknesses.[9] This precociously serious and disciplined relationship to books is not the mark of

[8] Biographical information on Dobroliubov is drawn from Lebedev-Poliansky, Reiser, Kruzhkov and Senese.
[9] Selected passages from these notebooks are published in the *Sobranie sochinenii* as the *Reestry chitannykh knig* (*Register of Books Read*), VIII:396-403. Much of what is missing from the *Sobranie sochinenii* can be filled in from

someone who took up literary criticism merely for its political potential. Dobroliubov's love for literature lived on throughout his political awakening, and an affiliation with a 19th century Russian journal was the perfect way to pursue both interests.

Dobroliubov's first significant publication was his article "Sobesednik liubiteley rossiiskogo slova" ("Conversation Partner for Lovers of the Russian Word"), which appeared in *The Contemporary* in 1856. The article is an excellent example of the intersection of Dobroliubov's political and literary interests: it combines a philologically solid discussion of the eighteenth-century journal named in the title with a politically inflected demonstration of the shallowness of Catherine II's supposedly enlightened views. Dobroliubov had submitted the article to *The Contemporary* through the hands of a fellow student who happened to know Chernyshevsky. The prominent critic was impressed by this new talent, and soon Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky met in person. These two young men with such similar backgrounds and outlooks quickly became good friends. Dobroliubov, barely twenty years old, had now broken into the highest levels of the Russian intelligentsia. He became an official contributor to *The Contemporary* even before he graduated. In the summer of 1857, he was promoted to the editorial board. A few months later, Dobroliubov was put in charge of the literary section of *The Contemporary*, while Chernyshevsky, who had formerly headed this section, turned his full attention to social and economic topics. Dobroliubov's career and his literary notoriety developed very quickly from this point—and he had to move quickly, since he had but a short time left to live. A case of scrofula developed into tuberculosis, and Dobroliubov died in November 1861 at the age of 25, after a year spent abroad in Italy and elsewhere in Europe failed to restore his health.

5. Dobroliubov's Vision for Progressive Realism in Literature

Between 1857 and 1860, Dobroliubov wrote hundreds of articles for *The Contemporary* ranging from short reviews to long discourses. He also frequently contributed articles on pedagogy to the *Zhurnal dlia vospitaniia* (*Journal of Education*) and wrote extensively for *Svistok* (*The Whistle*), a satirical supplement to *The Contemporary*. Dobroliubov's work represents the finest exemplar of the progressive-realist criticism of nineteenth-century Russia. It may seem that Dobroliubov was too young, and his career too brief, for his work to gain so much significance. But the intellectual ground had been well prepared for him first by Belinsky and then by Chernyshevsky, so that Dobroliubov was able to latch immediately onto the most vital aspects of their approach, and then pass them through his lively, agile intellect in order to generate scintillating examples of both the strengths and the underlying tensions of radical criticism. While Belinsky had gone through a protracted struggle as he mapped out the path from Romanticism to Realism, and while Chernyshevsky forcefully pioneered a new space for radical aesthetic doctrines with his controversial master's thesis, Dobroliubov arrived on the scene of a cultural constellation that was already very amenable to his own critical preferences. And so Dobroliubov adopted the doctrines of realism that he found already prepared.

But Dobroliubov was more than just a derivative mouthpiece for a theory that others had developed. Two things make him perhaps the most remarkable member, from a literary point of

---

S.A. Reiser, who read as many of the manuscripts as were legible and provides a thorough report in his book on Dobroliubov's childhood.

view, of the Russian radical triumvirate (Dmitrii Pisarev, who came after Dobroliubov, is the third major figure of Russian radical criticism). First, Dobroliubov did not adopt the radical heritage unquestioningly; he significantly refined the radical literary theory that came to him from Chernyshevsky. Chernyshevsky was often happy to deprive art of any special status or unique worth, but Dobroliubov, reviving aspects of Belinsky's literary outlook that Chernyshevsky had ignored, modified the hammer-like pronouncements of Chernyshevsky's aesthetics. In the approach he dubbed "*realnaia kritika*" (real criticism), Dobroliubov found a way to combine a strictly objective theory of literary imitation with a respect for artistic talent and a recognition of the unique benefits of a specifically aesthetic method for processing the world. Like Belinsky, and unlike Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov presented his realist aesthetic not as a challenge to art but as a way to elevate the significance of art, a way to give it new vigor and relevance.

Dobroliubov's other distinctive feature is that he was more interested in literature for its own sake than were Chernyshevsky or Pisarev. Chernyshevsky was an intelligent thinker, and clearly in the field of ethical philosophy he was the leader and Dobroliubov the follower. But Chernyshevsky's lower investment in literature comes through in the way he happily left his post as literary editor once he could hand it over to Dobroliubov; true to the argument he made in 1855, he preferred to discuss real life rather than fiction. Chernyshevsky is truly an example of the radical critic who used literary texts mainly to make social and political points. Of course, Dobroliubov is also notorious for turning novels into political allegories, so at first there appears to be little difference between the two critics. But two of their most famous articles reveal a clear contrast. Chernyshevsky's article "Russkii chelovek na rendez-vous" ("The Russian Man on a Rendezvous") uses a short story of Turgenev's to attack the ineffectual character of the Russian liberal nobleman. Dobroliubov does much the same thing in "Chto takoe oblomovshchina?" ("What is Oblomovism?"), his famous review of I. Goncharov's novel *Oblomov*. But in Chernyshevsky's article, the initial discourse on literary history soon evolves into a purely sociological analysis of class psychology followed by ominous predictions of a coming peasant rebellion. Dobroliubov's article, by contrast, begins and ends with Goncharov's novel (see below for a more extensive discussion of the article). Unlike Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov is interested not just in using the novel to make a sociological point, but also in using sociology to interpret the novel. And although literature does always become political in Dobroliubov's hands, politics also becomes literary. Dobroliubov's most famous legacy, after all, is that word "Oblomovism," which stamps reality with an indelible literary type. With this term, Dobroliubov draws on the power of fiction to illuminate life; Chernyshevsky's review, on the other hand, uses life to smother literature, true to his declared intention in 1855.[10] In short, although Chernyshevsky did produce some quite insightful literary interpretations, for example in his 1856 reviews of the young Tolstoy, Dobroliubov more consistently keeps the aesthetic element in play alongside the

[10] As this discussion shows, Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov certainly had some differences despite their affinity and their strong mutual regard. Orthodox Soviet criticism, unwilling to shine light on any differences between two of its foremost ideological heroes, presents them as virtually identical in their views; this is just one way that the hagiographic status of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov has impeded our understanding of their work. See Egorov's 1988 article "Dobroliubov i Chernyshevsky" for an example of late Soviet criticism starting to gently push back against the notion that the two critics shared exactly similar social and aesthetic views. Along with various comments related to their personalities and writing styles, Egorov makes the plausible argument that Chernyshevsky was slightly more interested in incorporating a clear action-oriented "verdict" into literary texts, while Dobroliubov usually held back from requiring anything more than a faithful reproduction of life.

political concerns throughout his career. This makes his work the more fruitful site for an analysis that comes from a literary-theoretical perspective.

So what does Dobroliubov's work tell us about the ways that mid-nineteenth century criticism navigated the clash between reality-reflection and reality-transformation? The rest of this chapter answers that question in detail by analyzing a series of Dobroliubov's most interesting articles, but the general situation is as follows. The cultural context of mid-nineteenth-century Russia offered a broad array of promising mechanisms for mitigating the clash in literature between the imitation of the present and the projection of the future, and Dobroliubov's theoretical discussions provide an excellent display of these devices. The first useful circumstance is that the nineteenth-century critics were operating in a post-Hegelian world in which history was generally assumed to be changing and progressing. This outlook kept open a path from the present to the changed future and made idealistic visions slightly more plausible than they would be under a static conception of history. Furthermore, even the present state of reality, according to the concept employed by the radical critics, encompassed not only physical phenomena but also the mental realm of the desires and aspirations that portended coming progress. The mid-nineteenth-century concept of reality was thus softened in order to make room for change, and the idealized future was found to be, at least to some degree, embedded in the present. The radical critics likewise operated with a moderated, sobered-down version of the ideal. The transformation they envisioned concerned social structures, not the personal and sexual morality of the eighteenth century, so that the Russian radicals at least did not have to run directly counter to the facts of human nature in their calls for change. Finally—and this is one of the most insistent aspects of their philosophy, their politics and their aesthetics—they in fact took great pains to insist that the ideal they envisioned required no extraordinary effort at all, but instead was completely natural and normal, and therefore could easily be included in a realist text. Finally, the model of aesthetic education that the nineteenth-century critics worked with did not even ask literature to portray the envisioned ideal in the first place. Literature was expected only to present real life and leave the reader to draw all conclusions about potential transformations of the real. The critics thus avoided the eighteenth century's conflict between ordinary and exemplary representations in literature. The single conceptual area where the nineteenth century did stand firm was in the concept of mimesis: the radical critics quite literally viewed literature as objective reflection. In sum, then, nineteenth-century Russia was willing to modify its concept of the real, its concept of the ideal and its concept of aesthetic agency itself, as long as mimesis was intact. This strategy is precisely the opposite of eighteenth century Germany, where, as I have shown, it was always the standard of mimesis that eventually had to give way to accommodate a more rigid notion of the ideal and of literature's pedagogical role.

The pattern that holds across both centuries, however, is that the territory of the possible, the territory of the attainable ideal, always falls apart in the end. In theory, it seems that the nineteenth century was nearly successful in elaborating a realistic vision of progressive change that could be coherently embodied in a mimetic literature. In practice, however, none of the factors sketched above were as flexible as they promised to be, so that the fervently desired ideal eventually slipped beyond the reach of a realist vision. Dobroliubov's later articles, including the pieces of criticism for which we most remember him, offer scintillating examples of the strained attempt to uphold a workable realist-progressive poetics. Dobroliubov is, as it turns out, just as eager for a literary embodiment of the positive hero as were Gottsched or Wieland, and he was perpetually unable to convincingly locate that ideal in real life. As Dobroliubov's revolutionary impatience increases, he creates wonderfully outlandish interpretations in the attempt to

reconcile the conflicting poles of his aesthetics. While we might find his readings dubious, they have value in themselves as the ultimate examples of an agile critical mind contorting itself to bring together the realist and the progressive moments of literature.

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

Once we enter the sphere of Russian culture, any discussion of the tensions between a reflective and a transformative mode of literature inevitably brings to mind not so much the "critical" realism of the nineteenth century as the socialist realism of the 20th. It is socialist realism that has spurred the most memorable engagements with this hybrid mode of literature, for example in Andrei Siniavsky's famous 1957 essay, "Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm" ("What is Socialist Realism"), and later in Katerina Clark's groundbreaking study *The Soviet Novel*, first published in 1981. Siniavsky's essay asserts that the essence of socialist realism is its orientation toward a goal, which explains its fixation on the positive hero. Siniavsky ultimately suggests (somewhat ironically) that socialist realism give up altogether on its pretensions to verisimilitude and give free rein to an idealized Classical, Romantic or fantastic mode of writing. Similarly, Katerina Clark, after pointing out the "modal schizophrenia" produced by the confusion of "what is" and "what ought to be" in socialist realism, suggests that overall these novels are shaped primarily by their utopian orientation as they narrate the lives of positive heroes in a "legendary" or "hagiographic" mode (36-45). Thus, although both Clark and Siniavsky point directly to the same aesthetic tension that I have been investigating in earlier centuries, in the end they largely turn away from the mimetic half of the dichotomy as they assert, understandably, that socialist realism is not really realism at all. In my analyses of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, by contrast, I prefer to keep both the mimetic and the visionary terms in play: it is the ongoing tension between these two abiding aspirations that produces such a varied, lively, shifting array of literary representations and critical interpretations in the texts I analyze. I aim to show how both the real and the ideal continue to compete for control of fictional narratives and literary-theoretical discussions. Models drawn from the mature period of socialist realism do not quite fit this tenaciously dual orientation.

Another drawback of approaching this aesthetic tension through 20th century Soviet literature is that socialist realism, as the state-imposed product of a totalitarian literary regime, is often viewed as a phenomenon external to "real" literature. Clark for example suggests that the genre is best analyzed with an anthropological rather than a literary methodology (xiii). By implication, then, the "modal schizophrenia" of this genre is not something that we should expect to find in the history of genuine literature. But, as I have demonstrated, Clark's modal tension is found well before the twentieth century, in literatures that were not nearly as tightly controlled as Soviet literature. The looming specter of socialist realism as a sort of aberrant genre overshadows these earlier literary modes and makes it harder to approach them on their own terms. And so I do not intend my discussion of nineteenth-century radical Russian aesthetics to be a "prehistory" of socialist realism, although Dobroliubov and his colleagues are frequently read this way by both Soviet and Western scholars (for example, Mathewson, Clark, Zhdanov). Instead, the Russian radicals revive a perennially recurring literary configuration last seen in the

early Enlightenment—and the fact that this approach was not imposed on them as official orthodoxy may make their works a better case study for the tension between the real and the ideal than is socialist realism.

Even though socialist realism has dominated discussions of this hybrid mode of literature, the clash between imitation and transformation has not gone unnoticed in discussions of nineteenth-century Russian literature as well. For example, when René Wellek presents his working definition of realism as a literary movement, one of the major distinguishing features he points to is the tension between description and prescription ("Concept of Realism"). On a more specific level, Victor Terras, concluding his book on Belinsky's aesthetics with a quick overview of the young radical critics, highlights a similar aesthetic tension precisely with respect to Dobroliubov. In Terras's formulation, we see a "conflict… between Dobroljubov the positivist and Dobroljubov the populist and revolutionary optimist" (251). Terras argues that these competing forces generate a dynamic inconsistency in Dobroliubov's writings. His revolutionary eagerness, according to Terras, leads Dobroliubov to make some dubious judgments in defiance of the critical acumen of his more positivist side. Andrzej Walicki makes essentially the same point when he notes that Dobroliubov's "facts" gradually turn into normative "ideals" (206). Terras and Walicki's observations are sound and perceptive, but since each devotes only a few pages to Dobroliubov, neither is able to ground the opening idea in a more extensive analysis of Dobroliubov's writings—a lack that this chapter aims to fill.

The specifically literary version of the clash between the descriptive and the prescriptive comes out particularly clearly in Dobroliubov, but scholars have also formulated broader cultural, semiotic or psychological versions of this clash in their work on other radical critics. One of the foundational ideas of Irina Paperno's book on Chernyshevsky, for example, is that literature both mirrors and transforms reality, simultaneously drawing on and generating new cultural codes, and using the literary type to mitigate between the representation of reality and the impact on reality—a phenomenon on display in Chernyshevsky's novel *Chto delat'?* (*What Is To Be Done?*). Paperno's conception of simultaneous multivalent processes is a persuasive semiotic model for the interaction between a text and its culture, and she convincingly uses this model in her description of the cultural building blocks of Chernyshevsky's sense of self. My analysis of Dobroliubov's work, however, will focus more on the irreconcilable clashes within his specific literary theory rather than on the balanced coexistence of multiple processes within an overall culture. Dobroliubov valued both the imitative and the transformative functions of literature too highly for them to be able to coexist peacefully in a sort of balanced interaction. Konstantin Klioutchkine's work provides one of the most recent examinations of the clash between the real and the ideal in nineteenth-century Russian aesthetics. Klioutchkine, following in the footsteps of Lydia Ginzburg, shows how the dynamics of a writer's personal life and psychology express themselves both in diaries and in published writings. Klioutchkine's particular interest is the ongoing clash between the very high standards that Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov set for themselves and their inevitable personal failings as they succumb to erotic desires. In short, Paperno and Klioutchkine's work shows how the clash between reality and the desired ideal runs through large swaths of mid-nineteenth-century culture. As such their work parallels and complements my focus on the contradictions specific to literary aesthetics.

As the above discussion demonstrates, Western scholarship has touched briefly or obliquely on the intense struggle in Dobroliubov's work between a mimetic and a transformative vision of literature, but has not yet given this fascinating dynamic the sustained attention it deserves. So far I have said little about Russian scholarship on Dobroliubov, largely because the

standard Soviet approach preferred not to emphasize the conflicts and inconsistencies in his work. Since Dobroliubov's views (for example, his interest in the common people, his obvious revolutionary leanings, or his calls for social content in literature) are largely compatible with Soviet-era politics and aesthetics, he was embraced and celebrated by the Soviet literary establishment and hailed as one of the pioneering early figures in the gradual movement toward socialist realism. Laudatory admiration suffuses most twentieth-century Soviet scholarship on his writings. This canonization of Dobroliubov undermined actual scholarly engagement with his work, as he needed to be protected from any meddling investigations that might disturb the role he fulfilled in the Soviet establishment's sense of its own cultural history. As a result, most of the innumerable books and articles on Dobroliubov produced approximately between 1950 and 1990 largely reiterate a set of generally accepted views.[11]

V.S. Kruzhkov wrote one of the leading orthodox treatises on Dobroliubov's life and work. His 1976 monograph *N.A. Dobroliubov: Zhizn', deiatel'nost', mirovozrenie* (*Dobroliubov: His Life, Work, and World View*) exemplifies the main strands of mature Soviet criticism. First of all, Dobroliubov's literary views are implicitly presented as the topic of least importance. Many Soviet monographs follow a conventional structure that opens with a biographical overview and then moves on to successive chapters treating Dobroliubov's political, social and philosophical views, turning to his aesthetics only in a final chapter (besides Kruzhkov, see Naumova and Lebedev-Poliansky). Dobroliubov's status as a social activist, particularly his opposition to serfdom and to autocracy, is emphasized at the expense of his actual position as a literary critic. Soviet scholars devote much space to Dobroliubov's interest in the common people (*narod*), and they strain (in the absence of any convincing evidence) to make the case that Dobroliubov was involved in concrete revolutionary agitation, or at least that he would definitely have become a revolutionary if he had lived longer (see e.g. Zhdanov, *N.A. Dobroliubov*, 97 or Lebedev-Poliansky 32-35).

When the discussion does turn to Dobroliubov's literary views, he is praised for the way his realist aesthetic pushed literature to engage with social concerns; however, any conflict between his realist commitments and his thirst for revolutionary "positive heroes" in literature is ignored. Soviet scholars also commonly assign Dobroliubov to a set position in the conventional literary chronology: he is presented as a successor to the great Belinsky and as the younger colleague of and close collaborator with Chernyshevsky. Dobroliubov thus plays his role as one of the stepping stones in the steady advance toward dialectical materialism and socialist realism. The views of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, furthermore, are implied to have been virtually identical. Of course, even though Dobroliubov is highly revered in Soviet scholarship, Soviet critics must also recognize that anyone living prior to the full elaboration of dialectical materialism will suffer from some historically inevitable misconceptions. And so these scholars, with condescending regret, note that Dobroliubov was wrong, for example, to have condemned eighteenth-century literature as harshly as he did, and was misguided in his occasional "anthropologism," as well as in his failure to recognize the importance of the author's world view and political consciousness. (Some scholars, however, labor mightily to exonerate Dobroliubov of such a grave failing: they manage to find a few passing phrases indicating that Dobroliubov did in fact value *soznatel'nost'* (consciousness)—see e.g. Zhdanov, "Dobroliubov," 137). Another

[11] See Elizavetina, *N.A. Dobroliubov i russkaia literaturnaia kritika*, for a bibliography of everything published on Dobroliubov between 1961 and 1986. Every tiniest facet of Dobroliubov's life and work seems to have had a book or article devoted to it during this period, but interpretations and reevaluations were in short supply.

recurring motif of Soviet scholarship is the insistence that Dobroliubov, contrary to the assertions of his liberal opponents, did truly value artistry (*khudozhestvennost'*) and was a proficient judge of aesthetic questions—an argument that I also find accurate. When scholars move on to discuss specific writings of Dobroliubov's, they assume that all of his major statements are incredibly insightful and absolutely correct. Dobroliubov's arguments about Goncharov, Ostrovsky and Turgenev are summarized and presented as standard interpretations that still hold. Finally, Dobroliubov is always presented in absolute opposition to the "art for art's sake" camp. Soviet scholars celebrate Dobroliubov's relentless attacks on the aestheticizing, moderate liberals and imply that he had nothing in common with these misguided reactionaries.

This is the picture presented to us not only in Kruzhkov's monograph, but also for the most part in M. A. Naumova's very similar book from 1960, V. I. Kuleshov's textbook history of Russian criticism first published in 1972, and V. Zhdanov's 1961 biographical sketch and 1958 article for the *Istoriia russkoi kritiki* (*History of Russian Criticism*). The latter article, because it focuses on Dobroliubov's literary criticism, is a serviceable, concise and accurate, albeit favorably biased, account of Dobroliubov's primary critical writings. The longer books that privilege Dobroliubov's philosophical and social views over his literary theory are filled with extensive, detailed analyses of Dobroliubov's opinions on the role of the common people, his anti-capitalist positions, the precise nature of his materialism, etc. While all these stances are of legitimate contextual interest, they are only secondary concerns in Dobroliubov's work, and often constitute the most unoriginal segments of his writings. In sum, most standard Soviet criticism on Dobroliubov has some reliable information to offer, but its interpretations tend to repeat an orthodox view rather than offer new insight.

One book that does stand out from this background is S. A. Reiser's account of Dobroliubov's childhood in Nizhny Novgorod, published in 1961. Reiser, himself a native of this region, clearly carried out extensive research in primary and archival materials related to Dobroliubov, and on this basis he describes such things as the social standing of Dobroliubov's family, the conditions at the local seminary where he attended school, and the battle with his father over the continuation of his studies in St. Petersburg. Reiser's work, although it does not take compelling interpretive stances, has a substance, detail and interest that is missing in much other Soviet scholarship. One of the major virtues of Reiser's book is the chapter devoted to a description of Dobroliubov's "Reestry chitannykh knig" ("Register of Books Read"), the notes he kept on everything he read in his teenage years. These notes have not yet been published in their entirety, so that we still have reason to return to Reiser's thorough account.

We can also find something of a respite from the stagnant Soviet perspective in studies of Dobroliubov published prior to World War II. Although these works were written by scholars who admired Dobroliubov as much as the later Soviet establishment did, and although they highlight many of the same features of his work, they also contain interpretations that depart from the exact details of the eventually standardized view. For example, A. Lavretsky, writing in 1941, emphasizes as usual Dobroliubov's desire that literature engage with current reality and his status as the rightful heir to Belinsky, but also discusses at length Dobroliubov's Enlightenment-tinged faith in a certain "natural" human being who must be freed from the artificial trappings of society. This is not a view that fits with the image of Dobroliubov that later Soviet criticism wanted to project. Another example is a 1935 book by the early Bolshevik V. Poliansky (writing as P. I. Lebedev), which emphasizes many of the themes found also in later scholarship—such as Dobroliubov's commitment to practical action (*delo*), love for the common people, and ties to Belinsky—and even presages the chapter structure found in 1960s scholarship. Nevertheless, a

certain independence can be felt in some of the details Lebedev-Poliansky gives of Dobroliubov's life (such as the fact that he read Rousseau, or that he had doubts about whether actual revolutionary activity could be effective in current circumstances) and in some of his idiosyncratic and original interpretations of Dobroliubov's personality. Lebedev-Poliansky also strongly emphasizes Feuerbach's influence on Dobroliubov, a view that was aggressively opposed decades later by Kruzhkov after Feuerbach had come to be seen as an undesirable associate. Finally, a pre-revolutionary assessment of Dobroliubov can be found in Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky's 1911 history of Russian literature. Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky shares the later hagiographic attitude toward Dobroliubov, but offers some distinctive interpretations that would not have been so acceptable in later decades. For example, Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky underlines Dobroliubov's advocacy for individual rights, asserts that Dobroliubov was more sober and realistic regarding social change than the utopian Chernyshevsky, and describes Dobroliubov's critical method as the scientific analysis of a text as a slice of reality. Overall, these early works of Dobroliubov scholarship do not radically oppose the later orthodox interpretation, but they do offer a few distinctive emphases and arguments.

The very end of the Soviet era also produced some scholarship that mildly, and occasionally even substantially, revises the standard take on Dobroliubov. An interest in the so-called "literary process" (*literaturnyi protsess*) was prominent in the 1980s. This method, championed by V. F. Egorov, aims to provide a detailed, even-handed, year by year account of significant literary developments as they happened. The main advantage of this approach is that it fills in some of the context that was lost when Soviet literary scholarship limited itself to the authors and texts that fit within the genealogy of socialist realism. Under the rubric of the "literary process" method, both Egorov and the scholar G. G. Elizavetina turn their attention to the "art for art's sake" camp, those critics who were anathema to Soviet orthodoxy but nevertheless are essential to any adequate understanding of Dobroliubov's career. Boris Egorov's 1991 essay "Bor'ba esteticheskikh idei v Rossii" ("The Battle of Aesthetic Ideas in Russia") is full of useful details about the bustling literary activity of the late 1850s. Egorov describes the major liberal almanacs, the popular "denunciatory" (*oblichitel'naia*) literature, and the gradual break between the liberal and radical camps, who initially hoped they could work together. This last point in particular is a significant departure from the standard Soviet view, as it acknowledges a certain degree of partnership and shared outlook between the radical and the liberal camps. In a different article published in 1988, Egorov pushes back against the usual assumption that Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky were practically interchangeable. He points out an array of small differences in their personalities, understandings of literature's social role, and writing styles ("Dobroliubov i Chernyshevsky"). Although Egorov does often repeat many of the standard Soviet themes in his work, and certainly still assumes that the radical camp had the "correct" views, these fairly concise pieces of scholarship offer a more subtle, even-handed and substantial portrait of Dobroliubov's context than is found in many entire books devoted to the critic.

Elizavetina, meanwhile, announces her focus on "literary process" right in the title of her 1989 book on Dobroliubov's cultural milieu. Her work is not as varied and flexible as Egorov's, but it is full of meticulous detail of a sort that does not appear in most other Soviet writings on Dobroliubov. Her book systematically and concisely describes the stance of each of the aesthetic critics and Dobroliubov's relationship to them; here she differentiates between individual voices from the aesthetic camp rather than dismissing all of Dobroliubov's opponents in a single gesture. Another chapter from her book provides detailed information on an array of secondary

figures in the radical camp (leaving the impression, however, that we are not overlooking much when we focus only on Dobroliubov, Chernyshevsky and Pisarev). Even though their ties to the established Soviet views remain strong, Egorov and Elizavetina's writings offer a refreshingly fleshed-out picture of the environment in which Dobroliubov worked.

Now that Soviet communism is a thing of the past, homage to Dobroliubov is no longer a requirement. One might hope that some space has opened up for balanced, in-depth, critical engagement with his work, but if a recent article by I. Kondakov is any indication, literary scholars in Russia, fatigued by decades of forced adulation, are inclined only to reject Dobroliubov as decisively as he was once celebrated. Kondakov's aggressively titled 2010 article "Pokushenie na literaturu" ("The Attack on Literature") seems to channel Druzhinin, Dobroliubov's bitter opponent of the 1850s. Kondakov's argument is that the radical critics of the 1860s—much like their counterparts in the socialist realism of the 20th century—mounted an attack on literature, presenting themselves as superior to the literary text and pressuring literature to center itself around tendentious content, thus undermining everything that is valuable about "true" or "classical" literature. Kondakov argues his case with vigorous and eloquent conviction, but naturally his polemical stance negates the possibility of any perceptive analysis of Dobroliubov's career. Such absolutist oppositions between a vaguely defined "pure" literature and the supposed defilements of didactic criticism lead us nowhere. Dobroliubov was much more of an opponent of naked tendentiousness than Kondakov acknowledges, and in any case the whole premise that any literature that aspires to social utility is *a priori* not real literature is false.[12]

Scholars in Western Europe and the U.S. enjoyed greater independence than their Soviet counterparts, and thus we find more variety and often more critical perception in their writings on Dobroliubov. But the Western body of work on Dobroliubov is quite small and is sometimes marred by a negative bias against the critic. Especially during the early years of the Cold War, Slavists in the West took stances that were almost as ideological as those of Soviet scholars, but from the opposite point of view: Western scholars saw it as their duty to defend the formalist aesthetic or the artistic freedoms that were under attack in Communist regimes. Dobroliubov sometimes became a victim of this principled standpoint. In his own life, of course, he was actually a champion of individual self-worth and himself a victim of a repressive cultural regime. But since he became such a hero to official Soviet culture, he ended up being looked down upon as a crude utilitarian, and as a sort of accomplice of socialist realism, by Western scholars.

The French Slavist Charles Corbet may be the most extreme example of this phenomenon. His 1956 article on Dobroliubov's literary criticism concerns itself mostly with demonstrating that Dobroliubov was *not* a literary critic, but instead a publicist who, under the exigencies of censorship, used literature as a vehicle for a sociopolitical message. Corbet asserts that, with the partial exception of the article on *Oblomov*, Dobroliubov consistently fails to

[12] A fresh perspective in recent Russian-language scholarship on Dobroliubov can be found in a 2011 dissertation by Aleksei Vdovin at Tartu University (*Kontsept "glava literatury" v russkoi kritike 1830-1860-kh godov*). Vdovin examines the way that the great 19th-century critics attempted to assert an authoritative cultural role by proclaiming the next "head of literature." Vdovin describes how Chernyshevsky created the "cult" of Dobroliubov after the latter's death, and thus attempted to make Dobroliubov into the "head of literature." Although his own work contributes to a post-Soviet reevaluation of Dobroliubov, Vdovin also confirms that Dobroliubov still lacks the sustained treatment necessary to illuminate the more interesting contours of his work: "Во многом миф продолжает определять восприятие Добролюбова и сегодня" (195) ["To a large degree the myth [constructed by Chernyshevsky and Nekrasov] continues to determine the reception of Dobroliubov even today"].

appreciate the true artistic talents of the writers he surveys. But while Dobroliubov's interpretations can be idiosyncratic and strained, he has plenty of critical acumen and should not be dismissed just because his approach to literature is not the same as Corbet's. The tragic themes and formal refinements celebrated by Corbet are not the only topics of legitimate interest for a critic.

Rufus Mathewson, who includes a chapter on Dobroliubov in his 1958 book *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, shares Corbet's vision of literature as essentially tragic. Mathewson, acting as a combatant in the cultural version of the Cold War, unabashedly speaks out against controlled, socially prescriptive approaches to art and criticizes the falsehood of ideologically motivated positive heroes. But unlike Corbet, Mathewson does not let his tendentious dislike for Dobroliubov's ideas prevent him from offering a reasonably fair account of his aesthetics. Mathewson presents Dobroliubov as the energetic, perennially youthful radical who sharpened Belinsky's ambiguous formulations into a sharper doctrine of social utility. Mathewson is even-handed enough to acknowledge that Dobroliubov was not calling for crude, direct tendentiousness in literature, but asked literature only to present the "truth"—even though, as Mathewson argues, Dobroliubov's critical practice turned literary "truth" into propaganda. Mathewson of course also dwells on Dobroliubov's quest for a positive hero, but does not delve into the strains and contradictions that I'll analyze in this chapter—only when he turns to Chernyshevsky does Mathewson touch on the way that the utopian impulse conflicts with the realist aim.

Like Mathewson, René Wellek (whose general comments on realism were discussed above) offers some balanced observations on Dobroliubov's literary theory, even though he disagrees with the critic's social utilitarianism. In his *History of Modern Criticism*, Wellek, a New Criticism sympathizer, admires Dobroliubov for having rejected the "intentional fallacy" *avant la lettre*. That is, Wellek gives Dobroliubov credit for advocating an objective analysis that disregards the author's subjective aims. But Wellek also quite harshly attacks Dobroliubov as "lumpish and stodgy" and "lack[ing] all literary grace and intellectual agility" (245), none of which I found to be the case. And Wellek's characterization of Dobroliubov as torn between a passive, reflecting and an active, progressive literature does not do justice to the subtleties of Dobroliubov's position (Dobroliubov resolved the active-passive conflict in his theoretical pronouncements, but strayed from his theoretical stance in his practical criticism).

As the assertively pro-formalist and pro-tragic Western literary ideology of the 1950s faded, several American scholars approached nineteenth-century Russian criticism with a more open-minded attitude. The primary example of a balanced account of the "1860s" is Charles Moser's 1989 *Esthetics as Nightmare*. This book straightforwardly describes the array of aesthetic opinions voiced by the Russian intelligentsia of this period. Moser touches on every somewhat influential statement published between 1855 and 1870. Moser's work recalls Egorov's "literary process" approach in that it offers a wonderful introduction to all the specific figures and publications that played a role in this lively cultural period. The most useful overall conclusion to be drawn from Moser's work is that the "aesthetic" and the "radical" camps were not so far apart, at least on paper. Their theoretical statements about the process of creation, the relation of art to reality, the ethics of art, etc., often sound fairly similar (although Moser does not do justice to the actual practical differences in the way the two groups approached literature). It can, however, be difficult to extract useful conclusions from the dizzying array of detail Moser provides on who said what on a dozen different aesthetic questions. We get a general sense that Dobroliubov was more inclined than some of his radical colleagues to appreciate the role of

artistry in literature, but the structure of Moser's work does not allow for a sustained treatment of Dobroliubov's criticism.

Victor Terras, whose views on Dobroliubov were partially discussed above, likewise takes an impartial approach to the radical critics in his 1974 book *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism*. In a short overview, Terras praises Dobroliubov for being "more thoughtful" than Chernyshevsky, credits him with having a respectable aesthetic sense, notes that he was theoretically close to many of his opponents but differed from them in politics and practical interpretations, and points briefly to some of the interesting contradictions in Dobroliubov's literary theory. E. Lampert's 1965 book *Sons Against Fathers* also devotes a chapter to Dobroliubov. Lampert offers a psychological portrait of Dobroliubov as an intense, passionate personality who sublimated his own suffering into compassion for others. When it comes to Dobroliubov's ideas, Lampert presents him as a practical humanist who hoped that radical social change could create a space in the world for a more moral and personally autonomous type of person. But Lampert, as a social historian, does not offer much useful commentary on Dobroliubov's literary criticism.

Overall, those Western critics who are not hampered by their opposition to Dobroliubov's political affiliations generally recognize that he was a thoughtful critic who prized artistry as well as social relevance, who sometimes adopted fairly moderate theoretical positions, and whose practical criticism reveals the conflicts that he experienced in trying to reconcile an imitative aesthetics with his revolutionary hopes. It is established, then, that Dobroliubov is not the crude utilitarian denigrated by Corbet or Kondakov, nor was he the completely conflict-free, proto-socialist realist painted by Soviet criticism. But beyond these general points, we still do not have a good understanding of just what *was* going on in these striking critical articles that, over the course of four intense years, captured the attention of the entire Russian literary establishment. The real Dobroliubov has gotten lost between the adulation of the Bolsheviks and the Western distaste for what are generally assumed to be crude ideological appropriations of literature. In Russia Dobroliubov could not be studied objectively; in the West very few scholars cared to study him objectively. And so we are confronted with a situation where there are really no genuinely useful, insightful interpretations of Dobroliubov that treat his work in any sort of depth. The present chapter will not quite fill the need for a respectable full-length monograph, but I hope to shine a much more extensive light than previously on the interesting products of Dobroliubov's passionate and energetic literary commitments.

PART I: A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESSIVE REALISM: CONCEPTS OF THE REAL, THE IDEAL, MIMESIS AND LITERARY AGENCY

1. Chernyshevsky's Positive-Realist Hero

The fundamental difficulty that plagues Dobroliubov's critical career is the elusiveness of what I have been calling the "possible," that realm of attainable progress that is a step ahead of the present, yet much more grounded than any utopia. Dobroliubov was constantly on the lookout for the "possible," but it always remained tantalizingly out of reach for him, so that his journalism remains torn between incommensurable extremes, between what he saw as the "dark

kingdom" of the present and the shining future of a revolution that was unfortunately nowhere to be found in empirical reality.

Dobroliubov's work is too immediately embroiled in its contradictions, or perhaps too honest about them, for him to be able to formulate a clear discursive statement of just what could have satisfied both the realism and the forward-looking activism of the radical critics. For such a statement, we need to turn to Chernyshevsky, the slightly older critic who came out of a period when the cultural and political conflicts between opposing factions were less stark. Chernyshevsky was also a more philosophical thinker than Dobroliubov. Both qualities made it possible for him to hypothesize a harmonic union of realism and progressivism that serves as an unattainable standard for the sort of hero that Dobroliubov, working on a more concrete level, was unable to achieve.

The passage in question can be found in Chernyshevsky's *Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury* (*Sketches of the Gogolian Period in Russian Literature*). In this series of articles published in *The Contemporary* in 1855 and 1856, Chernyshevsky provides a history of Russian literary criticism of the 1840s, focusing primarily on the critics' opinions about the prose writer Nikolai Gogol, whom progressively minded critics since Belinsky held up as the founder of their favored literature of "reality." The seventh article of the series is devoted to a discussion of Belinsky. Chernyshevsky opens by bringing in many of the familiar maxims of radical aesthetics: he describes how Belinsky rejects the sort of literature that is based on fantasy and dreams and praises literature that is based on life and reality (*zhizn'* and *deistvitel'nost'*). But these standard pronouncements take an interesting turn when Chernyshevsky admits that reality alone is not enough; most right-thinking people, Chernyshevsky states, would prefer to make some changes to reality: "явления действительности чрезвычайно разнородны и разнообразны. Она представляет много такого, что сообразно с желаниями и потребностями человека, и много такого, что решительно противоречит им" 'the manifestations of reality are exceedingly varied and diverse. It presents us with much that accords with the desires and requirements of the human being, and much that positively contradicts those desires' (3:228). With this comment Chernyshevsky runs straight into the opposition between the radicals' love for reality and their desire to transform it.

But Chernyshevsky immediately begins to bring these two poles together as he explains his vision of a social activism that is nourished by reality itself. We must not let our progressive visions get out of hand, Chernyshevsky cautions; our progressive work will be successful only if it is based in real life rather than fantasy: "Прежде, когда пренебрегали действительностью, слишком гордясь фантастическими богатствами, полагали, что переделать действительность по фантастическим мечтам очень легко. Но… сам по себе человек очень слаб; всю свою силу заимствует он только от знания действительной жизни" 'Formerly, when people scorned reality, excessively priding themselves on the riches of fantasy, they assumed that to remake reality according to fantastic dreams is a very easy matter. But… on his own the human being is very weak; he borrows all of his strength only from the knowledge of real life' (3:228). Chernyshevsky goes on to develop the notion that there exists a "natural" set of aspirations, aspirations that have been given the stamp of approval by reality:

> Действуя сообразно с законами природы и души и при помощи их, человек может постепенно видоизменять те явления действительности, которые несообразны с его стремлениями… не всякие желания находят себе пособие

> в действительности. Многие противоречат законам природы и человеческой натуры.
>
> Acting in accord with the laws of nature and of the soul, and with their help, the human being can gradually modify those manifestations of reality that do not conform to his aspirations… not all desires meet with the support of reality. Many contradict the laws of nature and of human nature. (3:228)

Having established that certain aspirations are more "natural" than others, Chernyshevsky makes the pursuit of these reality-based aspirations into the defining feature of what he calls the "positive" person: "Положителен только тот, кто хочет быть вполне человеком… отказываясь от мечтаний, несообразных с законами природы, не отказывается от полезной деятельности" 'Only he can be called positive who wants fully to be a human being… while rejecting dreams that do not conform to the laws of nature, he does not reject useful activity' (3:230). This "positive hero" was one of the major motifs of Russian criticism in the 1850s and 1860s; he was to be an alternative to the so-called "superfluous men," the ineffectual types who repeatedly turned up in major works of Russian literature. Chernyshevsky's 1856 version of the positive hero, as we see here, very neatly does away with the contradictions of radical theory. Chernyshevsky clearly posits the two opposed terms, both highly valued by the radical critics, of "life" and its possibility for transformation. But he immediately brings the two contrasting terms back together again as he envisions a mode of action in which reality itself generates our aspirations, and in which those aspirations are themselves "real" and "natural."

Chernyshevsky, as was his preference, soon begins in this article to apply his vision to real life rather than fiction—he argues that Belinsky himself was the epitome of the "positive" type. Dobroliubov, however, who read Chernyshevsky's *Sketches of the Gogolian Period* while a student at the Pedagogical Institute, eventually pursues the literary implications of Chernyshevsky's vision—the above passage could be viewed as the framework for Dobroliubov's aesthetics. In Dobroliubov's work, literature itself takes on the features of the positive type: it contributes to the transformation of society while keeping its images thoroughly grounded in real life. The same clever conceptual moves that Chernyshevsky uses to reconcile his opposing terms also show up throughout Dobroliubov's work, allowing him, at least on a theoretical level, to sidestep the contradictions in his aesthetics during the first few years of his journalistic career. But since Dobroliubov was more of a practical critic than Chernyshevsky was, he confronts the usual problem that theory tends to crumble in practice (recall how Wieland, in *Agathon*, was unable to make the narrative match his initially proclaimed theoretical intentions). The harmonic, positive vision formulated by Chernyshevsky just before Dobroliubov made his critical debut remains the implicit aim of the latter's aesthetics, but Dobroliubov constantly confronts this ideal as a lack, intensely desired but perpetually just over the horizon. As the only radical critic with a foundational and primary interest in literature, Dobroliubov grapples with the concrete realia offered by narrative texts and finds them unable to match Chernyshevsky's vision. Thus Dobroliubov brings radical aesthetic theory to fruition as he enacts the passions and contradictions of this critical faction in countless pieces of practical criticism.

2. Dobroliubov's Earnest Ideal
• *Rumors*, "Draft of a Socio-Political Program," "Provincial Sketches," "Literary Trifles"

Scattered throughout Dobroliubov's writings are the traces of theoretical positions that seem to pave the way for a reconciliation of the imitative and the transformative moments of his aesthetics. By looking at articles from the first few years of his career in particular, we can put together a picture of what he considered to be reality, and of what he meant when he asked a text to imitate that reality, as well as of what sort of ideal motivated his transformative aspirations, and of how he thought a text could contribute to the actual achievement of that ideal. These are the four concepts—the concept of the real, of the ideal, of mimesis, and of literary agency—that determine the specific nature of any individual permutation of "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism." The drama of Dobroliubov's work is that, on this conceptual level, he smooths over all underlying tensions, seemingly moving toward Chernyshevsky's vision of the pragmatic progressive. When he turns to concrete texts, however, particularly in the famous articles of the high point of his career, Dobroliubov runs into the fact that Chernyshevsky's positive person is nowhere to be found, whether in Russian life or in Russian literature. And so he becomes increasingly desperate in his attempts to track down the slightest trace of the hero of the future. In the end, driven perhaps by the urgency of his

Selected Writings by N. A. Dobroliubov

- *Слухи* (*Rumors*), 1855
- "Проэкт социально-политической программы" (Draft of a Socio-Political Program), c. 1856
- "Нечто о дидактизме в повестях и романах" (A Little Something on Didacticism in Stories and Novels), c. 1856
- "Губенрские очерки" (Provincial Sketches), 1857
- "О степени участия народности в развитии русской литературы" (On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element in the Development of Russian Literature), 1858
- "Органическое развитие человека в связи с его умственной и нравственной деятельностью" (The Organic Development of the Person with Regard to His Mental and Moral Activity), 1858
- "Русская цивилизация, сочиненная г. Жеребцовым" (Russian Civilization as Told by Mr. Zherebtsov), 1858
- "Литературные мелочи прошлого года" (Literary Trifles of the Past Year), 1859
- "Что такое обломовщина?" (What Is Oblomovism?), 1859
- "Весна" (Spring), 1859
- "Темное царство" (The Dark Kingdom), 1859
- “Когда же придет настоящий день?" (When Will the Real Day Come?), 1860
- "Благонамеренность и деятельность" (Good Intentions and Activity), 1860
- "Черты для характеристики русского простонародья" (Traits for the Characterization of the Russian Common Folk), 1860
- “Луч света в темном царстве" (A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness), 1860
- "Забитые люди" (Downtrodden People), 1861

approaching death, Dobroliubov goes to extreme lengths to find any sort of image that can satisfy his passionate and contradictory commitments to realism and progressivism.

But the drama and desperation of the later articles emerges against the backdrop of a conceptual framework that offers plenty of opportunities for a reconciliation of competing impulses. The harmonizing potential of this framework, however, emerges only once we consider its subtle details. At first glance, Dobroliubov's theoretical positions seem stark and rigid; certainly both he and Chernyshevsky were known more for their polarizing tone and unbending convictions than for their conceptual refinements. The first such conviction that jumps out at us from Dobroliubov's work relates to the progressive end of the spectrum. His earliest writings are dominated by the furious criticism and transformative aspirations of a youthful activist.

For example, Dobroliubov's handwritten newspaper *Slukhi* (*Rumors*), which circulated clandestinely in late 1855 among the students of the Pedagogical Institute, is composed of anecdotes that illustrate the grim state of affairs in Russia. The perennial problem of bribery is a target, as well as the anti-intellectualism of the entire ministry of education, the repressions of censorship, and the sexual predations of Tsar Nikolai I; the only positive point is a celebration of Decembrist-era secret societies. This adolescent newspaper with its earnest social engagement establishes Dobroliubov's interest in revolutionary agitation. But *Rumors* tells us little about his actual positive goals, since almost every issue has a purely negative, critical orientation. Moreover, the newspaper has a backward-looking, slightly outdated feel, as its barbs are directed at a regime that has already come to an end with the recent death of the tsar.

In an unpublished text dated to 1856, the "Proekt sotsial'no-politicheskoi programmy" ("Draft of a Socio-Political Program"), Dobroliubov makes an attempt to formulate a more specific, positive program. He calls on his readers to describe the "верную и живую картину идеальной республики, к которой вы стремитесь" 'true and lively picture of the ideal republic toward which you strive' (1:174). The document opens with an artfully composed rhetorical flourish, addressing itself to those, "кто сознал в себе хоть зачатки благородных стремлений" 'who have recognized in themselves even the slightest beginnings of noble strivings" (1:172). The eager forward striving is clear from the start—but in the end Dobroliubov's goals remain as vague as ever. About three quarters of the document consists of unanswered questions. Dobroliubov challenges his audience to decide just what "freedom" means, what sort of government it entails, how the serfs will make a living, what will become of the bureaucratic class, how family and sexual relations will be organized, etc., but he never moves beyond this interrogative mode. In the "Draft," Dobroliubov at least recognizes the need to begin to think about specific alternatives to the current social arrangement, but he offers no answers at all.

Similarly, Dobroliubov's personal writings show him with a fervent commitment to a vague object. In August 1856 he writes to one of his fellow students that even though his "путь… смелой правды" 'path… of bold truth' may lead him to ruin, still his devotion to the cause will give his life meaning: "и в самой последней крайности будет со мной мое всегдашнее, неотъемлемое утешение—что я трудился и жил не без пользы" 'even in the very last extremity I will still have my eternal, irrevocable consolation—that I labored and lived not without benefit" (9:254). The "truth" that Dobroliubov pledges himself to here is an inspiring but very ill-defined cause, and the reference to "benefit" is nothing more than a tautology for the fact that Dobroliubov wants to do *something* useful—just what that would be is not clear from this quotation. If this were a text intended for public consumption, we would have to consider the possibility that such vague expression was a device used to work around the constrictions of

censorship—such "Aesopian language" was a common practice during the 1860s. But Dobroliubov's early personal correspondence was probably not being intercepted, and in any case he was equally vague in the completely unpublished "Draft," so the lack of clarity is most likely genuine. In a diary entry from January 1857, Dobroliubov seems to have latched onto Utopian Socialism as his ideal: "Я—отчаянный социалист, хоть сейчас готовый вступить в небогатое общество, с равными правами и общим имуществом всех членов" 'I am a reckless socialist, ready at any moment to enter into a community of modest means, with equal rights and shared property among all members' (8:531). But the utopian communes of Charles Fourier or Robert Owen were not a viable option for the transformation of an entire society, as Dobroliubov himself recognized when he ended a biographical sketch of Owen by labeling the man an impractical romantic and a dreamer (4:47). In the above-mentioned diary entry, Dobroliubov goes on to admit that "для меня же идеал на земле еще не существует" 'for me the ideal does not yet exist on earth' (8:531). Clearly, Dobroliubov's intense progressive energy currently finds no adequate object in the realm of the concrete.

Dobroliubov's early published pieces continue to present his ideal along similar lines. The changes he desires clearly relate to the social, political and economic realm, as would be expected in the politically engaged context of the late 1850s, but instead of specifying concrete reforms he retreats to the realm of general humanist or Enlightenment values, celebrating the worth of the human individual and his or her capacity for independent thought. In these writings Dobroliubov also adds some new qualities to his vision of the ideal, without however pinning it down any further on the concrete level. Dobroliubov's perennial motif about the need for practical action instead of empty words makes its appearance, along with the surprising conviction that—wherever it is that society is going—it must keep to a very moderate, gradual pace.

These ideas emerge in Dobroliubov's 1857 article "Gubernskie ocherki" ("Provincial Sketches"), which takes its title from a prose collection by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. Here Dobroliubov seems to be asking readers to sober up after the heady excitement that followed the regime change of 1855. Dobroliubov admires the energy of the past few years, but notes that it has achieved little on the practical level. The "denunciatory literature" ("*oblichitel'naia literatura*") of which Saltykov-Shchedrin's text is a prime example has thrown itself into an attack on all aspects of Russian society—but all this reform-oriented chatter has produced almost no results. Words have not become action: "они… верили, что вслед за словом не замедлит явиться и дело" 'they… believed that after the word, the deed would not hesitate to appear' (2:122); "бóльшая часть людей… вдруг присмирела и спряталась, когда увидела, что подвиги нужно совершать не на одних словах, что тут нужны действительные труды и пожертвования" 'most people… suddenly became meek and went into hiding, once they saw that grand feats must be carried out not merely in words, that here real labors and sacrifices are necessary' (2:124). Here Dobroliubov debuts his oft-repeated opposition of words and action. This allows him to go through the motions of turning the ideal into something concrete, of turning high-flown aspirations into tangible results—but without naming those actions, and while himself remaining on the level of empty words and concepts.

As he elaborates on the call for actual deeds, it becomes clear that despite his seeming impatience, Dobroliubov is not asking for immediate revolutionary upheaval. Instead, practical action is explicitly linked to a deliberate and gradual approach, since the realm of practical events moves more slowly than the realm of noble aspirations and visionary thought. And so

Dobroliubov advises us not to expect unrealistic, heroic saviors, but to be content with society's gradual march forward:

> Не составляют ли исключения у нас люди, соединяющие с правдивостью и возвышенностью стремлений честную и неутомимую деятельность?... Оттого-то и бывает так медлен переход народов из состояния пассивного восприятия в состояние самобытной деятельности. Медленно, чуть заметно увеличивается из поколения в поколение число людей, самобытно мыслящих, и еще медленнее получается возможность приложить мысль к делу.
>
> Are they not exceptions among us, those people who combine truthful and elevated aspirations with honest and tireless activity?... For just this reason, nations are so slow to transition from the state of passive perception to the state of independent activity. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, from generation to generation the number of independently thinking people increases, and even more slowly arises the possibility of applying thought to action. (2:139)

In this passage we see Dobroliubov expressing his ideal more in generalized Enlightenment terms, celebrating the free-thinking individual, instead of in social or political terms. And because Dobroliubov is optimistic that society does eventually move forward, he patiently accepts the excruciatingly slow process, clearly decades or centuries long, whereby new ideas gradually filter through the mass of humanity and bit by bit express themselves in real action. Here a gradualist approach has nothing to do with "liberal" capitulation and compromise—instead moderation becomes positively valorized, since a focus on steady progress is the mark of the practical, active person. Since thoughts and dreams leap ahead infinitely, then the step by step approach must be a sign that one has moved from thought to action.

Dobroliubov reinforces these ideas in "Literaturnye melochi proshlogo goda" ("Literary Trifles of the Past Year"), published in 1859. Here he takes on a much harsher tone than in "Provincial Sketches" as he attacks the ineffectual elder generation, but his logic is similar: young people should be praised for their lack of high-flown principles and aspirations, since this is a sign of their effective, gradualist pragmatism. Dobroliubov compares them to chess players, who "подвигаются понемножку, заранее обдумав план атаки… их образ действий вернее, хотя вначале игра и не представляет ничего блестящего и поразительного…" 'creep forward bit by bit, formulating the plan of attack ahead of time… their mode of action is more reliable, even if at first the game presents nothing brilliant or striking' (4:74-75). And once again Dobroliubov suggests that he is concerned with sociopolitical reforms, but ends up expressing his goal in general humanist terms. In the course of his article, the purpose of which is to prove that the copious writings of the recent journalistic renaissance have had no effect on society, Dobroliubov runs over all the social "questions" that occupied his contemporaries: bureaucratic incompetence, the development of industry, the education of women, the emancipation of the serfs, etc. But when he sketches the positive vision that motivates the younger generation, a general Enlightenment interest in human well-being comes to the fore: the central cause of the young generation is the "человек и его прямое, существенное благо" 'person and his immediate, vital good' (4:74). Throughout this passage, Dobroliubov associates the slow approach that he advocates with a host of general positive qualities such as firmness, strength,

practicality, and connection to real life. As in the previous article, patient moderation, practical action, and a vague social-humanist program are linked together to characterize the ideal.

It is possible that Dobroliubov's vague expressions are primarily a result of the repressive context he worked in—he may have had a more distinct ideal than what he was able to get past the censors. But it is more likely that the censorship only encouraged and reinforced Dobroliubov's own disinclination to elaborate specifics. The contrived positive images that he celebrates in his later writings certainly suggest that he never attained a clear understanding of the positive structures that would replace all the negative phenomena of the present. And even if Dobroliubov's cherished notion of *delo* (deed, action) is code for revolution, the substitution does not mean much since the specific nature of the revolution is unspecified.

In sum, as he opens his career, Dobroliubov is fervently committed to progress. His desire to promote the well-being of all of humanity will support the forward-looking pole of his hybrid aesthetics. But his ideal is formulated in the most indistinct terms. The changes he envisions relate to the social and political realm, but before he can enumerate any specific structural outcomes he retreats into a general humanism. The one thing Dobroliubov seems sure of is that the forward advance must be gradual in order to be effective. In his later work, Dobroliubov's concept of the ideal never moves beyond this vague and tautological stage: the good of humanity is that which is beneficial and useful; the positive hero is the person who will do the things that need to be done. Dobroliubov reiterates the bare concept of the good without explaining it. The significance of all this for the project of uniting the real and the ideal is mixed. On the one hand, Dobroliubov's emphasis on moderation and gradualism brings the ideal down to a sober, attainable level—he is explicitly not calling for the impossible. But on the other hand, the lack of clarity and specificity makes it much harder to turn aspirations into real action. The whole point of "progressive realism" is to give our ideals a concrete, worldly realization, but Dobroliubov remains mostly on the level of Platonic Ideas. Later, Dobroliubov's understanding of the ideal will reveal new aspects: although the vagueness remains, Dobroliubov borrows some of Chernyshevsky's devices for making the ideal more theoretically compatible with the real, and meanwhile his views on gradualism change. But before touching on those developments, it is necessary to look at the other essential pole of Dobroliubov's aesthetics—his support for mimetic realism.

3. Dobroliubov's Concept of Mimesis: Literature Follows Life

• "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element"

Dobroliubov's early work promulgates a simple and stark theory of literary mimesis, certainly inspired in its early stages by Chernyshevsky's anti-aesthetics. Although the theory becomes more subtle in his later work, the core notion remains the same throughout Dobroliubov's career: literature is dependent on reality for everything it portrays, and can only represent that which already exists in life. Dobroliubov asserts this view in "Provincial Sketches": "человек не в состоянии сам от себя ни одной песчинки выдумать, которой бы не существовало на свете; хорошее или дурное—все равно берется из природы и действительной жизни" 'the human being is not capable on his own of thinking up even a single grain of sand, if it does not exist in the world; whether good or bad, all is equally derived from nature and from real life' (2:142). Dobroliubov makes this point even more prominently near the start of his 1858 article "O stepeni uchastiia narodnosti v razvitii russkoi literatury" ("On

the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element in the Development of Russian Literature"). This article is one of the more substantial and notorious writings of Dobroliubov's early career; it alarmed bureaucrats concerned about the rise of objectionable, radical views in recent journalism. The main message of the article is that Russian literature should focus more on issues relevant to the common people. Most of the article is spent in a historical overview lamenting the paucity of folk participation in literature ever since the Petrine era. But Dobroliubov opens the article with some general theoretical comments, and here his rejection of literary creativity is particularly nihilist. He tosses aside Homer, Vergil and Milton on the grounds that their creations consist of immature fantasy. He then continues:

> Мы хотим сказать, что поэзия и вообще искусства, науки слагаются по жизни, а не жизнь зависит от поэзии и что все, что в поэзии является лишним против жизни, т. е. не вытекающим из нее прямо и естественно, все это уродливо и бессмысленно… Не жизнь идет по литературным теориям, а литература изменяется сообразно с направлением жизни…
>
> We mean to say that poetry, and the arts and sciences in general, form themselves according to life, and conversely life does not depend on poetry, and that everything in poetry that is extraneous to life, that is, which does not directly and naturally follow from life, that all this is deformed and senseless… It is not life that goes in accordance with literary theories, but literature changes in conformity with the orientation of life… (2:222; 2:223)

Note that Dobroliubov partially slips into a normative mode here: the earlier article suggested that literature can never be anything but a reflection of the world, while these lines suggest that writers actually *can* invent new things, but should not do so. But the underlying point is the same: for Dobroliubov literature can only follow upon what already exists. Such a stance raises the question of how a literature that is so tightly confined to the present reality can ever contribute to the progressive transformations Dobroliubov desired. Half of the answer to this problem will come later when I describe Dobroliubov's understanding of literary agency, but the first half can be found when we unpack the terms of Dobroliubov's mimetic theory.

Dobroliubov presents his ideas as if their meaning is obvious and matter of fact, but of course his assertions gloss over the gaping questions not just of how reality is selected and arranged into a text, but of what reality is itself. The latter question is the first foundation of any mimetic theory, and when we look for answers in Dobroliubov's writings, his mimetic theory begins to take on subtle facets that belie his simple and direct proclamations.

4. Reality as Aspiration

• "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element," "Literary Trifles"

So what is reality for Dobroliubov? First of all, a few surface features are readily apparent. For Dobroliubov, the reality that literature should portray relates to the social realm, to the lives of humans with their material concerns and mutual interactions, especially among the broader masses rather than the small elite. Dobroliubov did acknowledge that the inanimate objects of nature are also part of reality, but (and here he slips into his prescriptive mode again)

for him inanimate nature is just not a compelling or admirable object for literary representation. This view is apparent in "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element" in the way that Dobroliubov consistently conflates literature's advance toward "reality" with literature's move toward the life of the common people. And in "Provincial Sketches" Dobroliubov is even more explicit about the proper sphere for literature: "чем же искусство более возвышается—описанием ли журчанья ручейков и изложением отношений дола к пригорку или представлением течения жизни человеческой и столкновения различных начал, различных интересов общественных?" 'by what means does literature elevate itself more—by the description of the burbling of brooks and by the exposition of the relations between the valley and the foothill, or by the representation of the flow of human life and the clash of various principles and various social interests?' (2:142). The latter option is obviously the correct answer; the references to charming natural scenes are meant to recall the poetry of Afanasii Fet, the leading contemporary writer of the "art for art's sake" school that Dobroliubov detested. For any respectable writer, then, the reality that he or she depicts is the dynamic interaction of humans in society.

Since Russian society in the 1850s was by general agreement rife with dire problems, representations of this society would likewise have to be full of such negative elements as exploitation, ignorance and crushed aspirations. The poor condition of society, coupled with Dobroliubov's requirement that literature depict only what already exists, would make it difficult for literature to incite any progressive movement, were it not for the way Dobroliubov implicitly modifies his concept of the real. The chief idiosyncrasy of his approach is the way that subjective desires and aspirations are included as part of the real, and in fact come to overshadow the actually existing, material aspects of the real. As with many aspects of Dobroliubov's thought, Chernyshevsky had prepared the ground for this approach: as mentioned above, he commented in his *Sketches of the Gogolian Period* that the drawbacks of reality naturally induce a desire to modify it. Dobroliubov develops this point in his literary aesthetics, suggesting that, since humans by their very nature always strive to improve their situation, an accurate depiction of reality will focus not on the static and dreary present but on humanity's struggle to advance. Such an understanding of reality emerges in "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element" immediately after the passage in which Dobroliubov had so adamantly insisted that literature only follow life. The particular part of life that literature responds to, it turns out, is our yearning for improvement: "как скоро общество или народ очнется и почувствует, хотя смутно, свои естественные нужды, станет искать средств для удовлетворения своим потребностям—и литература тотчас является служительницею его интересов" 'as soon as a society or a nation wakes up and senses, even vaguely, its natural needs, and begins to look for the means to satisfy its requirements—then literature too immediately acts as the servant of its interests' (2:224). "Needs," "requirements," and "interests" are the primary focus of literature here; literature is not so much reinforcing reality as validating our struggle against it. Thus the seat of mimesis is significantly shifted—rather than dwelling squarely in the center of the status quo, literature now exists in the front ranks of the move toward the future, in the midst of the struggle for change. Literature now depicts the reforming energies that push back against reality.

Dobroliubov pushes this idea so far that, at the end of "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element," he nearly bars realist literature from ever depicting the actually established state of affairs:

> Предупредить жизни литература не может, но предупредить формальное, официальное проявление интересов, выработавшихся в жизни, она должна. Пока еще известная идея находится в умах, пока еще она только должна осуществиться в будущем, тут-то литература и должна схватить ее, тут-то и должно начаться литературное обсуждение предмета с разных сторон и в видах различных интересов. Но уж когда идея перешла в дело, сформировалась и решилась окончательно—тогда литературе нечего делать; разве только один раз (не больше) похвалить то, что сделано…
>
> Literature cannot come before life, but it should come before the formal, official manifestation of interests that have been worked out in life. While a given idea is still located in our heads, while it is still only to be realized in the future, at that point literature should seize upon it, at that point the literary discussion of the matter, from various sides and from the point of view of various interests, should commence. But when an idea has gone over into a deed, formed and decided itself conclusively—then there is nothing for literature to do; except perhaps just once (and not more) to praise that which has been completed… (2:271)

Dobroliubov opens this quotation with the assurance that he has not abandoned his mimetic doctrine. The interests that literature depicts, he writes, have already been proposed by life. But he then goes on to stipulate that literature should not portray anything that has made the transition from proposal to established practice. Thus he delineates a peculiar site for realist literature, keeping it just behind the avant-garde of life. The objects of literary representation must be drawn from this precisely balanced space between the first appearance and the firmly rooted existence of some new phenomenon.

This focus on hopes and desires rather than concrete reality is not confined to "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element." The motif appears regularly whenever Dobroliubov gives a more extensive explanation of what he means by literature's reflection of life. The following passage from "Literary Trifles " underlines Dobroliubov's focus on human striving: "Литература постоянно отражает те идеи, которые бродят в обществе, и больший или меньший успех писателя может служить меркою того, насколько он умел в себе выразить общественные интересы и стремления" 'Literature constantly reflects the ideas that roam about in society, and the greater or lesser success of a writer can serve as a measure of the degree to which he was able to express social interests and aspirations' (4:55). This quotation, once again, reveals how Dobroliubov's call for imitation of reality refers primarily to the mental, aspirational aspects of human life. Under this new understanding of reality, mimetic literature no longer appears as a plodding reflection of our current life, and art is much more than the second-rate surrogate Chernyshevsky claimed it was in his dissertation. By moving the object of "realistic" imitation from nature to human life, Dobroliubov has introduced the dynamism of the human psyche into literature. The reality that literature reflects has more to do with the vital struggles, needs and desires of an active human agent than with the established features of experience. These changes have clear relevance for the project of "visionary mimesis." Literature can easily be mimetic and visionary at the same time when the preferred object of imitation is the latest trend introduced by the avant-garde of human strivers. Such a literature positions itself precisely at the realm of the "possible," the point where the present has taken its first step toward the future.

5. A Subjective Materialism
• Feuerbach, "The Organic Development of the Person"

Dobroliubov's more classically philosophical statements on the nature of reality back up the notion that "reality" for him encompassed both the subjective and the objective. For although the radical critics seem to be quintessential "materialists" with their rejection of religion, their interest in science, and their focus on the material basis of human prosperity, they did not argue for the strict separation of mind and body that characterizes a vulgar materialist viewpoint. Instead, they advocated a monistic ontology, in which the mind and the body are inseparably united in the human being. Chernyshevsky had advocated this view in his voluble philosophical treatise *Antropologicheskii printsip v filosofii* (*The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy*); Chernyshevsky in turn was heavily influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach. Dobroliubov for his part read Feuerbach at the pedagogical institute, then had his interest in the philosopher reinforced in his interaction with Chernyshevsky. The Russian radicals' interest in Feuerbach is significant because, although Feuerbach's anthropologization of religion gave the impression of a shocking, radical materialism, in actuality his philosophy was closer to a religious spiritualization of the human realm. Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums* focuses mostly on the abstract, mental and subjective aspects of the human such as self-consciousness and the "infinite" powers of thought, will and love (18-19).

Dobroliubov, like Feuerbach, espoused a materialism that had a strong subjective component; the deep religious devotion of his childhood years had transformed into an atheist humanism that retained a large focus on the non-tangible realm. Even though it was Dobroliubov's focus on the material and his implied rejection of religion that stood out to contemporary readers and censors, nevertheless his writings pay attention to both the mental and the physical aspects of the human. He notably latched on to the more spiritually oriented Feuerbach instead of the more dualistic, physical materialism of Carl Vogt or Ludwig Büchner.

All these tendencies are on display in Dobroliubov's 1858 article "Organicheskoe razvitie cheloveka v sviazi s ego umstvennoi i nravstvennoi deiatel'nost'iu" ("The Organic Development of the Person with Regard to His Mental and Moral Activity"). This is one of several articles that Dobroliubov wrote regarding the education of children, a perennial interest of his. Dobroliubov argues here—and it still sounds like good advice today—that physical and mental health are intimately connected, and that therefore the best way to further a child's moral and intellectual capacity is to promote the child's physical health. This almost sounds like a flatly materialistic approach in which all aspects of life are rooted in the physical realm. But Dobroliubov expressly refutes the dualistic separation of mind and body that underlies raw materialism. He mocks those extreme materialists who try to claim that the soul has a tangible existence as "каким-то кусочком тончайшей, эфирной материи" 'some small piece of extremely fine, ethereal matter' (2:434). Instead, Dobroliubov asserts, the soul and the body exist in an indissoluble union—the body is the necessary seat of the soul, while the soul permeates and enlivens our corporality. Each aspect of our humanity, in Dobroliubov's view, shapes the other: a healthy brain produces healthy thought, while vigorous thought can stimulate and develop the brain. And so this article, with its insistence that we use physical well-being to stimulate mental well-being, certainly has a strong materialistic streak, but this is a materialism that exists mainly for the sake of the mental realm. The physical seems almost to be subordinated to the essential moral, intellectual and

emotional capacities that it generates in the human being. This pattern applies more broadly to Dobroliubov's overall view of reality: for him the material aspect is the crucial foundation, but the mental aspect that grows out of it is what really makes us human.

The type of materialism that Dobroliubov espouses is not original, but it is relevant for the way it corresponds to his literary aesthetics. As already described above, Dobroliubov's "realistic" literature uses the physical realm only as a starting point, and ends up depicting the more important processes that occur in the hearts and minds of the characters. With this approach, the subjective realm comes to be seen as a legitimate piece of reality, and mimetic literature can project the future merely by portraying the visions of transformation that occur in the inner life of characters.

6. Reality as Historical Progression
• Hegel, "Literary Trifles"

One more aspect of Dobroliubov's understanding of reality was crucial for his ability, in theory at least, to unite mimesis with his progressive vision: namely, his faith in historical progress. Because of the immense influence of Hegel in Russia, a developmental view of history was part of the cultural background of the mid-nineteenth century. Hegel had been obsessively celebrated and debated in the passionate circles around Stankevich, Herzen and Belinsky. Although these figures differed over specific questions, such as the problem of whether to respond passively or actively to the rational advance of history, the idea that history was moving forward was assumed. Furthermore, Russia's historical circumstances contributed to the sense that some sort of gradual advance was underway. The country had steadily been increasing its profile on the international stage over the last century, Russian literature had only really begun to prosper in the last few decades, and Russian industry was working to catch up with Western innovations. In the 1850s, Russians felt that they were only starting to realize their national potential. As the era of reforms approached, the notion of a steady march forward appeared plausible.

Dobroliubov himself was admittedly no Hegelian. While Chernyshevsky had still felt it necessary to engage with Hegelian aesthetics, the younger Dobroliubov never bothered with this stage—the preoccupation with Hegel belonged to the older gentry liberals, with whom he had nothing in common. Nevertheless, a belief in historical development, and a fairly optimistic belief at that, pervades his writing. In the "Folk Element" article, he repeats the motto, attributed to Lermontov, "Россия вся в будущем" 'Russia is all in the future' (2:218). More fundamentally, the assumption of historical progress underlies many of his core ideas, as was already seen in several of the passages mentioned earlier. For example, when Dobroliubov advocates a slow, patient approach to social change in "Provincial Sketches" or "Literary Trifles," his argument depends on the conviction that history is advancing, even if only gradually. And Dobroliubov's notion that literature depicts the most recent human aspirations that have not yet been broadly accepted assumes a process whereby new ideas are constantly filtering into and establishing themselves in society.

Dobroliubov frequently conceives of historical advance in terms of this steady progression of ideas. In addition to some of the passages quoted earlier, the concept makes an appearance in the following passage from "Literary Trifles." Here Dobroliubov has been attacking the clueless, ineffectual and outdated older generation, and he describes the process

whereby these once-admirable figures have fallen behind the times. Previously, their ideas were fresh and noteworthy, but:

> …пока продолжался процесс водворения новых начал в целой массе людей, жизнь шла своим чередом и возбуждала опять другие вопросы, давала опять новый материал для разработки… и молодое поколение принималось работать над новыми данными, еще робко, ощупью, но уже с предчувствием нового света, который прольется на их начинания при появлении нового гениального ума…
>
> …while these new principles continued the process of becoming established among the whole mass of the people, life went on in its due course and once again stirred up other questions, once again offered new material to be worked out… and the new generation set to work on these new data, for the time being timidly, gropingly, but already with the presentiment of a new light which will pour over their initiatives upon the appearance of a new thinker of genius… (4:57)

The constant and inexorable nature of historical progress is apparent in this quotation: by the time the ideas of the elder generation have finally become established, life has thrown out new developments and new realities, which spur the younger generation to another round of intellectual innovation. Dobroliubov's vision of progress is so clear, linear and mechanical that the reader envisions a sort of never-ending conveyer belt of new realities and new ideas, dropping one after another into the masses and spreading until each is washed away by the next innovation.

Dobroliubov's faith in linear intellectual progress has enormous significance for an aesthetics based on the intersection of imitation and transformation. The contrast with the eighteenth century culture discussed in previous chapters is strong. Intellectual figures of the earlier part of the eighteenth century, whether they studied morality, human sentiments, astronomy or natural history, were inclined to seek the lasting truths that explained the world; for them the world was a complex but essentially static system. And if the world is stuck in one place, always following the same eternal laws, it becomes very difficult to plausibly claim that an overall improvement is possible. Hence neither Wieland nor Gottsched were able to adequately describe a hero who could be morally inspiring yet realistic. On the other hand, if the world is changing, it becomes simple to find seeds of future improvement in the present: by the very logic of historical progression, some small group of advanced people must be in possession of the groundbreaking new ideas that eventually are going to transform society. By depicting this avant-garde, literature can promulgate ideas that are progressive with respect to the overall mass of people, while still adhering to the requirement that texts reflect existing reality. This is essentially what Dobroliubov asks literature to do when he suggests that it imitate needs and desires rather than established practices. In short, if history is progressive, mimetic literature can find a viable position on the cusp of the future. While the eighteenth century was trying to find the link between the realistic, faulty person and the morally elevated, extraordinary person, the nineteenth century was only trying to find the link between the person of today and the person of tomorrow—certainly a much easier task.

The various facets of Dobroliubov's concept of the real work together to pull the object of literary imitation away from established, everyday reality and to place it at the site where the

future has made its first appearance in the present. The overall process of literary imitation elaborated by Dobroliubov's theory is thus much more flexible than it appeared at first. Dobroliubov's concept of mimesis *per se* remains literal and rigid—literature is not allowed to present anything that does not occur in reality. And his view of the surrounding world also retains stubbornly negative elements—Dobroliubov is as concerned as ever about the numerous injustices of the surrounding social and economic system. But neither of these views matters once the more nuanced concept of the real is introduced into the equation. When the "real existence" that literature imitates can be drawn from the subjective realm of needs, aspirations and ideas, and when these aspirations are constantly in flux as they respond to a changing historical situation, then the imitation of "reality" becomes much more amenable to the progressive function of literature, and certainly much more interesting. Dobroliubov's reality is lively, striving, and full of dynamism and struggle, and as a result realist literature is not the plodding reproduction suggested by Chernyshevsky's aesthetics, but instead an intervention in a constantly churning process of change.

7. The Ideal as a Social Vision

These adjustments in the concept of the real seem by themselves to be enough to allow the harmonious accommodation of the real and the ideal in literature. But the aesthetic theory of the radical critics also made substantial adjustments to the other half of the dichotomy, namely to their concept of the ideal. Even as they positioned their concept of the real a step ahead of the actual facts of current existence, they perhaps to an even greater extent brought their concept of the ideal down to earth. The discussion of Dobroliubov's concept of the ideal earlier in this chapter focused mostly on surface aspects that seemed to make his vision fairly lofty and unbending: Dobroliubov had a fervent, unbending commitment to progress, and moreover his visions of progress were so vague as to be difficult to translate into real practice. His openness to a very gradual pace of change was the only factor that gave his concept of the ideal some flexibility. But a closer look reveals that this adamant stance is as much of an illusion as Dobroliubov's supposedly rigid concept of the real.

The first factor that brings Dobroliubov's concept of the ideal closer to actual lived experience is an obvious feature that has already been alluded to. His vision of progress, vague though it may be, is social rather than moral; it involves changes to political, economic and class structures rather than to human character. The significance of this social orientation comes out when we draw a comparison to the eighteenth century. The ideal that frequently occupied Enlightenment culture was one of sexual morality: the human being was expected to find a way to master his or her erotic passions. This sexual conflict, for example, was the foundation of the hero's endless struggles in Wieland's *Agathon*, and is a familiar motif throughout early and mid-eighteenth-century culture, whether in the novels of Richardson or the bourgeois tragedies of Lessing. Since humans are necessarily sexual creatures, this chaste ideal is quite difficult for the average mortal to live up to. The result is that, as Wieland himself complained, admirable and moral heroes often end up being alienated from regular human experience.

The situation was quite different in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. In the late 1850s, literary culture was so consumed with the questions of political and economic reform occasioned by the death of Nicholas I that sex was no longer such a fundamental concern. Literature was still being used to explore an ideal world, but the ideal related to civil society, not individual sexual

morality. When sex does appear in mid-nineteenth-century Russian literature, it not uncommonly comes in the form of a fallen woman or prostitute who is oddly celebrated. This shift of concerns from moral and sexual to social and civic purification makes the nineteenth-century ideal much more attainable, since the aim is not to change the basic character of human beings, but merely to change the organization of the environment they inhabit. One could argue that social utopia goes as much against human nature as the chaste ideal of the previous century, but, since economic and political arrangements are constantly being modified through history, it does not strain credibility to suggest that a slightly better arrangement is on its way. Social transformation is no simple matter, but it is probably more plausible than the moral transformation of the eighteenth century, and as a result the ideal that the nineteenth-century critics hoped to promote was not quite as stubbornly opposed to the reality that the text was supposed to imitate.

8. The Ideal as the "Natural" and the "Normal"
• Rousseau, "Dark Kingdom," "Zherebtsov," "Good Intentions and Activity"

Two other, more subtle, devices that Dobroliubov uses to bring the ideal within the grasp of mimetic literature can be illustrated with a look at his 1859 article "Temnoe tsarstvo" ("The Dark Kingdom"). In this article Dobroliubov presents his famous interpretation of the work of the dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky, whose plays depict the often unappealing, tradition-bound domestic life of the Russian merchant class. As in many of his literary reviews, Dobroliubov disregards Ostrovsky's actual viewpoints—which were close to the Slavophile camp—and uses the plays to draw a socioeconomic conclusion in line with the revolutionary convictions of the radical camp. In a long, two-part treatise that skillfully cites details of plot and character from over a half-dozen plays, Dobroliubov exposes the ways that the atmosphere of merchant life as depicted by Ostrovsky ruins the human soul. The primary vice that Dobroliubov indicts is *samodurstvo*, the capricious and petty tyranny of those who hold positions of power in the home and in business. These petty tyrants crush the independent personalities (*lichnost'*) of their subordinates while themselves remaining mired in appalling ignorance. But of course Dobroliubov was not expending all this interpretive effort in order to expose the benighted existence of just one small segment of society. At the close of the article, in one of the classical "Aesopian" moves necessitated by censorship, Dobroliubov insistently urges us to read his biting critique allegorically and instructs the reader to draw certain conclusions that he is unable to express fully (5:139). The interpretation he prods us toward is that the "dark kingdom" is actually all of Russia, whose citizens suffer in an environment that stifles freedom and celebrates ignorance and subservience.

While attacking the mostly negative images he finds in Ostrovsky's plays, Dobroliubov implicitly sketches a counter-image of the person as he or she should be: self-confident, honest, capable of independent thought, and respectful of the rights of others. The intriguing feature of the way Dobroliubov presents these positive qualities is that he constantly refers to them as "natural" (*estestvennyi*) and "normal" (*normal'nyi*). Conversely, those who have been ruined by the dark kingdom are of course labeled as unnatural and abnormal. Dobroliubov's readings of Ostrovsky are peppered with such references. In merchant life, he writes, "естественный ход мышления изменяется" 'the natural course of thought is altered' (5:38); or: "всякое преступление есть не следствие натуры человека, а следствие ненормального отношения, в какое он поставлен к обществу" 'every crime is a consequence not of the nature of the

person, but of the abnormal relationship he is placed in with respect to the society' (5:47); or: "горько видеть такое искажение человеческой природы. Кажется, ничего не может быть хуже того дикого, неестественного развития…" 'it is bitterly distressing to see such a distortion of human nature. It seems that nothing could be worse than this savage, unnatural development…' (5:68). In these quotations, the concept of nature is invoked using three different Russian words: *priroda*, *natura* and *estestvennyi*. Together with the word *normal'nyi*, these frequently recurring synonyms drum in the point that the existence found in this merchant world is a travesty of the true essence of the human being. The natural, properly developed person neither perpetrates nor falls victim to petty tyranny.

This reference to a "natural" person unfettered by the distortions of society bears the strong mark of Rousseau, who was a significant influence on the radical critics. Rousseau's influence on Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov deserves more attention than it has gotten—Soviet scholars tended not to highlight the Western European aspects of radical criticism's intellectual genealogy. Dobroliubov read Rousseau's *Social Contract* already during his childhood in Nizhny Novgorod (Reiser 63), and was familiar enough with Rousseau that he would casually drop his name at various points in his articles (e.g. 2:282, 2:368, 7:245). "Dark Kingdom," besides drawing on the Rousseauian idea of the natural human being, also contains theoretical musings obviously based on Rousseau's social contract theory and on his ideas about the education of children (5:102-107). But even though Dobroliubov was clearly drawn to Rousseau, his notion of a certain "natural" set of positive qualities is only partially based on the French philosopher. Dobroliubov also draws on the ideas of "rational egoism" formulated by Chernyshevsky and influenced by Feuerbach. In his only substantial commentary on Rousseau, which comes in an article on Robert Owen, Dobroliubov distances himself from what he interprets as Rousseau's excessively optimistic idea that humans are naturally good and suggests instead that humans are blank slates shaped by circumstance (4:12). Dobroliubov, then, does not believe in an innate natural virtue. But by the time he writes "Dark Kingdom," he has come to accept the rational egoist idea of an ethics that arises automatically out of a rational response to the circumstances of life. Merely by pursuing their own self-interest, humans, according to rational egoism, will come to act in a way that is also beneficial for society as a whole. Dobroliubov, then, draws both on Rousseau's notion of natural, undistorted development and on Chernyshevsky's idea of the self-interested basis of morality in order to generate the assumptions about natural and unnatural behavior that appear repeatedly in "Dark Kingdom." Out of this combination comes the idea that the noble, independent, free-thinking human being is also natural, normal and ethically unremarkable.

But what matters is not so much the origin of these ideas as their obvious implications for Dobroliubov's aesthetics. By constantly reminding us that his ideal is normal and natural, Dobroliubov seeks to make room for his forward-looking visions in the realm of the real, and therefore also in realistic literature. According to Dobroliubov's Rousseau-inflected rational egoism, an independent, free-thinking personality is certainly no extraordinary phenomenon; in fact such a positive individual is just a usual product of nature. If we do not actually see many of these positive people around us, the problem is not that our vision is too unrealistic but instead that the whole social structure is wrong. Dobroliubov's ideal thus becomes almost more real than reality, and in the process he points the way toward a theoretical justification of exemplary heroes in the literature of the everyday. The actually existing world takes on a tinge of falsehood, while the progressive vision becomes natural, and therefore presumably real, and therefore appropriate for realistic literature.

But Dobroliubov never explicitly pushes his arguments this far, since he cannot ignore the fact that his vision of a supposed "normality" hardly exists in the concrete, empirical world, and that, for the nineteenth century, the "natural" is not equivalent to the "real." In the eighteenth century, "nature" was still roughly used to designate the actual, empirical world (even if that world was conceived of in a stylized way), but by the nineteenth century the word "nature" has acquired a more overt normative inflection. As we saw in the passages cited above, the existing world of human society has been labeled as "unnatural," and as a result "nature" ends up referring to a sort of lost ideal. "Nature" thus becomes a hybrid term, still halfway pointing to that which really does exist, but also strongly referring to that which *should* exist, if we could just get back to the real, undistorted version of reality. As a result, Dobroliubov is not able to fully follow through on the string of equivalencies that would assert that the ideal vision is natural and therefore real and therefore acceptable in realistic literature. But by employing the terminology of the "natural" and the "normal" he is at least able to blur the contrasts between the real and the ideal. Even if his positive vision is not fully real, neither is it pure fantasy, since it derives from basic postulates about "normal" human development. With his insistence on the natural, Dobroliubov ostentatiously demonstrates that he is no dreamy visionary; the transformations he desires are extrapolated from a practical understanding of humanity. Eventually Dobroliubov bumps up against the intransigent gap between what the radicals claim is natural and what actually exists, but nevertheless this discourse of the "natural" does much to help his progressive literary vision fit into his stringent standards for literary mimesis.

The normalization of the ideal was necessary for the radical critics if they wished to avoid cognitive dissonance. They after all were supposed to be the anti-Romantics, who scoffed at the high-flown principles of their elders; they were supposed to be practical and pragmatic men who would never chase after an ephemeral chimera. Yet since they were, of course, fervently committed to an idealistic vision, they needed to ensconce their ideal in a discourse of almost biological necessity in order to maintain their image as realists. Following in the mold of the "positive man" sketched in Chernyshevsky's articles on the Gogolian period, the radicals promote a vision that is birthed by reality, not by fantasy. Chernyshevsky applies this normalization of the ideal to ethics, and thus comes up with his doctrine of "rational egoism," where morality is based on pragmatic calculation rather than lofty principle. Dobroliubov, as usual, applies the normalization of the ideal in a more literary way as he searches for a positive hero in realist fiction. In both cases, the insistence on the normality of their transformative vision is a consistent, necessary component of radical discourse.

Dobroliubov's tendency to label as natural that which he found desirable is not confined to the various offhand comments in "Dark Kingdom." The move was a recurring part of Dobroliubov's intellectual repertoire. A particularly well-developed example of the "natural development" argument can be found in "Russkaia tsivilizatsiia, sochinennaia g. Zherebtsovym" ("Russian Civilization as Told by Mr. Zherebtsov"), Dobroliubov's 1858 review of a history of Russia written by the Slavophile-affiliated scholar N. Zherebtsov. The purpose of Dobroliubov's article is to attack Zherebtsov's idealization of pre-Petrine Russian culture, but the part of the article that stands out is a tangential discourse on patriotism that covers several pages. Dobroliubov aims here to prove that Zherebtsov is no true patriot, and so he introduces his own alternate theory of patriotism, based of course on his notion of the "natural" development of a child. The same sort of vocabulary seen in "Dark Kingdom" shows up here. Dobroliubov describes how the normal child acquires a natural, ego-based attachment to his or her immediate surroundings; subsequently, however, the "человек, нормальным образом развивающийся"

'person developing in the normal manner' (3:263) will eventually advance from this parochial viewpoint to a generalized love for humanity, which is applied within one's homeland merely for the sake of convenience and proximity. This cosmopolitan patriotism, Dobroliubov claims, is "вполне естествен и законен" 'completely natural and lawful' (3:260). Here Dobroliubov takes his unconventional, implausible and elevated understanding of patriotism and makes it natural; his normative understanding becomes normal.

Dobroliubov performs the same operation with respect to human character in the 1860 article "Blagonamerennost' i deiatel'nost'" ("Good Intentions and Action"). Here he asserts that the high-minded superfluous man types are not justified in priding themselves on their noble strivings, since their principles are merely the result of natural development (as usual, Dobroliubov's point is that striving is worthless unless it translates into action). Taking a strong hint from rational egoism, Dobroliubov claims that good moral character is natural: "мы не требуем непременно *идеальности*… прекрасными стремлениями мы признаем все естественные, неиспорченные стремления человеческой природы; все прекрасные стремления мы признаем следствием естественных, нормальных потребностей человека" 'we do not demand absolute *idealism*… we recognize as noble aspirations all natural, unspoiled aspirations of human nature; we recognize all noble aspirations as the result of natural, normal human requirements' (6:195, 196). Dobroliubov goes on to make the usual rational egoist argument about how a normally developing person will neither allow himself to be constrained nor will he infringe on the rights of others. Again Dobroliubov uses multiple synonyms for the natural and the normal in order to give his idealistic vision a foundation in reality and developmental biology. The examples just cited reinforce how fundamental this device was to Dobroliubov's outlook. According to this discourse, the ideals he admires are emphatically normal, he can remain a realist while he champions them, and potentially literature can remain realistic when it portrays these ideals.

9. Dobroliubov's Concept of Literary Agency: Text Generates Thought
• "A Little Something on Didacticism," "Dark Kingdom," Druzhinin

So far I have described Dobroliubov's rigid concept of mimesis, his more diffuse concept of the "reality" that mimesis imitates, and his passionately progressive yet "naturalized" concept of the ideal. The missing piece is his concept of literary agency, i.e. his understanding of the strategies literature uses to promote the desired ideal. The viability of the project of "visionary mimesis" depends on finding a version of literary agency that can function without completely undermining the mimetic commitment of the text. Dobroliubov certainly succeeds at this task, at least in his theoretical statements. In fact, his concept of literary agency is so amenable to a strictly mimetic literature that all the devices described above—the incorporation of subjective aspirations into the real, the faith in historical development, the normalization of the ideal—appear to be superfluous. For it turns out that Dobroliubov is not asking literature to provide an actual image of the ideal at all. The realism he champions is "critical" realism, in which the honest portrayal of the negative aspects of life will on its own arouse progressive-minded reflections and encourage social activism. This model of literary agency eliminates the conflict between the realistic and the progressive aspects of the text, since the ideal is no longer internal to the textual representation, but instead is displaced to the subjectivity of the reader. A faithful and comprehensive mimesis now contributes to rather than conflicting with the achievement of

the ideal, since vivid and accurate representations are expected to inspire the most concrete, well-informed and effective projects for change.

Dobroliubov puts his concept of literary agency into practice extensively in "Dark Kingdom," but the clearest explicit statements of his approach come in several prior articles. Already in some of his earliest critical reflections, Dobroliubov was a firm opponent of overt didacticism. The collected edition of his works contains an unpublished manuscript dated to late 1856 or early 1857 in which Dobroliubov resolutely opposes literary didacticism and proposes a more artistically palatable alternative. In this manuscript, titled "Nechto o didaktizme v povestiakh i romanakh" ("A Little Something on Didacticism in Stories and Novels"), Dobroliubov exclaims in indignation at the moral epilogues that are appearing ever more frequently in the literary fiction published by contemporary journals. As Dobroliubov notes, these statements turn a rich text into a flat piece of philosophy, producing "трактат вместо рассказа, психологию вместо самой души, правила морали вместо жизни" 'a treatise instead of a story, psychology instead of the soul itself, moral precepts instead of life' (1:162). Furthermore, Dobroliubov claims, these empty phrases, these "чисто внешние влияния" 'purely external influences' (1:163), do not have the power to actually improve anything in society, since direct preaching seldom induces people to change their behavior. The alternative model Dobroliubov proposes is one in which literature relies on the depth, vividness and verity of its representations in order to spur the reader to reflection:

> Этот мир, обрисованный теперь верно, ярко, поэтически, представленный ему [читателю] во всей своей привлекательной и потрясающей правде, наверное подействует благодетельно на его развитие, разбудит в его душе благородные инстинкты, расширит его взгляды, придаст ему новые силы для деятельности честной и полезной… если можно чего-нибудь требовать от литературы, то это того, чтобы произведения ее вызывали на размышления. Вот когда достигнет она своего идеала и по справедливости присвоит себе серьезное значение в ходе нравственного развития народа.
>
> This world, now that it is depicted faithfully, vividly, poetically, and is presented to him [the reader] in all of its attractive and staggering truth, will surely have a beneficial effect on his development, will rouse in his soul noble instincts, will broaden his views, will give him new strength for honest and useful activity… if it is possible to demand anything of literature, it is that its works provoke us to reflection. This is when it will attain its ideal and will justly claim for itself serious significance in the process of a nation's moral development. (1:163)

In this passage Dobroliubov makes a strong case for the superior efficacy of rich, "thick" narratives as opposed to flat hortatory statements. A text need do no more than present, skillfully and artistically, the truth of contemporary life, and the positive benefits will follow as the reader reacts to these ethically neutral portrayals by experiencing a series of intensely positive moral and intellectual transformations. To actually place the positive message in the text would be unnecessary and even counterproductive. The literary effect that Dobroliubov highlights above all others, both here and in his later writings, is the instigation to thought. In keeping with the high value he places on personal independence, Dobroliubov strongly dislikes literature that provides us with ready answers. Literature's most valuable service is to stimulate our intellect so

that we come to our own understanding based on the complex and accurate data offered by the text.

Dobroliubov consistently returns to this same model of literary agency in the articles that follow. For example, in "On the Degree of Participation of the Folk Element," just after insisting that literature must follow life, Dobroliubov notes that it can still make a progressive contribution by helping the nation discuss and clarify problems that life has already raised: "Сознательности и ясности стремлений в обществе литература много помогает… как ничтожно было участие литературы в возбуждении вопроса, столь же велико может быть ее значение в строгом и правильном его обсуждении" 'Literature can contribute greatly to the awareness and clarity of aspirations in society… as insignificant as the participation of literature was in raising the question, so great can be its role in the rigorous and correct discussion of the same' (2:225). In "Literary Trifles" Dobroliubov gives a more extensive description of how this process of "clarification" works: while the masses are still mired in perplexity about the current problems of social life, literature picks up on the most recent and innovative responses to these problems, examining and elaborating the latest social movements until the new ideas are fully assimilated by the masses and by national policymakers. Writers of fiction are celebrated for the way they are able to "схватить на лету первый проблеск новых потребностей" 'snatch up in passing the first glimmer of new requirements' and "разъяснить факты, в которых заключается зародыш нового движения, дать ему должное направление" 'explicate the facts which contain the germ of a new movement, give the movement its proper direction' (4:78-79). Finally, in "Good Intentions and Action" Dobroliubov concisely notes that the job of literature is the "переработка" 'working over' of the "факты общественной жизни" 'facts of social life'—which is best achieved when the literary images have "художественная полнота и сила" 'artistic fullness and power' (6:194). These examples expand on the general concept of thought-provoking literature presented in "A Little Something on Didacticism," as they more precisely connect literature to the ongoing process of responding to new problems with new ideas. Literature reflects a dynamic world in which new difficulties and new attempts at reform continually appear on the scene. In this contexet, literature does not actively advocate for anything; the text presents contemporary reality in its material, cultural and intellectual aspects, and contents itself with merely increasing the reader's awareness of the latest developments. As the above quotations demonstrate, this model of literary agency fits seamlessly with Dobroliubov's theories of mimesis and of the real. On the one hand, Dobroliubov strictly refuses to allow literature to raise a completely new issue, emphasizing instead literature's important role in the dissemination of an already-existing idea. On the other hand, Dobroliubov as usual asks literature to concentrate on the newest forward-looking aspirations. Merely by reflecting the sites where innovative movements are brewing, literature helps the avant-garde become the status quo, and thus lubricates the forward movement of society.

"Dark Kingdom" is the ultimate example of the passive model of literary agency described above. In this article Dobroliubov introduces his famous method of "real criticism" (*real'naia kritika*) and bases it on the idea of literature as a thought-provoking repository of information about contemporary life. The opening pages of this article are the first point where Dobroliubov gives a name to his method and explicitly defines his critical approach. He presents "real criticism" as an alternative to the academic school, which measures a text against an artificial, preordained set of rules; he also objects to the critics who are obsessed with the writer's ideological affiliations and with the tendentious messages that can be found in the text. Dobroliubov declares that he will not waste time wishing that the text had been structured

differently, nor will he argue about the writer's political intentions. Instead he will approach the text on its own terms, analyze it as a slice of real life, and point out what we can learn about contemporary society from the characters and plot situations. Such an absolutist identification of the text with reality strikes the modern-day reader as reductive, naïve and anti-artistic, but Dobroliubov does manage to display a respectable aesthetic sensibility within the bounds of his resolutely imitative literary theory. His idea that the text should be analyzed on its own terms is after all a commendable basis for a critical practice, certainly preferable to the focus on scholastic rules or to the attempt to discern the writer's political viewpoints. And it also becomes clear in "Dark Kingdom" that Dobroliubov's idea of mimesis is more subtle than the simple notion, implied in Chernyshevsky's dissertation or in Dobroliubov's earlier work, of an immediate and unproblematic reflection of reality. In a tangent at the opening of the third article of the series, Dobroliubov sketches the difference between artistic and scientific representations of reality, using terms most likely drawn from Belinsky's aesthetics. The theorist works with ideas, Dobroliubov declares, while the artist works with images (5:70-71). Thus the artist is able to pick up on new developments in reality that have not yet been intellectually assimilated, and that no one has even consciously noticed yet. Art therefore has a special ability to contribute to our understanding of the ongoing developments of society, as it gives concrete shape to significant yet barely perceptible phenomena. And so Dobroliubov may be overly invested in the idea that literature faithfully imitates reality, but at least he recognizes that art is not exactly the same as reality, and that the literary re-creation of the world actually has some advantages over direct engagement with reality. Thus the naïve assumptions behind "real criticism" are mitigated by a more nuanced theory of mimesis and a commendable emphasis on the independent validity of the text.

These subtleties do not change the underlying point of "real criticism," which, similar to the model of literary agency presented in earlier writings, is that the text imitates reality in order to improve the reader's intellectual and moral connection to contemporary society. Here is Dobroliubov's description of his approach:

> …для реальной критики здесь представляется прежде всего факт: автор выводит доброго и неглупого человека… затем критика разбирает, возможно ли и действительно ли такое лицо; нашедши же, что оно верно действительности, она переходит к своим собственным соображениям о причинах, породивших его… Реальная критика относится к произведению художника точно так же, как к явлениям действительной жизни.
>
> …for real criticism the first thing that presents itself here is a fact: the author depicts a kind and intelligent person… the critique then investigates whether such a character is possible and realistic; having concluded that the character is faithful to reality, the critique proceeds to its own reflections on the causes that gave birth to it… Real criticism relates to the work of the artist exactly as it relates to the phenomena of real life. (5:20)

In other words, once the mimetic verity of the text is established, the critic turns it into an object of sociological analysis; just as in earlier articles, "reflections" (*soobrazheniia*) are the primary reaction generated by the literary text. Thus "real criticism" is based on a rejection of direct literary didacticism. Dobroliubov is so far above any interest in overt tendency that he refuses to

even engage in the ongoing disputes over which writer belongs to which camp. Regardless of ideology, the reader extracts the progressive impulse from the impartial text by assimilating and reflecting on the data it provides. The rest of "Dark Kingdom" is a virtuoso display of the potential of this critical approach, as Dobroliubov painstakingly describes how each distorted personality in Ostrovsky's plays arises from the stifling atmosphere of merchant culture. As he applies his method at length in this article, Dobroliubov amply demonstrates that one can extract a politically progressive message from a conservative writer, as long as that writer is seen as faithful to reality. Ostrovsky, Dobroliubov declares, has done us a great service in helping us perceive the harmful repressions that surround us, and armed with this knowledge we are both more motivated and better equipped to begin to transform the "dark kingdom" into something better. Literature, in the model of "real criticism," can have an intense forward-looking effect even while it itself remains absolutely focused on the negative realities of the current world.

Dobroliubov, then, is clearly not the aesthetically impaired ideological didact his critics made him out to be. But the sharp political differences between the critical factions of the late 1850s drove the leading critics to exaggerate the contrasts between their own and their opponents' aesthetic views. As a result the radicals were written off as utilitarians with a hostility toward "true" art. For example, the critic Alexander Druzhinin, who became a leading voice for the "pure art" camp as editor of the *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* (*Library for Reading*), articulated an influential contrast between the "didactic" and the "artistic" approaches to art in his 1856 article "Kritika Gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury i nashi k nei otnosheniia" ("Critique of the Gogolian Period of Literature and Our Relationship to It"). Here Druzhinin stands up for an "eternal" art based on truth and beauty as opposed to the transitory contemporary themes and the instrumentalizing method supposedly supported by the radical critics, who are the implicit targets of this article. But Druzhinin's article misrepresents the radical position; he seems to confuse an interest in current, concrete themes with an interest in didacticism. Even Chernyshevsky, who found little independent value in art and did eventually write a didactic novel, started his career by asking literature not to preach to us, but only to copy reality. Druzhinin's characterization is particularly inaccurate when applied to Dobroliubov, who frequently and explicitly spoke out against the presence of any intentional political tendencies in art, and moreover valued the unique ability of art to produce exceptionally vivid and powerful images of reality. However, the terms of Druzhinin's attack stuck. Several years later, Dostoevsky's 1862 article "Gospodin –bov i vopros ob iskusstve" ("Mr. –bov and the Question of Art") presented Dobroliubov as the leading figure of the "utilitarian" camp. Again this is a polemical mischaracterization of Dobroliubov's aesthetics. Certainly, the general impression of utilitarianism in Dobroliubov's work is understandable. Dobroliubov hoped that literature would contribute to revolutionary change, and he regularly interprets texts in terms of their political implications. But Dobroliubov keeps his utilitarianism confined to the reader's response to the text; he never asks the text itself to actively pursue social propaganda. In order to assess Dobroliubov fairly, we need to recognize that although his actual interpretations instrumentalized texts after the fact, his literary theory opposed texts that were deliberately composed for didactic purposes.

10. Summary: Realism and Progress, United in Theory

In sum, multiple facets of Dobroliubov's literary theory work together to unite the real and the ideal in the realm of possibility. Potential conflicts are sidelined many times over by a whole series of semantic adjustments and flexible theoretical structures: first the concept of the real is broadened to incorporate forward-leaning subjective aspirations; next the idea of historical change is added in, making it possible to believe that the wave of the future has already manifested itself somewhere in reality and is available for literary imitation; then the concept of the ideal is brought down to earth by the fact that it is based on a sociopolitical rather than a moral vision, and the ideal is further normalized with the claim that the admirable qualities of the positive person are only the natural result of human development. Finally, it turns out that this ideal does not need to be represented in the text anyway, since the potential transformation of reality occurs only in the reader's mind as he or she reacts to the dilemmas depicted in the text. And so, although the radical critics initially seemed to take stark, extremist positions with regard to both mimesis and revolutionary progress, this series of theoretical adjustments softens their position considerably. It seems that the critics of mid-nineteenth-century Russia have in fact solved the problem of visionary mimesis.

The successful theoretical strategy employed by Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky contrasts clearly with the situation in early eighteenth-century Germany as analyzed in previous chapters. The Russian radicals had a pliable concept of the ideal, while the Enlightenment figures held to an uncompromising vision of virtue; the radicals espoused a very indirect theory of literary agency, while the eighteenth-century writers preferred that their progressive vision actually be given concrete representation in the text. The eighteenth-century critics, in other words, were much more rigid with respect to the ideal end of the spectrum, and thus they were forced to give ground on the concept of mimetic fidelity whenever any conflicts occurred. Gottsched, for example, developed a very distended understanding of mimesis and a very stylized understanding of "nature," all in order to claim that his didactic poetics was also imitative. Wieland, operating with a more pessimistic world view and a more empirical understanding of mimesis, was unable to take advantage of such flexibility on the mimetic end of the spectrum, and eventually had to give up all hope of reconciling mimesis with progressive vision. The Russian nineteenth century inverts the theoretical priorities of early eighteenth-century Germany. The most rigid aspect of the radical Russian aesthetic is its mimetic commitment, while expectations for representation of the ideal are quite flexible. And the radical adjustments to the concept of the ideal are supplemented by various adjustments to the concept of reality, thus opening up multiple avenues for the combination of mimetic literature and progressive vision. The nineteenth-century realists stood firm only in their commitment to an objective, empirical understanding of mimesis; their models for the real, the ideal and for literary agency all shifted in order to accommodate this stance. In contast, the eighteenth-century writers, standing firm in all aspects of the ideal half of the dichotomy, were unable to sufficiently adjust their concepts of mimesis and of reality to accommodate their unwavering devotion to virtue. Thus the nineteenth-century critics were much more successful at theorizing a space for "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism."

PART II: THE BREAKDOWN OF THE THEORY: DESPERATION AND INGENUITY

1. "Literary Trifles": Impatience, Attack, Frustration

The radical critics developed a powerful theoretical foundation for bridging the antinomies of progressive realism. But previous chapters have demonstrated that, when it comes to harmonizing the real and the ideal, theory works better than practice. Around 1859, once Dobroliubov had been working at *The Contemporary* for about two years, his articles began to show signs of difficulty with maintaining the patient attitude required by the theoretical framework outlined above. The literature he sees around him does not seem to be living up to the model according to which it gradually disseminates new ideas, prods readers to reflect, and depicts struggles and strivings without directly suggesting solutions. And in any case this model itself, to judge from Dobroliubov's writings, began to seem too moderate and slow-moving now that the reforms of 1861 were drawing nigh. Once the Russian government began releasing specific details of plans for the emancipation of the serfs, the post-1855 period of vague optimism was over, and competing interests battled fiercely over specific questions such as whether or not the serfs would be given land along with their freedom, and whether they would have to compensate their former masters for the loss of free labor as well as for the land. In this atmosphere of fierce debate, differences sharpened between the moderate (usually gentry) and the radical (usually non-gentry) supporters of reform, especially when it seemed that the moderate factions were too willing to compromise rather than defend the interests of the peasant class.

Dobroliubov took part in these battles on both the political and the aesthetic fronts. His attacks on the gentry liberals grew more bitter at the same time as his frustration with the inadequacy of contemporary literature became more acute. Relations between the young radical critics of clergy origin and the older moderately liberal gentry had been strained since about 1856, when N. A. Nekrasov, the publisher of *The Contemporary*, decided to tie his journal closely to the radical voices of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, to the detriment of gentry figures like Turgenev, Ostrovsky or Goncharov who had long been associated with the journal. A significant incident in this growing rift occurred in response to Dobroliubov's 1859 article "Literary Trifles." On the political level, this article contains a harsh and condescending characterization of the gentry generation as outdated, empty windbags. Dobroliubov scoffs at their exaggerated celebrations of *glasnost'*, and he claims that their *oblichitel'stvo* (the exposure or denunciation of social ills in literature) has had precisely zero effect in the practical realm. Dobroliubov's attack particularly alarmed Alexander Herzen, the elder gentry émigré who was publishing the socialist newspaper *Kolokol* (*The Bell*) from London. Herzen responded to Dobroliubov with the 1859 article "Very Dangerous!" (original title in English), where he insinuated that the radical critics, by attacking moderate reformers, only end up aiding the more conservative factions of the tsarist government. Both sides became so worked up in this exchange that Nekrasov dispatched Chernyshevsky to London to smooth over relations with Herzen. Dobroliubov assured everyone that he had always admired Herzen, but his attacks on the liberal generation hardly slowed down (Walicki 208-209; *ПСС* 4:433-436).

These political and personal scuffles go hand in hand with Dobroliubov's literary and cultural frustrations in "Literary Trifles." In this article, Dobroliubov does not break with his existing theoretical positions—in fact I used this article more than once above as an illustration of Dobroliubov's basic views—but he does run into the practical difficulties inherent in his theories. As the political context becomes more polarized and urgent, Dobroliubov also becomes more impatient and demanding in his expectations for literature. Whereas in his earlier writings, for example in "Provincial Sketches," he still displays some respect for the moderate, small-scale, but well-intentioned denunciations of *oblichitel'stvo*, now he attacks that genre viciously for its uselessness: "Кричат, кричат против каких-то злоупотреблений, каких-то дурных порядков… оказывается, что они и кричат-то вовсе не из-за того, чтó составляет действительный, существенный недостаток, а из-за каких-нибудь частностей и мелочей" 'They shout and shout against certain abuses, certain bad arrangements… and it turns out that they are not at all shouting about that which constitutes the real, essential deficiency, but instead about some private and petty issues' (4:52). Dobroliubov cannot hide his thirst for a more directly transformative mode of writing. But these heightened expectations come at the same time as he confronts the fact that contemporary literature is not living up to his expectations. Confronted with the gap between the beneficial role of literature envisioned in his theory and the disappointing results that he sees around him, Dobroliubov finds no good response. The best he can do is to make a virtue out of negativity: contemporary literature, he claims, should at least recognize its own impotence as a sort of first step toward improvement: "нет для нее [литературы] никакого оправдания, ежели она самодовольно забудется в своем положении, примирится с своей мелочностью и будет толковать о своем серьезном значении" 'there is absolutely no justification for it [literature] if it complacently settles into its situation, makes peace with its own trifling nature and chatters on about its own serious significance' (4:111-112). Even as he thus drastically lowers his expectations for contemporary literature, Dobroliubov upholds his vision of what literature could be. His article ends with this famous, rousing call for a vigorous and effective literature: "не надо нам слова гнилого и праздного… а нужно слово свежее и гордое, заставляющее сердце кипеть отвагою гражданина, увлекающее к деятельности широкой и самобытной" 'we do not need a discourse that is rotten and idle… no, we need a discourse that is fresh and proud, which makes the heart pulsate with a citizen's valor, and which entices us to broad and independent activity' (4:112). In "Literary Trifles," then, Dobroliubov's intense desire for a genuinely powerful social literature collides with the actual disheartening state of affairs, and the factors that will put great strain on his promising theoretical approach become apparent. Dobroliubov becomes ever more impatient for a powerfully active social literature at the same time as he realizes that the world is not what it would have to be for his theory to work. But he never lets go of his vision for literature; instead he strains to find a way to put at least some paltry positive spin on the current negative situation.

"Literary Trifles" is the first major appearance of a pattern that will repeat itself in all of the major works of Dobroliubov's last few years at *The Contemporary*. The general, defining problem of this part of his career is that, now that the political exigencies have become more acute, the aesthetic model that held together so well in theory proves to be inadequate for actual literary practice. Two main adjustments in particular spell doom for the harmonic functioning of Dobroliubov's theory. First, Dobroliubov becomes increasingly anxious to see an actual representation of a concrete positive hero after all, even though his theory of literary agency had suggested that such direct textual modeling of transformation was unnecessary. Secondly, it turns

out that reality contains no such hero. Of course, according to the theory, the positive hero was so normal, and the ongoing development of history was so dynamic, that surely the individual who embodied the correct response to the latest social problems must have appeared somewhere in reality. But these notions about reality are exposed as wishful thinking once theory confronts contemporary Russian life. In the end, Dobroliubov finds himself face to face with the same dichotomies that bedeviled all other theorists of visionary mimesis or progressive realism: he yearns for the portrayal of an ideal that reality cannot produce, and that realistic literature cannot represent without abandoning a strictly mimetic orientation.

But even though Dobroliubov seems to be pulled away from his original detached, neutral model of literary agency, what stands out is the way he tries his utmost not to abandon his literary model. He obviously yearns for a positive hero, but at the same time he cannot let go of his deep-rooted realist aesthetic. And so he rarely asks literature to openly pursue a positive, didactic approach; instead he just wishes fervently that there *were* some positive hero available in the realm of the real. And since there is no such figure, he perfects his ability to find even the slightest hints of the positive within the realm of the real. In strained and desperately hopeful readings, he extracts convoluted positive implications from the images in the text, and thus forces texts to satisfy, if only barely, both his transformative and his imitative desires for literature. At other times, his desire for a more unequivocal positive hero leads him to argue that some very implausible portrayals are realistic. Whichever approach he takes, he always manages to demonstrate that the text achieves a positive social effect while strictly adhering to an empirical realism. Dobroliubov's convoluted arguments are evidence of the strength of the same theoretical convictions whose bounds he pushes against. He never gives in to the intransigent contradictions of his progressive-mimetic aesthetics; instead he produces the most ingenious and interesting—albeit implausible—interpretations of his career in order to force the texts to live up to his conflicting desires for literature.

2. "What Is Oblomovism?": A Positive Spin on Degeneration

Even "Dark Kingdom," which seems to be a triumphant demonstration of Dobroliubov's original theory of "real criticism," already shows hints of the shifts described above. On the one hand, the article describes how the dark images of Ostrovsky's plays spur beneficial understanding and reflection even if they offer no positive suggestions for improvement. In concluding, Dobroliubov bluntly underlines the unremittingly negative character of Ostrovsky's portrayals: "мы должны сознаться: выхода из 'темного царства' мы не нашли в произведениях Островского" 'We must admit: we have found no way out of the 'dark kingdom' in the works of Ostrovsky' (5:135). The article thus seems to celebrate a masterwork of purely critical realism whose social agency is powerful but negative and indirect. Even here, however, Dobroliubov cannot quite refrain from contradicting his own declaration and seeking a few faint signs of positive potential after all. He finds a few examples of resolute, independent human character in Ostrovsky's plays: a jilted woman generous enough to confront her former lover and wish him well, or a former "petty tyrant" whose financial ruin forces him to develop a sense of humanity. These suggestions are brief and underdeveloped, but they indicate that, in the end, Dobroliubov is unable to accept a purely negative model of literary agency.

Dobroliubov's desire to find positive implications in realist texts plays a more central and intriguing role in "Chto takoe oblomovshchina?" ("What Is Oblomovism?"), probably the most

notorious article he wrote; it was published in 1859 just a few months before "Dark Kingdom." The article is a review of Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov*. This lengthy and leisurely-paced novel traces the life of the nobleman Oblomov, a tender-hearted but fabulously lethargic and ineffective man who famously spends the whole first part of the novel trying and failing to get out of bed for the day. Dobroliubov's reading puts an aggressive political and social spin on the novel as he places Oblomov within the tradition of the Russian "superfluous man" (*lishnii chelovek*). The "superfluous man" was a talented, intelligent figure, usually a nobleman, and often possessed of elevated aspirations and principles, but unable to find a productive place for himself in society; he ends up wasting his life in pointless cynical pursuits, or declines into an ineffectual mediocrity. Critics since Belinsky had noted that this type appears in Russian literature with unusual frequency: Pushkin's Onegin, Lermontov's Pechorin and Turgenev's Rudin are classic examples. The traditional superfluous man was a vaguely noble and tragic figure. Especially during the reign of Nikolai I, it was understood that these educated and well-intentioned individuals were ruined because the oppressive government offered them no outlet for their talents and aspirations; the best they could do was retire in protest from a social system that would have required them to corrupt themselves. But in the late 1850s, as part of their sparring with the elder gentry faction, the radical critics began to attack this sympathetic interpretation of the superfluous man. They suggested that his wasted life could not just be blamed on an inhospitable environment, but was due to deeper character failings common to all members of the upper class. The radical view of the superfluous nobleman was expressed most prominently in Chernyshevsky's 1858 article "Russkii chelovek na rendez-vous" ("The Russian at a Rendezvous") (5:156-174). Using a short story of failed love by Turgenev as a starting point, Chernyshevsky argues that the idle lifestyle of the gentry makes them unfit to accomplish anything; they are all just as helpless as the hero of Turgenev's story, who is afraid to elope with the woman who loves him. Pavel Annenkov, a nobleman and overall man of letters, soon countered Chernyshevsky with a defense of the superfluous type. In the article "Literaturnyi tip slabogo cheloveka" ("The Literary Type of the Weak Man") Annenkov claims that the indecision of these gentry types is a strength: their inability to act is a sign of their thoughtful, educated approach to problems, which in the end is more useful to Russian society than bold deeds. Moreover, Annenkov claims, these thoughtful, moderate individuals are responsible for all the cultural achievements on which Russia currently prides itself.

Dobroliubov, as might be expected, takes Chernyshevsky's side in this debate when he interprets Oblomov as a typical superfluous man. Like Oblomov, Dobroliubov claims, all members of the superfluous gentry type suffer from inertia and apathy; waited on hand and foot by servants, they never get the chance to explore their own capabilities, never figure out their own relation to the world, and never discover any practical point to their existence. Dobroliubov has clearly borrowed this class-based argument from Chernyshevsky, but the uniquely damning feature of his interpretation is that he makes such a ridiculous and pathetic character as Oblomov into the leading symbol of the superfluous man. The gentry writers who defended the Rudins and Pechorins of an earlier period wanted to differentiate clearly between these noble, tragic victims of circumstance on the one hand, and the personally lazy and ineffectual Oblomov on the other hand. The apathetic, hapless, almost comical Oblomov would downgrade the image of the superfluous man if he were placed alongside the earlier gentry figures who had genuinely striven to live a principled life in the face of a hostile social system. But Dobroliubov makes the bold claim that all members of the gentry are superfluous precisely in the mode of Oblomov, and he does so with considerable critical skill: he expertly cites various details and quotations from the

previous literary tradition in order to highlight the parallels between the earlier superfluous men and Oblomov. In Dobroliubov's powerful ideological interpretation, Goncharov's hero is not a single idiosyncratic individual, but instead the emblem for "Oblomovism," a fatal inertia that affects all superfluous men, all members of the gentry, and in fact most of educated Russia.

It is easy to see how Dobroliubov's interpretation fits in with the realist aspect of his aesthetics: Oblomov, as Dobroliubov presents him, is the accurate, objective reflection of an actually existing social type. He is certainly not idealized; in fact he stands for the worst, ingrained tendencies that stand in the way of Russian progress. The theoretical passages of "What Is Oblomovism?" also prominently uphold a mimetic aesthetic, as Dobroliubov applies to Goncharov many of the points made in earlier articles. Dobroliubov particularly admires Goncharov's observational skill, praising its sober impartiality, its balance, and the contemplative, slow pace that allows the author to gradually build up a detailed world and a human type. Goncharov, Dobroliubov says, presents an image and "ручается только за его сходство с действительностью" 'vouches only for its similarity to reality' (4:309). Thus, in this article, Dobroliubov continues to see skilled imitation as the foundation of literary talent. He also, as in "Dark Kingdom," asserts that art has a special ability to capture fleeting impressions that tend to escape our notice when encountered in the real world. And just as he has many times before, Dobroliubov opposes overt didacticism in strong terms, claiming that the desire for an explicit moral is the sign of a juvenile and lazy intellect, that this desire is, "несколько обломовское, происходящее от наклонности иметь постоянно руководителей" 'somewhat Oblomov-ish, deriving from the inclination to constantly be led by the hand' (4:312-13). And so Goncharov's novel easily meets Dobroliubov's realist criteria as it presents a socially relevant phenomenon from contemporary life. The novel also seems well positioned to have the sort of indirect socially progressive effect called for in Dobroliubov's original literary model: the faithful portrayal of social problems in *Oblomov* will presumably spur a beneficial intellectual reaction in the reader. Thus the novel has the potential to easily fit into the relatively forgiving parameters of Dobroliubov's original theoretical model for progressive realism.

But Dobroliubov's growing need to find at least some concrete positive implications in the realist text prevents him from being satisfied with an interpretation based purely on the reader's critical response to negative images. And so, in an ingenious move, he finds a way to turn this degenerate nobleman into the sign of an approaching positive transformation. Dobroliubov achieves this by introducing a subtle historical differentiation into his earlier sketch of the superfluous man. While all members of this type share the same traits, in Dobroliubov's view Oblomov represents a more direct, unadorned presentation of the superfluous man than was seen previously. The Rudins and Pechorins, Dobroliubov claims, manage to fool people into admiring their vaguely noble characteristics—but Oblomov's contemptible features are plain for all to see. Dobroliubov concludes that this newly direct portrayal of the superfluous man must be a sign of society's maturation: "появление его было бы невозможно, если бы хотя в некоторой части общества не созрело сознание о том, как ничтожны все эти quasi-талантливые натуры" 'his appearance would be impossible if the awareness had not ripened in at least some part of society of how insignificant all these quasi-talented natures are' (4:333). In other words, the appearance of Oblomov indicates that we are becoming better at recognizing the kind of hero we *don't* need—and this suggests that our discovery of the kind of hero we *do* need is just around the corner. This quotation makes Oblomov into exactly the sort of avant-garde image Dobroliubov's theory of realism calls for: Oblomov is the sign of a positive development that has appeared at some point in reality but has not yet penetrated all of society. Even though

Oblomov is actually a *more* contemptible version of his social type, the literary debut of this new mode of portrayal is paradoxically a wonderful development.

The subtle advance represented by this new literary type causes Dobroliubov to erupt in glee: "как чувствуется веяние новой жизни, когда, по прочтении Обломова, думаешь, чтó вызвало в литературе этот тип" 'how you sense the stirring of new life, when, on reading *Oblomov*, you consider what it is that called this type to appear in literature' (4:331). We further feel Dobroliubov's excitement when he imagines the moment when the people (here metaphorically presented as fellow travelers in a difficult journey) finally become fed up, throw out the Oblomovs, and move ahead with productive "activity," i.e. revolution: "Тогда бедные путники видят всю ошибку и, махнув рукой, говорят: 'Э, да вы все Обломовы!' И затем начинается деятельная, неутомимая работа" "Then the poor travelers see their entire mistake, and, disdainfully waving their hand, they say, 'Oh, you're all a bunch of Oblomovs!' And after that, the active, tireless work begins' (4:332); "теперь Обломов является пред нами разоблаченный, как он есть… Вопрос: что он делает? в чем смысл и цель его жизни?— поставлен прямо и ясно, не забит никакими побочными вопросами. Это потому, что теперь уже настало или настает неотлагательно время работы общественной" 'Oblomov now appears before us exposed, in his essence… the question, 'What does he do? What is the point or goal of his life?' is posed directly and clearly, not blocked by any secondary questions. This is because now the time for socially engaged work has already come, or is coming without delay' (4:333). As always, Dobroliubov places a high value on intellectual shifts and on the attainment of true understanding. This subtle mental advance is a step toward what he desires most: a transition to actual work, to practical activity, to revolution.

These exuberant quotations illustrate Dobroliubov's remarkable ability to turn a depressing image into a rallying point for optimistic celebrations. In the process, Dobroliubov also manages to make the novel fulfill all the requirements of his literary model. According to this reading, *Oblomov* is a fully realist novel that disseminates the newest elements of an advancing progressive awareness. But we readers know that this theoretical victory comes at the price of a strained interpretation; the appearance of this incompetent character really does not warrant such celebration. And Dobroliubov himself backs off from his enthusiasm by the end of the article, as he begins to acknowledge that Russian society still faces a long and difficult journey. The little temporal equivocation at the end of the previous excited quotation shows how quickly sobriety begins to reassert itself: the longed-for time of action may have already come—or, according to the tagged-on phrase, it might still be just around the corner. Later parts of the article push the anticipated social changes clearly into the future. It is "еще рано" 'still early' (4:338) to claim that we have rooted out Oblomovism; and we still have no idea how Russia will actually move ahead once it shakes off its apathy: "До сих пор нет ответа на этот вопрос ни в обществе, ни в литературе" 'As yet there is no answer to that question either in society or in literature' (4:338). These sober statements indicate that the debut of the Oblomov literary type is a much more modest advance than it seemed to be earlier. Oblomov has unmasked the superfluous man, stripping him of his pretensions to personal nobility and integrity, but we still have no positive answer about where to go from here.

Nor do any of the secondary characters in the novel, according to Dobroliubov, offer a workable positive example. Oblomov's friend Stolz, for example, is incredibly capable and accomplished, and certainly a more constructive model than Oblomov—but the problem with him is that he is too unrealistic. As Dobroliubov notes, "литература не может забегать слишком далеко вперед жизни" 'literature cannot run ahead too far in advance of life' (4:340).

In the end, Dobroliubov singles out Oblomov's love interest Olga as the best option available in the novel. He admires her strong desire to play an active, useful role in the world, but even she has severe limitations in that her desires are vague and mostly unrealized, rendering her unable to offer any concrete direction to readers. Dobroliubov does refer to her as the "highest ideal," but we cannot overlook the essential qualification that follows: she is the "высший идеал, какой только может теперь русский художник вызвать из теперешней русской жизни" 'the highest ideal which a Russian artist can currently call forth from contemporary Russian life' (4:341). In other words, she is not *the* ideal, but only the best thing available amid difficult circumstances. These examples reveal how Dobroliubov's realist aesthetic imposes tight limits on the positive implications that can be found in literature. Stolz must be excluded as a positive hero because he is too far ahead of society, while Olga is an acceptable model only because the example she offers is indefinite and unsatisfactory. And the main character Oblomov, who is initially presented as the inspiring symbol of an approaching transformation, actually offers only the slightest hints of a change that currently exists only as an empty formless potential, as a shift in mental attitude rather than as concrete improvement. Once Dobroliubov's realist convictions reassert themselves toward the end of the article, he repeatedly reminds us that literature must confine itself to the realities of life, and that life is currently very far from the transformations that progressive Russians anticipate.

By downgrading his expectations for positive literary images, Dobroliubov in "What Is Oblomovism?" brings his conflicting tendencies into a temporarily workable equilibrium. On the one hand, the article exhibits his rising eagerness for more direct forms of literary agency and more concrete indications of the advance of history, and these pressures lead him to impose a strained interpretation that turns a lazy nobleman into a sign of the coming revolution. On the other hand, Dobroliubov's unshakeable realist aesthetic, combined with his sober view of contemporary Russian society, forces him to curb his revolutionary impatience and content himself with a progress that exists for now only as a mental potential. For the time being, the positive hero is postponed to the future, and the best we can do is hope that the revolution is slightly closer than it was previously. With this interpretation, Dobroliubov manages to satisfy his desire for at least some concrete signs of progress without betraying his realist aesthetic. But this solution to the conflicting dynamics of progressive mimesis is tenuous, precisely because Dobroliubov has to compromise his positive vision so drastically. As it turns out, the enduring aspect of Dobroliubov's article is not his strained positive interpretation of Oblomov, but his delineation of the depressing, intransigent "Oblomovism" of Russian life. And so Dobroliubov's search for a more satisfying positive hero continues in the major publications that follow.

3. "When Will the Real Day Come?": Perpetually "on the Eve"

The progressive urgency of Dobroliubov's writings grows more acute as he advances through the high point of his very short career at *The Contemporary*. His continued eager anticipation is immediately apparent in the title of his next major article after "What Is Oblomovism?" and "Dark Kingdom." Published in early 1860, "Kogda zhe pridet nastoiashchii den'?" ("When Will the Real Day Come?") is a review of Ivan Turgenev's most recent novel, *Nakanune* (*On the Eve*). The novel tells the story of a young Russian noblewoman, Elena, who falls in love with Insarov, a visiting Bulgarian revolutionary dedicated to the cause of freeing his homeland from Ottoman rule. Dobroliubov plays on the title of Turgenev's novel by asking when

the "eve" will be succeeded by the actual "day," i.e. by real rather than merely anticipated transformations. In his review of *On the Eve* Dobroliubov takes an approach similar to the strategy in his review of *Oblomov*. That is, Dobroliubov claims that the characters of *On the Eve* mark a clear step forward from Goncharov's hero (6:104-5), yet in the end the only positive features he finds in them are vague, anticipatory traits that exist as yet only on the subjective level.

The central figure in Dobroliubov's interpretation is Elena, whom Dobroliubov celebrates as an entirely new type and as a sign that Russian society has finally moved beyond the stage of the superfluous man. What excites Dobroliubov so much about Elena is that she actually has a distinct thirst for action, unlike Oblomov, whose will was smothered in apathy. Even as a girl, Elena did everything she could to provide practical assistance to the suffering beings around her: she assisted beggars, nursed sick animals, etc. Her shining accomplishment, in Dobroliubov's view, is that she realizes the need for deeds instead of words. Dobroliubov claims that she "уважала только практически-полезную деятельность" 'respected only practical, useful activity' (6:107). But as might be expected, Elena's promising character also has its limitations. The problem is that her desire for action never finds its proper object. Her humanitarianism cannot be satisfied by these petty ministrations to a few people around her, and so her thirst for action remains an empty yearning and does not turn into the concrete revolutionary activity that society requires. According to Dobroliubov's characterization, Elena feels a "жажд[а] деятельного добра" 'thirst for active kindness' (6:107), but she remains forever on the verge of real action: "Она все ждет, все живет накануне чего-то… Она готова к самой живой, энергической деятельности, но приступить к делу сама по себе, одна—она не смеет" 'She is always waiting, always living on the eve of something to come… She is prepared for the most lively, energetic activity, but to start taking action on her own, alone—this she does not dare' (6:108). And so once again Russian reality can only offer half measures. Like Oblomov, Elena is a sign that Russian society is moving closer to real, positive action—but as usual that action is postponed to the future. Russia is perpetually "on the eve," waiting for tomorrow, the "real day," to come. Dobroliubov does refer to Elena as an ideal, just as he did Olga in *Oblomov* (Dobroliubov has a penchant for finding the best positive images in female characters). Again, however, she is not *the* ideal of revolutionary action, but only the best ideal possible in current circumstances. Dobroliubov describes her as an "идеальное лицо, составленное из лучших элементов, развивающихся в нашем обществе" 'ideal character, put together from the best elements currently developing in our society' (6:110). He notes, however, that "художественно создать… деятельность, вероятно, еще и невозможно для русского писателя настоящего времени. Неоткуда взять деятельности" 'to portray… activity in art is, most likely, still impossible for the Russian writer of the present time. There is nowhere to take the activity from' (ibid.). Any ideal that is assembled from the sorry components of contemporary Russian society must be very limited. Elena is a sign of our desire for activity, not of activity itself.

But what about Insarov? The novel presents him as a decisive character dedicated to a worthy and grand cause; he truly is the needed man of action. But, Dobroliubov points out, it is no accident that Insarov is Bulgarian. In a long discourse on the intransigent problems of Russian society, Dobroliubov argues that a *Russian* Insarov is impossible in our current circumstances. Insarov is fighting a clear external enemy, the Turks, while Russians are hampered by the fact that they are themselves implicated in the systems they are trying to transform. The Russian revolutionary has to fight the deep-rooted "internal Turk," a much more exhausting and formidable enemy than any external occupier. Overall, then, *On the Eve*, in Dobroliubov's

reading, demonstrates that Russian society is still not able to produce the genuine positive hero whom Dobroliubov desires. And so again Dobroliubov contents himself with celebrating a minor, mental advance, namely the subtle shift in aspiration supposedly represented in Elena. The actual practical results of this shift are put off until tomorrow.

By thus once again adopting a patient stance, Dobroliubov makes *On the Eve* fit within his harmoniously functioning, theoretical model of progressive realism. Throughout his review, Dobroliubov frequently reiterates the aesthetic viewpoints already seen in so many of his earlier articles. For example, the principles of "real criticism" introduced in "Dark Kingdom" make an appearance when Dobroliubov declares that he analyzes texts as raw data from contemporary social life. He approaches the text, he tells us, "как совершившийся факт, как жизненное явление, стоящее пред нами" 'as an accomplished fact, as an occurrence from life standing before us' (6:97). As usual, Dobroliubov asserts that the basis of artistic talent is the capacity for impartial imitation, and he praises Turgenev for his exceptional ability to reflect the latest social developments in his novels (6:99). Dobroliubov also, as in previous writings, notes that art, despite being strictly imitative, does have special capabilities that make it superior to everyday perceptions of life. The particular quality that he highlights in this article is art's ability to reveal the inner life of the human being (6:97-8). Also very noticeable in Dobroliubov's review of *On the Eve* are the ideas that history is constantly advancing and that imitative art aims to reproduce the most recent forward-moving elements of society rather than the features that are already established. The job of art is to show the leading individuals of a given epoch, the "люд[и] избранн[ые], люд[и] лучш[ие]" 'select people, the best people' (6:101). As Dobroliubov describes it, art is meant to "стать на дорогу, по которой совершается передовое движение настоящего времени" 'take up a position on the road upon which the forward movement of the present time occurs' (6:105). Finally, Dobroliubov reminds us that literature must nevertheless be careful not to get ahead of life, lest its characters end up "чужд[ыми] русскому обществу" 'foreign to Russian society' (6:108). All of these comments, as they reinforce Dobroliubov's established literary model, neatly delineate a stable space for progressive mimesis: literature is called to help disseminate the latest trends by allying itself with the most avant-garde yet definitely real segments of society. In Dobroliubov's interpretation of *Nakanune*, Elena is precisely that figure who is more advanced than the norm, yet not so perfect that she ruins the objective accuracy and concrete relevance of the realist text.[13]

Thus, on the one hand, we can read "When Will the Real Day Come?" as one of the best-realized instantiations of Dobroliubov's literary theory. His interpretation of *On the Eve* is not nearly as strained as his reading of *Oblomov* and it fits just as well into his theory of progressive realism. But the ultimate problem with Dobroliubov's interpretation, and with his entire literary theory, is the same as the problem we saw in *Oblomov*: the positive content of the literary text must be held within frustratingly modest limits in order to meet the criteria of Dobroliubov's aesthetic theory. And an activist with Dobroliubov's intense desire for change is not likely to remain content for long with these minor anticipations of a change whose concrete manifestation lies forever in the future. After all, Dobroliubov was claiming that Russian society had made a major advance to a new literary type in the ten-month span between his reviews of *Oblomov* and of *On the Eve*; clearly he is looking for a rapid pace of change. And so it is no surprise that

[13] Turgenev was upset at the ideological spin Dobroliubov gave his novel. He pleaded with Nekrasov not to publish the article and threatened to sever ties with *The Contemporary* over it. But Nekrasov chose Dobroliubov over Turgenev, and Turgenev made good on his pledge not to contribute any more to the journal. This was yet another episode in the sharpening clash between the elder gentry and the younger mixed-class writers.

Dobroliubov's impatience, although held in check throughout his moderate interpretation of Elena, bursts out into the open at the end of "When Will the Real Day Come?". In a closing passage, Dobroliubov passionately and ecstatically declares that a full-fledged "Russian Insarov" is truly on on the verge of appearing. A new awareness is ripening and spreading in society, he claims, and today's children are growing up amid new hopes for the future:

> Когда придет их черед приняться за дело, они уже внесут в него ту энергию, последовательность и гармонию сердца и мысли, о которых мы едва могли приобрести теоретическое понятие. Тогда и в литературе явится полный, резко и живо очерченный образ русского Инсарова. И недолго нам ждать его… придет же он наконец, этот день! И, во всяком случае, канун недалек от следующего за ним дня: всего-то какая-нибудь ночь разделяет их!
>
> When their turn comes to take up this business, they will already inject into it that energy, consistency and harmony of heart and mind of which we could barely acquire a theoretical understanding. Then in literature too the full, sharply and vividly sketched image of a Russian Insarov will appear. And we do not have long to wait for him… it *will* come finally, that day! And, in any case, the eve is not far from the day that follows upon it: a single night is all that divides them! (6:140)

Here Dobroliubov, admittedly, still postpones the positive hero until the future, but the impassioned certainty of his anticipation indicates that he is hardly content with the modest advance he perceives in Elena. Dobroliubov's faith in historical advance, as embodied in the succession of generations, allows him to convince himself that the "business"—in other words the revolution—is approaching steadily. Someone who clings to this hope with such irrepressible anticipation is going to mine contemporary literature for every least sign of advance he can find. The last articles of Dobroliubov's career indicate that he cannot ultimately be satisfied until he sees, not the mere mental preparation for revolution described in previous articles, but the revolutionary hero himself—or, as it turns out, the revolutionary heroine herself.

4. The Positive Hero, *Pro et Contra*
• "Spring," "Good Intentions and Activity"

Even before he wrote the review of *On the Eve*, Dobroliubov had actually given in fully to his revolutionary urgency and called for the direct representation of a positive hero. The passage in question comes from his mid-1859 review of the almanac *Vesna* (*Spring*). The almanac included some contributions written from the "art for art's sake" point of view, as well as a few short stories in the denunciatory vein. Dobroliubov passes over the aestheticizing theoretical statements in this almanac with a few contemptuous remarks. His more interesting comments come while he is reviewing the strengths and drawbacks of one of the pieces of fiction, a minor work by a certain Yu. G. Zhukovsky. Here Dobroliubov approves of the fact that the author aims his denunciatory attacks at important targets, but exclaims that he wishes to see more positive depictions in literature: "мы пожелаем автору, чтобы он не остановился на безвыходных сожалениях своих героев, а додумался за них до какого-нибудь решения" 'we wish for the author that he would not confine himself to hopeless commiserations with his

heroes, but would come up with some solution on their behalf' (4:383). Dobroliubov then goes on to describe the solution that society needs: a hero with a strong will, an independent personality, and an unwavering dedication to battling social ills. Dobroliubov's call for the direct literary representation of positive solutions is a rare slip for a critic who usually holds himself to his own mimetic creed and accepts that literature cannot present anything not found in reality. But Dobroliubov's impatience is apparent even in those articles where he does his best to stick to critical realism. In "Spring," for some reason, his impatience gains the upper hand and he gives his forward-leaning desires free rein. In a wonderful metaphorical repudiation of his earlier support for a step-by-step approach, Dobroliubov compares gradualists to the ridiculous sort of person who would refuse to buy a train ticket all the way to Moscow, preferring instead to advance only one small station at a time. This metaphor repudiates the cautious gradualism that marked most of his other work. In "Spring" Dobroliubov wants to go all the way to his destination, immediately, and he seems to have renounced all of his usual concerns about how literature is not allowed to get ahead of our faulty reality.

But in the mid-1860 article "Blagonamerennost' i deiatel'nost'" ("Good Intentions and Activity") Dobroliubov takes the opposite view. This article was cited above for its comments on how noble principles are actually natural. Dobroliubov uses this argument to excoriate the ineffectual liberal gentry for priding themselves on empty principles in the absence of any tangible deeds. So in this article Dobroliubov clearly yearns for a positive alternative to the superfluous gentry type, and he also apparently believes that a positive individual is normal. One might expect him, then, to call on realist literature to present such a depiction just as he did in "Spring." But in "Good Intentions" Dobroliubov's realism gets the better of him. By the end of the article, he admits that Russian literature is not yet ready to portray positive characters, since the desired type has not appeared yet in reality: "видно, еще не пришло время создания деятельных и твердых и в то же время честных характеров в нашей литературе" 'evidently, the time has not yet come for the creation of active and firm and at the same time honest characters in our literature' (6:207). Dobroliubov contents himself with one of his usual attempts to find at least some virtue in an essentially negative situation: since authors cannot present positive heroes, he asks them to at least approach their undesirable heroes with an ironic rather than a sympathetic attitude. In "Good Intentions," Dobroliubov's forward-looking impatience collides with his disillusioned view of reality, and the latter wins out.

So which approach prevails in the end, the sober resignation or the no-holds-barred call for positive transformation? One might expect that the statements in "Spring" are just an aberration, since in almost every other case Dobroliubov stops himself from asking literature to portray any ideal that does not already exist in reality. But in fact the thirst for a positive hero begins to dominate in some of the last publications of Dobroliubov's short lifetime. He never openly abandons his realist aesthetic, but he does stretch his concepts of the real and of the ideal farther than he ever has before in his attempt to finally find a positive yet realistic hero in Russian literature. Perhaps Dobroliubov's impending death from tuberculosis motivated his growing urgency. He must have realized that he would not be able to wait until the younger generation grew up or until the small advances traced in earlier articles bore fruit in concrete revolutionary action. If Dobroliubov was going to witness the arrival of the positive hero, it would have to happen on an accelerated time scale. Thus, at the end of 1860, Dobroliubov writes two articles that hail the actual presence of a supposedly positive heroine in supposedly realist literature. In the first instance, he makes his interpretation work by accepting a drastically

implausible version of reality; in the second instance, he locates the desired heroine only because he employs a bizarre notion of what constitutes positive action.

5. "Traits for the Characterization of the Russian Common Folk": Village Girl as Positive Hero

The first solidly positive image that Dobroliubov finds is described in the article "Cherty dlia kharakteristiki russkogo prostonarod'ia" ("Traits for the Characterization of the Russian Common Folk"), published in fall 1860. In this article Dobroliubov reviews a short story collection by the Ukrainian writer Maria Vilinska, who published under the pseudonym Marko Vovchok. In particular, Dobroliubov draws our attention to a remarkable Russian peasant girl named Masha, a character in one of Vovchok's stories who happens to embody most of the characteristics that he and Chernyshevsky attribute to the positive hero. Even as a small child, this extraordinary girl constantly questions the customs she observes around her. Her independent mind and sense of personal dignity make it impossible for her to accept that the local noblewoman has power over the lives of the peasants, and consequently she steadfastly refuses to perform any work for her mistress, choosing instead to pine away inside her aunt's home while feigning sickness. One day, however, she learns that the mistress will allow her to buy her freedom. She then sets to work with unmatched energy, wins her independence and finds happiness. Dobroliubov points to Masha as a shining example of all the humanist values he admires most: a sense of self-respect and personal independence, love for freedom, a capacity for critical thought, and an awareness of one's inborn rights as a human being. Apparently, the positive hero is not only a woman, as was the case for the previous figures Dobroliubov admired, but also a member of the peasant class. In fact the overall ideological point of Dobroliubov's article is to argue that Russian peasants deserve to be treated as fellow-citizens whose moral and mental capacities are equal or even superior to those of the upper classes. This argument was directed against conservative voices who claimed that the common folk could not handle the autonomy that would come with emancipation and needed always to be guided by their masters. Dobroliubov, following his usual tendency to read literature as data from real life, assumes that Masha is an accurate representation of the Russian peasantry and points to her as evidence that the common people deserve our respect. In the process he also suggests that, by looking to the common people, we can finally find inspiring and uncompromising positive heroes who are also realistic.

But how can Dobroliubov claim that Masha is realistic? The case for her positive features is obvious, but she seems too extraordinary to be accepted as a faithful depiction of the Russian peasantry. Fyodor Dostoevsky, for example, while attacking Dobroliubov's critical positions in the article "Mr. -bov and the Question of Art," scoffed at the notion that Vovchok's characters were plausible: "Что это за люди? Люди ли это, наконец? Где это происходит… на Луне?" 'What sort of people are these? Are they even people, in the end? Where does this take place… on the moon?' (18:90).[14] And Dobroliubov himself recognizes this problem: he writes that many

[14] Dobroliubov responded to Dostoevsky's derision in "Zabitie liudi" ("Downtrodden People," 1861), the last article he published before his death. In this article, a review of *Poor Folk*, Dobroliubov turns the tables on Dostoevsky. Dobroliubov claims that Dostoevsky's writing is very poor when judged by his own "artistic" standards. Dostoevsky's art, Dobroliubov claims, only has value for its social realism, i.e. only when judged by the standards of the radical realist camp. This whole dispute masks the fact that the two were not actually very strongly opposed in

readers will view Vovchok's tale as "фантазия" 'fantasy' and "идиллия" 'idyll' (6:235). But he manages to evade the problem of implausibility by turning to one of the logical tricks that I described earlier as one of the key components of his realist aesthetic. Namely, Dobroliubov insists that Masha's characteristics are the normal and natural traits of any properly developed human being. Using the same tactics found in "Dark Kingdom," "Russian Civilization as Told by Mr. Zherebtsov," or "Good Intentions and Activity," Dobroliubov claims that a desire for independence arises irrepressibly in any human being. The love for freedom, he writes, is "ничем незаглушимое" 'impossible to smother' (6:229); in a vivid image, he compares the human desire for freedom to a spring that rebounds as soon as the external oppressing force is removed (6:237). Human nature, Dobroliubov insists, cannot be crushed to the point where "в ней не осталось и следа естественных инстинктов" 'not even a trace of natural instincts remained in it' (6:237), and therefore Masha's story "казался вполне нормальным и понятным для всякого, знакомого с крестьянской жизнью" 'appeared fully normal and understandable for anyone who is familiar with peasant life' (6:236). In these lines Dobroliubov's usual references to "life" and "reality" are replaced by references to the "natural" and the "normal," and thus his usual empirical measure of what *is* true is exchanged for a subtly normative notion of what *should* be true according to a presumably Rousseau-derived theory of the uncorrupted human being. By shifting to this alternative measure of verisimilitude, Dobroliubov finds a sophistic yet compelling way to argue that this seemingly extraordinary character is plausible.

Dobroliubov's review of Vovchok's stories provides a fine example of how the discourse of the natural and the normal can be exploited to claim that idealized literary representations are fully plausible. This tactic was certainly one of the more promising tools available in Dobroliubov's theoretical repertoire of progressive realism. But "Traits for the Characterization of the Russian Common Folk" also reveals how weak the "naturalizing" approach is in practice: almost any reader can see through the argument and realize that these perfectly "normal" human beings are quite different from the flawed human beings of reality. And Dobroliubov himself apparently was not satisfied with the superficial successes derived from claiming that the ideal is normal. In most of his other work, he displays both a more grounded sense of reality and a sharper critical judgment than we see in his review of Vovchok. The fact that Dobroliubov departed here from his usually reliable aesthetic judgment, while resorting to one of his more skepticism-inducing theoretical arguments, underlines how he was becoming increasingly desperate to do whatever it takes to finally glimpse the positive hero. "Traits for the Characterization of the Russian Common Folk" is an anomaly born of revolutionary impatience. In the next issue of *The Contemporary*, Dobroliubov will find a way to satisfy his desire for a positive hero that better fits his aesthetic inclinations. This time, he will remain firm in his standards for realism and empirical mimesis, and instead of an implausible vision of reality he will give us an incredibly distended version of the ideal.

6. "A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness": An Unlikely Revolutionary Hero

In "Luch sveta v temnom tsarstve" ("A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness") Dobroliubov finally locates the full-fledged positive heroine. In this article, published in late

---

their aesthetic views. Dobroliubov certainly valued artistry and Dostoevsky certainly was interested in social realism. See chapter four for more on the parallels between Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky.

1860, he returns to the work of Alexander Ostrovsky and focuses solely on his recent masterpiece, the tragedy *Groza* (*The Storm*). This play is unlikely material for an optimistic interpretation: it presents the spectacle of a young woman of the merchant class who is ruined by an extramarital affair. Yet in this text Dobroliubov joyfully perceives the "ray of light" that was so persistently unavailable in the "dark kingdom" he had described just over a year earlier. Katerina, the protagonist of *Groza*, is for Dobroliubov an unambiguously positive figure, the concrete manifestation of the revolutionary ideals he has been anticipating so eagerly. Katerina, in Dobroliubov's view, is far superior to the mildly promising, yet faulty heroes of earlier literary texts, such as Oblomov, Olga or Elena—yet at the same time she is absolutely realistic.

In "Ray of Light," rather than resort to the dubious tactics of the Vovchok review, Dobroliubov marshals all the other elements of his mimetic-progressive theory in order to robustly support the notion that Katerina is both remarkable and real. Almost the whole first half of the article is devoted to theoretical exposition. Here Dobroliubov expresses some of his familiar core ideas in particularly direct and strong formulations. His central conviction, of course, is that the imitation of reality, life, or truth—he uses all synonyms available—is the foundation of artistic talent. Literature is defined by "верност[ь] действительной жизни" 'faithfulness to real life' (6:305), and the one quality "без которого в ней не может быть никаких достоинств" 'without which it can have no merit at all' is "правд[а]" 'truth' (6:310). The progressive mission of literature also comes out very sharply in this article. In an unusually stark formulation, Dobroliubov calls literature a "силу служебную, которой значение состоит в пропаганде" "auxiliary power, whose significance consists in propaganda' (6:309). It soon becomes clear, however, that Dobroliubov is not taking a more extreme stance here than anywhere else. He assures us as usual that literature should not be composed with a deliberate intention in mind (6:312-13); literature is "propaganda" only in the sense that it contributes to social progress by mirroring reality accurately. Meanwhile, Dobroliubov deploys all his usual methods to bring the mimetic and the progressive roles of literature into harmony. For example, he indicates that "reality" actually refers to the subjective aspirations of human striving: texts can be evaluated, he says, according to the degree to which they "служат… выражением естественных стремлений известного времени и народа" 'serve as the expression of the natural aspirations of a certain time or a certain nation' (6:307). The article also betrays Dobroliubov's strong sense of the forward movement of reality. He describes how he senses an intense atmosphere of progress all around him (6:318-19), and he directs literature to portray this advance, the "движение, совершающееся в человечестве" 'movement occurring in humanity' (6:311), and to portray the more progressive members of society (6:308-9). Finally, the article is permeated with Dobroliubov's conviction that an independent, freedom-loving character is also a normal and natural character. In particular, as seen in the quotation just above, he constantly notes that literature is interested in the "natural" strivings of people. However, Dobroliubov does not push the argument about the "normal" ideal to the literal extreme seen in the review of Vovchok. He uses this argument to establish that Katerina's heroic character is at least possible, but he also admits that the real does not live up to the natural ideal, that "здравые, простые понятия о вещах" 'healthy, simple conceptions of things' are "искажены… во многих" 'distorted… in many' (6:313). As so, in the first part of "Ray of Light," Dobroliubov draws on a well-balanced combination of all of his theoretical positions in order to set the stage for the introduction of the heroic yet realistic character, the character who is true to life yet also points us forward, who embodies the reality-based strivings of humanity, and who represents the avant-garde of the forward movement of history.

In the second part of the article, Dobroliubov describes the supposed heroine who fits this multi-layered theoretical model. In Ostrovsky's Katerina, Dobroliubov perceives the same positive traits he has championed elsewhere. Katerina is decisive, self-confident, and self-sacrificing; she possesses a natural regard for truth and human dignity; and she prefers practical considerations over abstract principles (6:334-39). Admittedly, she comes from an obscure background, and has hardly been exposed to any education or any expansive influences that would suggest a way out of her repressive environment. But Dobroliubov makes a virtue out of her lack of cultivation. Since Katerina's positive qualities come to her on the basis of instinct rather than logic, he suggests, she is able to uphold her convictions more steadfastly than others do. Her natural, uncalculated character also supposedly arises from her gender. Women, in Dobroliubov's view, live immediately and directly, making up for their lack of self-awareness with their instinctually healthy yearnings. Dobroliubov thus builds up Katerina's character to quite lofty heights. But by reminding us that her desires are only natural, and that such human striving is the core feature of reality, Dobroliubov encourages us to view her as a plausible character, whose childhood circumstances just happened to give her a slightly stronger sense of natural human aspiration than is present in many around her. Katerina, then, is the promising indication of a new independent spirit that is just beginning to emerge in Russia; she is the first "ray of light" that disturbs the old systems of petty tyranny. Katerina's appearance in literature assures Dobroliubov that change is no longer a subjective yearning or a vague desire. In his view, if Ostrovsky portrayed Katerina, then it must be because the revolutionary character genuinely exists in a tangible manifestation in life. Dobroliubov happily notes how, in *Groza*, the characters who represent ignorance and repression seem much more uneasy than in Ostrovsky's earlier work and complain of their fading influence. Change is on its way.

But just what is the deed that confirms for Dobroliubov that Katerina truly represents the revolutionary character? What is the action that strikes a resounding blow against the forces of the dark kingdom? Katerina's heroic deed is suicide. She throws herself into the Volga River once her adulterous affair is discovered. Dobroliubov, combining a juvenile and melodramatic admiration for suicide with his usual ability to find cheerful implications in depressing situations, presents Katerina's drowning death as a bold act of defiance. For him, Katerina's act announces that the oppressed masses will no longer put up with the status quo. They refuse to live any longer under the current system, and if there is no way out, they will choose death over the loss of personal dignity. Dobroliubov describes how suicide is the result of Katerina's noble and resolute character: "Он сосредоточенно-решителен, неуклонно верен чутью естественной правды, исполнен веры в новые идеалы, в том смысле, что ему лучше гибель, нежели жизнь при тех началах, которые ему противны" 'It is focused and decisive, undeviatingly faithful to the sense of natural truth, full of faith in new ideals, in the sense that it prefers to perish rather than live on the basis of tenets that it finds disgusting' (6:337). In Dobroliubov's reading, suicide is an offensive tactic, not a surrender. And if Katerina, a provincial and unremarkable young woman, has become fed up with the state of affairs, then surely, Dobroliubov implies, the peasantry likewise will soon rise in rebellion. As in previous articles, Dobroliubov gets carried away at the positive implications he extracts from domestic tragedy: "Вот истинная сила характера, на которую во всяком случае можно положиться!" 'Here is true strength of character, which one can depend on in any event!' (6:352). And in conclusion: "какою же отрадною, свежею жизнью веет на нас здоровая личность, находящая в себе решимость покончить с этой гнилою жизнью во что бы то ни стало!" 'What joyous, fresh life wafts out at us from this healthy personality, finding in itself the resolve to put an end to this

rotten life no matter what it takes!' (6:362). Dobroliubov ends his article by reveling in the joyous spectacle of a young woman driven to suicide, and in the unparalleled strength of character this act supposedly represents. By putting forth such a perverted image of the ideal, "Ray of the Light" becomes the ultimate expression of Dobroliubov's desperate need to locate tangible progressive movement within a dismal reality. Only by employing such a downgraded version of the positive hero is Dobroliubov able to claim that he has found the change he desires within the parameters of actual Russian life.

In previous writings, Dobroliubov would eventually back down from his joyful exclamations and acknowledge that the slight positive movements he discerns in various texts are still far inferior to the revolutionary ideal. But in "Ray of Light" Dobroliubov's need for an unambiguously positive image overrides his sober assessment of reality, and thus his joyous conclusions remain untainted. In this article, Dobroliubov has finally found the positive-realist hero, and his approaching death leaves him no time to once again back down and postpone the appearance of the genuine hero. In this late article, published only a year before his death, Dobroliubov appears to us as Moses on Mount Pisgah, granted a glimpse of the promised land—i.e. the revolutionary hero—just before death. But Dobroliubov's promised land, unfortunately, is one that is largely manufactured in his imagination. Dobroliubov may believe that he has managed to locate the positive heroine without violating his realist aesthetic. But readers perceive that he has done so only by drastically lowering his standard for the positive ideal. Only an interpretation as crazy as this triumphant reading of suicide succeeds finally in making the progressive ideal visible in mid-nineteenth-century Russia.

CONCLUSION

Dobroliubov's attempt to define a socially progressive realist literature succeeds to a greater extent than the eighteenth century's effort to delineate morally edifying imitations of nature. While adhering to a more strict concept of mimesis than his counterparts a century earlier, Dobroliubov permits massive adjustments in his understanding of the real, his expectations for literary agency, and most of all in his standards for the ideal. By combining his dynamic view of the real with his hands-off concept of literary agency and with a concept of the ideal that is either naturalized or downgraded, Dobroliubov easily sidesteps all the obstacles that usually stymie a theory of progressive realism. He produces a multipart theory of visionary mimesis that provides numerous paths for the reconciliation of the real and the ideal. But in the end his victory is dubious. For if the eighteenth-century critics suffered from the problem that their theoretical model was too strict to function in practice, Dobroliubov confronts the opposite problem: his model is too flexible to be satisfying. All of the theoretical attenuations that Dobroliubov allows weaken the progressive impact of the texts he celebrates. Dobroliubov's model functions only by sacrificing its progressive intensity, which turns his theoretical triumph into a Pyrrhic victory.

Dobroliubov runs into the dissatisfying aspects of his model once he applies it in works of practical criticism. The problem is that his theory either entirely excludes the concrete representation of a positive ideal, relying only on negative images to spur social engagement, or

else permits only the most limited positive portrayals or merely the presentation of intangible, subjective aspirations. Such a gradual, step by step approach is strongly supported by Dobroliubov in his early writings. But as his career advances he cannot suppress his desire for more tangible and inspiring embodiments of progress than can be found in Ostrovsky's "dark kingdom" or in Oblomov's dissolute apathy.[15] Dobroliubov's heightened expectations, however, constantly bump up against his stubborn commitment to objective mimesis. Dobroliubov's realist aesthetic will permit only the most paltry and vague representations of progressive potential. If he is truly going to find a positive hero or heroine, then, Dobroliubov's only recourse is to drastically exaggerate the positive significance of the dreary images he finds in contemporary Russian literature, a trend that starts with Oblomov and Elena and culminates when he hails Katerina's suicide as a triumphant rebellion. Alternatively, as we saw in his reading of Marko Vovchok, Dobroliubov could put forth a ridiculous version of reality in order to convince himself that an idealized caricature is true to Russian life—but his strong empirical grounding prevents him from resorting more than once to this option. Whichever route he takes, Dobroliubov has to make severe concessions in order to maintain the impression that his model of progressive realism is viable and is manifesting itself in contemporary literature. Thus he stays true to his theoretical model to the end, but only via forced readings of texts that could not succeed at progressive realism without being revamped in the critic's interpretation. We readers perceive the strains behind Dobroliubov's unlikely interpretations and realize that he is confronting the same difficult options that faced earlier proponents of this contradictory literary configuration: either the real gives way to utopia, or the ideal lowers itself down to earth. Dobroliubov chooses the latter option, while deluding himself that his heroines are grandly inspiring and that his theory is uncompromised.

Dobroliubov's criticism may be full of theoretical fault lines, but that only makes his work all the more interesting. His leading pieces of criticism are rhetorically powerful and politically passionate, and even if they twist the text into an ideological mold, they do make their points by exploiting rather than ignoring the detailed substance of the texts at hand. Unlike Chernyshevsky, whose orientation was frequently much more political than literary, Dobroliubov does not let the text disappear when he turns it into a political argument; instead he gives the text a lively and compelling new image, albeit a distended one. Meanwhile, the distortions to which Dobroliubov is driven are ingenious enough to make us marvel at the intractable difficulties of his literary-political project. As the sole "radical" critic for whom literature always remained in the foreground, Dobroliubov is our best source if we want to fully understand the literary and aesthetic, and not just the cultural, implications of mid-nineteenth-century Russian criticism. Chernyshevsky and Pisarev also dealt heavily with literature, but they seem to have done so primarily because literary criticism was the only safe outlet for political discourse; Dobroliubov is the figure whose political and literary interests were evenly matched. And thus his work offers us a new version of the project of "visionary mimesis" or of "progressive realism" that we can set alongside the eighteenth-century options. Dobroliubov's writings demonstrate how a century's

[15] It may seem that Dobroliubov's career is too short to be given a substantial arc of development. But the problems he confronts did not require a long period of incubation in order to emerge. Dobroliubov adopted the mimetic and socially progressive tenets already prepared for him and inevitably encountered their contradictions as soon as he applied them in intellectually honest practical criticism. Moreover, it is certainly plausible that a young revolutionarily-minded person would be impatient enough to very quickly begin to demand concrete action rather than mere potential. The sense of his approaching death would have only increased Dobroliubov's impatience and would have spurred an even faster intensification of his progressive urgency.

worth of change in the understanding of history, of reality and of the wished-for ideal opened up multiple fruitful routes for the reconciliation of the present and the future orientations in literature. But his work also shows how the underlying conflicts of visionary mimesis remain intractable despite all these cultural changes.

Just as Dobroliubov was dying, Fyodor Dostoevsky was beginning to renew the literary career that had been interrupted by his years of imprisonment and exile. By the time he returned to St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky had lost his taste for overtly political forms of social engagement, and eventually he wrote some of the harshest criticisms of the world view of the radical critics. Politically Dostoevsky had little in common with the radicals, but his aesthetic inclinations had a remarkably similar configuration. In his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky, like Dobroliubov, will try to work out the contours of a "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism." But he will be writing in a religious, not a political vein. His novel will aim to depict the kingdom of heaven on earth, and in doing so will engage in the intricate maneuverings that always accompany the project of "progressive realism."

Chapter 4

The Strangeness of Reality and the Pursuit of the Golden Age in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 1879-80) emerges from the same structure of motivations that shaped the work of Gottsched, Wieland and Dobroliubov as described in previous chapters: the novel aims to depict the positive hero in a realist, attainable mode, thus generating all the tensions between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the present and the future, and the plausible and the utopian that were characteristic of Dostoevsky's predecessors in the hybrid genre that I call "visionary mimesis" or—in the nineteenth-century context—"progressive realism."

Two passages from *The Brothers Karamazov* make the parallels with the preceding tradition particularly apparent. The first passage is the moment when we are told that Alyosha could just as easily have become a socialist as a religious acolyte. As the description of him makes clear, Alyosha belongs to the type of the passionate, uncompromising, youthful idealist, "честный по природе своей, требующий правды, ищущий ее и верующий в нее, а уверовав, требующий немедленного участия в ней всею силой души своей" 'honest by nature, demanding the truth, seeking it and believing in it, and, having once believed, demanding immediate participation in it with all the strength of his soul' (14:25).[1] Alyosha has found the "truth" he seeks in a Christian faith, but a simple change in focus, the narrator says, could have led him to socialism: "если бы он порешил, что бессмертия и бога нет, то сейчас бы пошел в атеисты и в социалисты" 'if he had decided that immortality and God do not exist, he would immediately have joined the atheists and socialists' (ibid.). This comment places Alyosha in the same category as the positive heroes of the radical tradition, whether Chernyshevsky's Lopukhov and Rakhmetov, Turgenev's Insarov, or all the socialist revolutionaries whom Dobroliubov dreamed of but never convincingly found in literature. Like these heroes, Alyosha is driven by a selfless and abolutist commitment to a higher cause. Although Alyosha's goal differs from theirs, he is, so to speak, merely a different "flavor" of the same idealistic character type, and his portrayal in a realist novel generates the same structural conflicts encountered in the socialist or atheist version of the positive hero mode. The switch from a political to a religious goal is of course central to the thematic preoccupations of Dostoevsky's novel, but the general pattern is

[1] All quotations from Dostoevsky are from the 30-volume *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1972-1990). For the English translations, I have drawn on Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's version of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Kenneth Lantz's rendering of *A Writer's Diary*, and the *Complete Letters* edited by David A. Lowe. I occasionally modified their translations. All translations from the Russian not available in the above-mentioned volumes are my own.

the same; thus Alyosha, even as he appears as an alternative to the radical positive hero, is also very much a continuation of the same tradition.

One aim of this chapter, then, is to place *The Brothers Karamazov* more firmly in the positive hero tradition than is usually the case, and thereby to highlight the strong similarities between Dostoevsky's approach to art and that of the radical critics who are usually seen as his ideological and aesthetic opponents. Dostoevsky's connection with Dobroliubov, for example, is most likely to be seen through the prism of his 1861 article "Mr. –bov and the Question of Art" ("Gospodin –bov i vopros ob iskusstve"), in which Dostoevsky criticizes Dobroliubov and his associates at *The Contemporary* for their narrow views on the social utility of art. This polemical article presents a distorted view of Dobroliubov's literary views[2] and also corresponds only very loosely to Dostoevsky's own practice as a writer of fiction; it thus presents an inaccurate picture of the relation between these two cultural figures. Dostoevsky and Dobroliubov may have been opponents in their political and social outlook, but they often parallel each other in their approach to literature.[3] Both writers were preoccupied with visions for the transformation of human life and expressed confidence that history was steadily advancing toward this transformation. Both hoped that literature could promote the remaking of the world by providing concrete portrayals of new, positive human types. On this point, the "Mr. –bov" article is misleading, for in it—on a purely theoretical level—Dostoevsky champions a subtle, indirect form of aesthetic education via objects of beauty such as the Apollo Belvedere (18:78). Dostoevsky's fictional writings, however, demonstrate that he was drawn toward a much more direct form of didacticism based on the immediate portrayal of positive and negative character models. Alongside their progressive vision for literature, both Dostoevsky and Dobroliubov were also deeply committed to the realist aesthetic of their time. Dostoevsky's view of realism certainly had peculiarities, which will be discussed below, but his mature novels delve into the unattractive, unstable and problematic facets of contemporary social life in a way that roughly matches the tenets of Dobroliubov's "real criticism." Finally, both Dostoevsky and Dobroliubov experienced the inevitable difficulties of combining a realist and a visionary aesthetic, and their careers followed a similar trajectory in responding to this conflict. The previous chapter described how Dobroliubov was initially satisfied with a purely negative, "critical" realism, but then ended his career by enthusiastically celebrating what was, in his view, the fully realized depiction of a true positive hero—and he strained his critical ingenuity to the utmost in order to finally achieve such a positive interpretation. Likewise, Dostoevsky, in his admittedly much longer career, initially tended toward the negative portrayal of fragmented characters and harmful ideologies, then gradually became more interested in the portrayal of the "good person," and finally crowned his career, just before his death, with the novel in which he made his best effort to embody his most idealistic strivings in positive character types. Both Dostoevsky and Dobroliubov were driven by their attachment to a transcendent yet difficult and elusive positive vision. The two writers, then, are not so much opposed to each other as running in parallel tracks:

---

[2] For example, Dostoevsky claims that the radical critics ignore artistry, but Dobroliubov consistently emphasizes the importance of artistic technique (e.g. *Sobranie sochinenii* 6:194); Dostoevsky also claims that the radicals eliminate the independence of art, but Dobroliubov is disturbed by art that allows itself to be reduced to a didactic treatise (e.g. *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:162). See the previous chapter for more detail on Dobroliubov's aesthetic views. Dobroliubov replied to Dostoevsky's attack with the article "Zabitie liudi" ("Downtrodden People," 1861), in which he criticizes Dostoevsky's supposedly poor artistry and claims his work only has value as social realism. This entire dispute masks the fact that the two were not so far apart in their aesthetic views.

[3] A point also made by Terras (*Belinskij* 254) and Moser (*Esthetics as Nightmare* 225).

although one pursued a sociopolitical and the other a spiritual ideal, they absorb and respond in similar ways to the rich intersection of visionary and realist ideologies that characterized mid-nineteenth-century Russian culture. Thus we can take the passage quoted earlier that links Alyosha to the socialists as a hint of how to understand Dostoevsky as well: he too was of the same type as the atheist radicals—and nearly became one in his youth[4]—and differed only in having chosen a Christian rather than a socialist utopia as his guiding ideal.

This combination of transformative zeal and an empirical literary aesthetic, as I have argued earlier, was not confined to nineteenth-century Realism. Another quotation from *The Brothers Karamazov* resonates with that eighteenth-century version of the positive hero, Wieland's Agathon. In the chapter that introduces us to Alyosha, the narrator warns us not to dismiss this youth as an otherworldly idealist: "Прежде всего объявляю, что этот юноша, Алеша, был вовсе не фанатик и, по-моему, по крайней мере, даже и не мистик вовсе" 'First of all I announce that this young man, Alyosha, was not at all a fanatic, and, in my view at least, even not at all a mystic' (14:27). The start of the following chapter continues the effort to present Alyosha as a pragmatic realist: "Может быть, кто из читателей подумает, что мой молодой человек был болезненная, экстазная, бедно развитая натура, бледный мечтатель, чахлый и испитой человечек. Напротив, Алеша был в то время статный, краснощекий, со светлым взором, пышущий здоровьем девятнадцатилетний подросток" 'Perhaps some of my readers will think that my young man was a sickly, ecstatic, poorly developed type, a pale dreamer, a puny, emaciated little person. On the contrary, Alyosha was at that time a well-built, red-cheeked nineteen-year-old youth, clear-eyed and bursting with health' (14:24). These two passages are the counterweight to the passage cited earlier, in which the narrator told us that Alyosha has an idealistic character similar to that of the socialists. While that passage established Alyosha's credentials as a progressive, striving activist, here the narrator pulls Alyosha back down to earth, assuring us that the young man is a flourishing inhabitant of the real, physical world. In doing so, Dostoevsky's narrator echoes the protestations that Wieland's narrator made about Agathon and carries out the same delicate positioning of the youthful character. Recall that the aim of Wieland's novel was to demonstrate that young Agathon could be virtuous without succumbing to mystical Platonism or a dreamy *Schwärmerei*; similarly, Dostoevsky's narrator deliberately conjures away the dreaded appellations of "fanatic," "mystic" or "dreamer," implicitly suggesting that Alyosha is truly a possible model for a life lived in the real world. Taken together, these two passages from the initial characterization of Alyosha—one that links him to the idealistic progressives, and another that emphasizes his pragmatism—establish him squarely within the tradition of the plausible positive hero, a hero who struggles to balance the ordinary and the extraordinary, the transformative and the real. At the same time the passages make subtle links to the earlier literary-critical tradition of what I call "progressive realism," links that result not from the overt influence of Wieland or Dobroliubov, but from the fact that *The Brothers Karamazov* picks up on similar motifs as it pursues the perennially unresolved project of trying to establish a literary foothold for the new world within the current one.

The point here, however, is not just to establish that *The Brothers Karamazov* belongs to the tradition of "progressive realism," but to describe how the novel navigates the complex challenges of this aesthetic, to evaluate whether Dostoevsky is more or less successful than

[4] Joseph Frank discusses the evidence that Dostoevsky, besides participating in the relatively moderate Petrashevsky group, actually joined a more aggressive secret revolutionary cell led by Nikolai Speshnev (*Seeds of Revolt* 267-269).

Gottsched, Wieland and Dobroliubov at working out a way for an exemplary hero to be empirically plausible, and finally to consider whether interpreting *The Brothers Karamazov* from this perspective offers any new insight into the critical problems of the novel. To answer these questions, I will first delve into some of Dostoevsky's nonfictional writings in order to establish the conceptual framework from which *The Brothers Karamazov* emerged. As usual, I will consider Dostoevsky's understandings of the real and of the ideal together with his views on the imitation of the real and the promotion of the ideal within literature, and I will find the areas of conceptual flexibility or rigidity that either promote or hinder the successful achievement of progressive realism within *The Brothers Karamazov*. For Dostoevsky's stance on realism, I will analyze some of the well-known statements from his correspondence. The main point that emerges from these passages is the conception of the real world as a world of extremities, which leads to a literary realism based on the imitation of exceptional cases. With this version of realism, Dostoevsky goes a long way toward uniting the opposed poles of imitation and transformation—and also replicates one of the moves made by Gottsched in his eighteenth-century attempts to unite imitation with didacticism. Next, in order to illuminate Dostoevsky's understanding of the ideal, I will turn to the evocations of the "golden age" found in the *Diary of a Writer*. Here Dostoevsky displays a wonderfully unresolved ambiguity about the attainability of the golden age: it is at the same time incredibly simple to achieve, yet also a near impossibility.

Dostoevsky's distinctive views on realism and the golden age generate the world represented in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The novel maps out a path that transforms the golden age from an impossibility into an attainable way of life. It does so by drawing on the imitation of extremes, challenging readers to accept that the extraordinary characters in the novel are—or can be—part of the real world; at the same time, the novel seeks to gently ease readers toward accepting a remarkable Christian ideal by presenting graduated versions of that ideal. One of the main structural features that the novel draws on as it tries to bridge the dichotomy of "progressive realism" is the creation of a collective hero: the role of protagonist is distributed among several individual characters. This collective hero device breaks apart some of the intractable oppositions usually encountered in the attempt to create a hero who is both ordinary and exemplary. The multiple protagonists provide multiple sites for exploring intersections of the ideal and the real and for trying out the various ways in which a moral transfiguration can combine with prosaic human limitations. Alyosha, therefore, should not be the sole or even the main focus of an investigation into Dostoevsky's creation of a positive hero, even though he is often the first character who springs to mind in this respect. The analysis below will take into account a progression of heroes that runs from Zosima through Alyosha to Dmitri, Grushenka, Ivan and numerous other minor characters. My reading will focus particularly on Dmitri and his female counterpart Grushenka, for if we are interested particularly in a *plausible* version of the positive hero, these two characters represent the most successful combination of the transformative and the ordinary. Both are strikingly presented as mixed characters and as the Russian "everyman" or "everywoman." In this role they go far beyond the merely "external" plot role that Dostoevsky's narrator assigned to them[5]: they carry an important ideological function in that they offer an accessible model of human behavior as an alternative to the extremes represented by Zosima, Alyosha or Ivan. Even as Dmitri and Grushenka take on this key

[5] See 14:12, where the narrator tells us that Dmitri's quarrel with his father is only the "внешн[ая] сторон[а]" 'external side' of the novel.

conceptual role, Alyosha is pushed away from center stage because of the peculiar way the novel constructs him as the hero of a never-written future volume.

My analysis will also touch on a few other aspects of Dostoevsky's intellectual outlook that influenced his pursuit of "progressive realism," such as his faith in historical progress, his gradualist approach to change, and his occasional suggestions that the ideal is actually more "natural" than reality; some of these are ideas that the radical critics also drew on in their pursuit of a realistic positive hero. Taken together, Dostoevsky's aesthetic and philosophical views and the unique structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* allow him to achieve at least a partial success in the project of "progressive realism." As is often the case, the extremes of a visionary idealism and a principled realism do prove to be too far-flung to be spanned with complete facility, but *The Brothers Karamazov* does give us several positive and plausible heroes who are more holistic than Gottsched's fragmented mimetic-didactic theory, more stable than Wieland's Agathon and more believable than Dobroliubov's interpretation of Ostrovsky's Katerina. The specific contours of this idiosyncratic achievement will be explored below.

PART I: DOSTOEVSKY'S AESTHETICS

1. Qualifying Dostoevsky's Realism: Review of Scholarship

W. J. Leatherbarrow claims that the question of Dostoevsky's realism is the "single most persistent leitmotif of Dostoevsky criticism" (*Reference* xv). While this sweeping assessment could be questioned, it is certainly true that Dostoevsky's relationship to the rising realist aesthetic of the "natural school" was one of the *first* themes in his critical reception. The leading critic Vissarion Belinsky's exuberant embrace of and subsequent disillusionment with Dostoevsky turned on precisely this question, as the humanitarian naturalism of *Poor Folk* (Dostoevsky's sensational debut novella) gave way to what Belinsky saw as a repellent use of the fantastic in Dostoevsky's next major work, *The Double* (Belinsky 10:41-42). This early wavering between aesthetic modes makes for a fitting start to Dostoevsky's career, since the never-quite-clarified relationship between a gritty social realism and a psychologically inflected, semi-fantastic extremism became a recurring issue in Dostoevsky's fictional work and its reception. By the time Dostoevsky was writing his major novels, the stylistic unevenness of his earlier work had settled into an equilibrium in which literally fantastic elements are consistently avoided, yet at the same time contemporary life is presented in a certain heightened, compressed mode that often gives an otherworldly metaphysical intensity to the plot and characters. This idiosyncratic fictional method not only gave rise to occasional charges of implausibility from Dostoevsky's contemporaries, but has also spurred numerous attempts in the subsequent critical literature to describe the unique features of Dostoevsky's fictional method—an endeavor both encouraged and complicated by several cryptic aesthetic pronouncements in Dostoevsky's correspondence and notebooks.

For example, Donald Fanger argues that Dostoevsky was heir to the "romantic realism" of Balzac, Gogol and Dickens, a style characterized by the use of mystery, dramatic contrasts and grotesque characters, all of which were applied primarily to the portrayal of urban life in all its extremities. Joseph Frank claims that the verisimilitude of Dostoevsky's work is strained by

"ideological eschatology," an approach in which an idea is pushed to extremes and then dramatized in a concrete literary situation in order to reveal the ultimate consequences of the idea (*Liberation* 248). Frank suggests that this method uses melodrama in order to get at "eternal" concerns hidden in the "ephemeral" (*Liberation* 51) or to extract the larger moral-philosophical implications of our everyday actions (*Miraculous Years* 315, 351). Soviet critics, on the other hand, during the periods when it was politically viable to speak positively of Dostoevsky at all, tended to underline the facets of his work that bolstered rather than complicated his realist credentials, while underlining the ways that Dostoevsky's realism can function as a critique of capitalism. A. V. Lunacharsky, for example, as part of his efforts in the 1920s to repackage the Russian cultural heritage for the Bolshevik regime, celebrated Dostoevsky's work as an accurate portrayal of capitalism's destabilizing, alienating effects on the individual personality. G. M. Fridlender's 1964 monograph *Realizm Dostoevskogo* (*Dostoevsky's Realism*) similarly emphasizes that Dostoevsky's fiction depicts immediate contemporary life, that all of the larger themes of his work are inspired by an engagement with current social developments, and that the main effect of his realism is to expose the destructive impact of bourgeois capitalism (3, 365-98). And the 1917 article "Problemy realizma u Dostoevskogo" ("Problems of Realism in Dostoevsky") by the major early Dostoevsky scholar Leonid Grossman presents a precise and compelling case for Dostoevsky's essential realist orientation. Grossman points to Dostoevsky's interest in current events, his habit of researching the accurate portrayal of certain episodes, and his facility in portraying the material world and physical appearances.

But even the Soviet critics most invested in Dostoevsky's realism note its idiosyncrasies. Fridlender's 1972 article on Dostoevsky's aesthetics acknowledges that Dostoevsky's realism has a "fantastic" element which Fridlender argues is necessary to adequately portray the unhealthy contradictions of capitalist society ("Estetika" 125). And Grossman notes that Dostoevsky is fond of Gothic atmospheres, occult themes, and impressionistic scenes set amid flickering light, and concludes that these intensifying methods are necessary in order to give the literary representation the same impact as genuine reality. If we turn back to English-language scholarship, we find even more variations on the theme of Dostoevsky's idiosyncratic realism. Leatherbarrow's 1992 study of *The Brothers Karamazov* notes that Dostoevsky's fiction tests the limits of the verisimilar by employing unlikely coincidences, patterns of repetition and doubling, a compressed sequence of events, and sensational plots; the overall effect, Leatherbarrow concludes, is to privilege the "mythic" over the "mimetic" (85), or to attain a symbolic meaning that sacrifices surface accuracy in order to represent the deeper "spirit" of reality (83). Robin Feuer Miller published her monograph on *The Brothers Karamazov* in the same year as Leatherbarrow's. She variously links Dostoevsky's "fantastic" realism to the structures of repetition in the novel, to the metaphorical meanings that underlie surface details, and to the author's effort to dive into the depths of the human mind in a way that inspired Virginia Woolf (6).

Thus, even in the small number of critical works mentioned thus far, it seems that the Dostoevskian catchwords of "fantastic" or "higher" realism can be attached to almost any feature of his work that seems distinctive, and it becomes difficult to acquire a clear sense of just what makes Dostoevsky's realism unusual, and, even more crucially, of just what the function or significance of his method is. On the former question, at least, there is a rough critical consensus: scholars note that Dostoevsky chose plots, characters and imagery that seem "dramatic," "mysterious," or "extreme," to pick a few of the words mentioned above, and they also note that Dostoevsky arranged these elements in a highly structured way that sometimes seems to

foreground the artifice of the text. But critical opinions are less cohesive when it comes to explaining just what these modifications of the real aim at and how, if at all, they fit into the realist enterprise. Two quite different answers to these latter questions are found in the critical discussions of Dostoevsky's method and also in Dostoevsky's own reflections on his literary practice.

The first idea is that the surface of Dostoevsky's fiction may be inaccurate, but its deeper implications are true. According to this approach, the implausible and exaggerated external features of Dostoevsky's work allow him to more effectively represent important philosophical and psychological truths; thus his work faithfully conveys the intangible aspects of reality that *really* matter. Some variation of this concept lies behind the assessments already mentioned above—Frank's "ideological eschatology," Leatherbarrow's "mythic" realism, Miller's notion of delving into the human mind, and even Grossman's idea that the experience of reality cannot be conveyed without resorting to a heightened mode of representation. In each case, literal accuracy must be sacrificed for the sake of some "higher" fidelity to life. Robert Louis Jackson's 1966 book on Dostoevsky's aesthetics also assesses Dostoevsky's realism in this way, arguing that Dostoevsky is mainly interested in a "deeper, archetypal reality" (71), and that the distinction between idealism and realism is therefore a moot point in his work, since "the identity of fact A to fact B to fact C" is insignificant as long as the work illuminates the "human spirit" (84). Jackson interprets Dostoevsky from a secular humanist point of view, but the same idea can easily be voiced in religious terms, as seen in some of the more recent discussions of Dostoevsky that seek to revive an awareness of the Christian themes in his work. For example, Karen Stepanian's 2005 book on Dostoevsky's "higher realism" asserts that Dostoevsky's fiction aims to reveal the presence of God and spiritual yearning in the world—yet another version of the idea that the genuine realism of Dostoevsky's work exists mainly on an abstract level that rises above the specific events and characters of his fiction.

This "mythic" (to use Leatherbarrow's term) understanding of Dostoevsky's realism certainly does capture an important aspect of his work, but it also smooths over the conceptual difficulties in his aesthetics too easily. Reality and transcendence are not so seamlessly combined in his work; the demands of a more direct sort of verisimilitude conflict with Dostoevsky's desire to portray a religious ideal. Moreover, an emphasis mainly on the "mythic" significance of Dostoevsky's realism undermines the effect of his fiction, the point of which is precisely that we should *not* write off the more extreme episodes as merely allegorical, but instead should consider that perhaps life really *is* this intense. That is, we should not sublimate Dostoevsky's plots and characters into comfortably abstract categories, but instead let the novels broaden our sense of what is literally true and genuinely possible. So, instead of suggesting that Dostoevsky's extreme portrayals primarily serve a "higher" verisimilitude, an alternative way of understanding his realism is that Dostoevsky portrays the world as extreme because reality *is* extreme. This interpretation is less prominent in the critical discourse; often the notion of a more literal realism in Dostoevsky quickly morphs into some version of the more comfortable "mythic realism" approach. For example, Frank certainly makes it clear that Dostoevsky's supposedly "pathological" representations were rooted in real events and were meant to challenge conventional notions of verisimilitude (e.g. *Miraculous Years* 311-315, 452), but Frank prefers to emphasize the abstract "moral," "ultimate" or "eternal" implications of Dostoevsky's fiction that rise above the level of "strict veracity" (*Miraculous Years* 354, 315; *Liberation* 51).

The most emphatic literal reading of Dostoevsky's realism comes from Sven Linnér's 1967 *Dostoevskij on Realism*, which systematically discusses all of Dostoevsky's literary-

theoretical pronouncements and concludes that he was much more interested in the current world than in any other worlds, and that all the extremes of good and evil in Dostoevsky's work reflect his belief that these extremes exist in real life. Linnér does not consider Dostoevsky's fictional writings, which makes his conclusion more one-sided than it otherwise might be, but he usefully reminds us not to read Dostoevsky too symbolically. In sum, although Dostoevsky's dramatic plots and intense characters are saturated with broader philosophical or spiritual significance, at the same time their oddity is a more straightforward comment on reality: Dostoevsky's fictional world is dramatic because he believes that literal reality is dramatic. This stance appears prominently in several of Dostoevsky's most well-known theoretical pronouncements.[6]

2. The Strangeness of Reality in Dostoevsky's Aesthetic Statements

Two of Dostoevsky's major statements on his artistic technique appear in letters written to friends from Florence just as the last chapters of *The Idiot* were appearing in the journal *Russian Herald* (*Russkii vestnik*). In letters from this period Dostoevsky acknowledges that his novel was not a complete success—a rushed composition process made it impossible for him to adequately execute his original creative idea (28.2:320-21; 29.1:19)—but he bristles at charges that its characters are too fantastic. Writing to Apollon Maikov, a close friend and poet with "aesthetic" tendencies, Dostoevsky lays out a grand vision for his next novel and then launches into an impassioned defense of his supposedly unrealistic technique:

> Ах, друг мой! Совершенно другие я понятия имею о действительности и реализме, чем наши реалисты и критики. Мой идеализм — реальнее ихнего. Господи! Порассказать толково то, что мы все, русские, пережили в последние 10 лет в нашем духовном развитии, — да разве не закричат реалисты, что это фантазия! А между тем это исконный, настоящий реализм! Это-то и есть реализм, только глубже, а у них мелко плавает. Ну не ничтожен ли Любим Торцов в сущности, — а ведь это всё, что только идеального позволил себе их реализм. Глубок реализм — нечего сказать! Ихним реализмом — сотой доли реальных, действительно случившихся фактов не объснишь. А мы нашим идеализмом пророчили даже факты. Случалось.
>
> Oh, my friend! I have absolutely different notions of reality and realism from what our realists and critics do. My idealism is more real than theirs. Lord! To give a clear account of what all of us Russians have lived through over the last ten years

[6] In addition to the sources mentioned here, James P. Scanlan's *Dostoevsky the Thinker* provides a clear and perceptive account of Dostoevsky's aesthetic views. In particular, Scanlan discusses several different reasons why Dostoevsky believed a literal "Daguerreotype" realism was insufficient. Scanlan's balanced account notes that Dostoevsky's realism, while it "does not exclude 'immediate reality'" (141), asks the artist to look beneath the surface, apply principles of selection, etc. Like many readers of Dostoevsky's aesthetics, Scanlan ends up placing the most emphasis on the nonliteral aspects of Dostoevsky's version of realism. For example, he suggests that Dostoevsky's work embraces unusual phenomena because these unusual cases often provide "a better understanding of the true nature of something" or get "at the essence of the reality in question" (142). I prefer to give Dostoevsky's comments on the exceptional an even stronger reading: as will be seen in his letter to Strakhov, Dostoevsky does not just use the exceptional as a device to get at the essence of the ordinary; he claims that what we think is exceptional actually *is* ordinary.

> in our spiritual development—won't the realists start shouting that it's a fantasy! And meanwhile it is age-old, genuine realism! That in fact is what realism is, only deeper, but with them it's shallow sailing. Well isn't Liubim Tortsov [a character from an Ostrovsky play, hailed as a positive figure by Slavophiles] paltry in essence—and that after all is as much of the ideal as their realism has allowed itself. Deep realism indeed! With their realism you can't explain a hundredth part of real, actually occurring facts. But with our idealism we have even prophesized facts. It has happened. (11 Dec. 1868, 28.2:329)

The ironic, combative, scoffing tone of this passage and the rapid alternation of the real and the ideal complicate its interpretation, yet we can still extract the point that Dostoevsky makes so passionately. A few phrases seem to support the notion that Dostoevsky's realism is to be found—drawing on words used in the secondary literature—primarily at a "higher," "mythic," "philosophical," "deep" or "archetypal" level. When Dostoevsky calls his method "idealism" and declares that his art is deep while that of his critics is shallow, he appears to advocate an abstract, conceptual or symbolic sort of realism; when he expresses the desire to portray the "spiritual development" of society, he apparently asks art to be true mainly in some profound moral sense. The phrase "my idealism is more real than theirs" strongly suggests the idea that a departure from immediate reality allows Dostoevsky to achieve some more essential form of realism. By the end of the quotation, however, statements of a more literal, concrete realism gain the upper hand. Dostoevsky claims that his "realism" is "genuine" and "age-old" and expresses his project in empirical terms as simply to give a "clear account" (*porasskazat' tolkovo*) of recent events; finally, the passage closes by twice invoking that most concretely empirical of all words, "facts" (*fakty*). This closing underlines the irony of Dostoevsky's use of the word "idealism" for himself. Critical, superficial reviewers mistakenly perceive his portrayals as "fantastic" or "idealistic," and Dostoevsky adopts their terms only to turn them around and make it clear that his method is based on facts and reality—a reality whose strangeness some readers wish to deny by dismissing Dostoevsky's work as "fantasy."

The end result of this quotation, then, is not to move the verisimilitude of Dostoevsky's art to some higher plane. If Dostoevsky does in fact call for any sort of idealism, it is not the sort of "ideal" that is commonly opposed to the "real," but an intellectual aura that is added to the real, that deepens realism without undermining it.[7] Dostoevsky endorses no exaggeration or distortion of reality here; his work as he describes it is real through and through, on both the physical *and* the spiritual plane. The passage from the letter to Maikov suggests that what Dostoevsky is aiming to do in his creative work is not so much to bring our view of reality to a higher level as to change our understanding of what reality is on all levels and force us to recognize that reality is more bizarre than we think it is. Readers and critics may find Dostoevsky's characters and plots strange, but they are not meant to remain strange or to act as some sort of exaggerated allegory for deeper meanings. Dostoevsky gives us strangeness and challenges us to recognize it as normal life.

This creative aim becomes clearer in a second well-known quotation, this one from a letter to Nikolai Strakhov, Dostoevsky's former colleague on the editorial board of the journal

[7] See 25:90-91, where Dostoevsky uses the term "idealism" to refer to the notion that art must be illuminated by some unifying, underlying "idea." Dostoevsky's use of the term must be differentiated from the usage common in contemporary English, where the "ideal" usually refers to the "perfect," not the "conceptual."

Time (*Vremia*). Writing to Strakhov, Dostoevsky abandons the ambiguous and ironic references to "idealism" seen in the letter to Maikov and emphasizes the notion of a genuine realism that challenges inadequate and conventional understandings of the verisimilar. Once again, Dostoevsky's outburst of artistic self-reflection occurs while he is discussing his work on *The Idiot*, which had given occasion for the latest attacks on Dostoevsky's supposedly fantastic style. After describing how he finished working on the novel, Dostoevsky writes:

> У меня свой особенный взгляд на действительность (в искусстве), и то, что большинство называет почти фантастическим и исключительным, то для меня иногда составляет самую сущность действительного. Обыденность явлений и казенный взгляд на них, по-моему, не есть еще реализм, а даже напротив. В каждом нумере газет Вы встречаете отчет о самых действительных фактах и о самых мудреных. Для писателей наших они фантастичны; да они и не занимаются ими; а между тем они действительность, потому что они *факты*. Кто же будут их замечать, их разъяснить и записывать? Они поминутны и ежедневны, а не *исключительны*… И какая мелочь и низменность воззрения и проникновения в действительность. И всё одно да одно. Мы всю действительность пропустим этак мимо носу. Кто ж будет отмечать факты и углубляться в них?... Неужели фантастичный мой "Идиот" не есть действительность, да еще самая обыденная! Да именно теперь-то и должны быть такие характеры в наших оторванных от земли слоях общества, — слоях, которые в действительности становятся фантастичными….
>
> I have my own special view of reality (in art), and what the majority calls almost fantastic and exceptional for me sometimes constitutes the very essence of the real. The ordinariness of phenomena and a banal view of them are not yet realism, in my opinion, but even the contrary. In every issue of the newspapers you come across reports of the most real facts and the most strange ones. For our writers they are fantastic; and besides, they don't even deal with them; but meanwhile they are reality, because they are *facts*. Who is going to notice them, elucidate them, and record them? They occur every minute and every day, and are not *exceptional*… And what triviality and baseness in ideas and in penetration of reality. And all the same old thing. We'll let all of reality slip by right under our noses that way. Who is going to note facts and delve deeply into them?... Can it really be that my fantastic *Idiot* is not reality, moreover, the most ordinary kind! But it's just now that there in fact have to be such characters in our levels of educated society that are cut off from the soil—levels that really are becoming fantastic… (26 Feb. 1869; 29.1:19)

In this letter Dostoevsky's radically revisionist approach to our everyday understanding of reality emerges in full clarity. The previous letter to Maikov had contained much stronger suggestions that Dostoevsky was merely moving literary imitation to some "higher" or more "profound" plane. Here, however, that notion emerges only slightly in some brief phrases about how Dostoevsky hopes to "penetrate" or "delve deeply" into reality; meanwhile the main emphasis of the letter to Strakhov is on completely reversing our notions of the normal and the fantastic.

Dostoevsky articulates his creative mission in unmistakable terms: that which the majority thinks is "fantastic," including the seemingly exaggerated characters and scenes in Dostoevsky's fiction, *is* actually reality, not in some symbolic sense, but on the most concrete, direct level of "facts," a word that Dostoevsky repeats several times, while pointing to the empirical evidence of contemporary newspaper reports.[8] Moreover, as he repeatedly stresses, these facts are neither exceptional nor rare, but are ordinary and frequent. Thus the fantastic is actually normal, or, to express it the other way around, as Dostoevsky does in his closing line, reality is fantastic. And if Dostoevsky claims the banner of reality and truth for himself, that means that the supposed truths that his fellow writers represent are false. In this passage he carries out a sharp attack on the false version of verisimilitude: the plausible appearance of his opponents' work is a banal cliché, while the mission of his own work is to prod us to turn our attention to the everyday phenomena that we ignore, and in the process to realize how strange reality actually is.

Dostoevsky's insight into the strangeness of reality is supported not just by the passing comments above, but also by a key piece from the 1860s in which he reflects on his artistic method—the feuilleton "Petersburg Dreams in Verse and Prose" ("Peterburgskie snovideniia v stikhakh i proze"). This piece falls outside the late period that is my main focus, but a quick mention of it will confirm that the strangeness of reality had long been central to Dostoevsky's artistic vision. Published in 1861, "Petersburg Dreams" looks back to the 1840s and presents a semi-autobiographical account of the very beginnings of Dostoevsky's creative life. The most well-known passage in the article comes when Dostoevsky describes a revelation he experienced while gazing out over the Neva one winter afternoon. A mix of smoke, falling snow and late afternoon light, Dostoevsky tells us, gave the urban landscape the appearance of a fantastic vision: "Казалось, что весь этот мир… в этот сумеречный час походит на фантастическую, волшебную грезу, на сон… я как будто что-то понял в этоу минуту… Я полагаю, что с той именно минуты началось мое существование" 'It seemed that that entire world… at that twilight hour was like a fantastic, magical reverie, like a dream… it was as if I attained some understanding at that moment… I think it was from precisely that moment that my existence began' (19:69). This story, narrated through the stylized persona of the flâneur and feuilleton author, does not describe a real episode in Dostoevsky's life, but it likely gives the general outlines of his creative development, and it prefigures the statements that we see coming directly from Dostoevsky in his letters of 1868 to 1869. The central factor of the experience described here is that reality appears as strange, and that this insight spurs a lasting shift in the narrator's outlook. The precise nature of the life-altering "understanding" is left unexplained, but we can draw out the implications of the vision for ourselves. Presumably, the narrator, who describes himself as a dreamer, realizes that he can invert the relationship of the real and the fantastic in the creative process: instead of his dreams creating new worlds, the existing world can create fantastic dreams—in other words, the real urban milieu contains ample mystery to feed his creative energy.

If the vision on the Neva were an isolated incident, we might be tempted to dismiss it as the distorted product of a haze-induced reverie. But the continuation of the feuilleton confirms that the real world is indeed full of wonders, for the narrator now describes how his "dreams" show up in the newspapers: "Когда мне приснился этот сон [of a minor bureaucrat who went mad], я сам засмеялся над собою и странностью моих снов. И вдруг — сон в руку. Как вам

[8] Konstantine Klioutchkine has investigated the ways that Dostoevsky's creative work, and *Crime and Punishment* in particular, drew on the burgeoning press ("The Rise of *Crime and Punishment*).

нравится, господа: вычитал я недавно из газет опять одну тайну" 'When I dreamed that dream [of a minor bureaucrat who went mad], I myself laughed at myself and at the strangeness of my dreams. And suddenly—the dream came true. How do you like it, gentlemen: I recently read in the newspapers again about another mystery' (19:72). Here the narrator draws on that preeminently empirical, contemporary document—the newspaper—in order to confirm that the strangeness of the world is not just the product of a distorted vision, but is grounded in the concrete people and events of Petersburg life as reported in the newspapers or encountered on walks through the city. The narrator goes on to provide several examples of how real-life encounters feed his fantasies as he views the grotesque contrasts of rich and poor in the commercial district. Thus "Petersburg Visions" breaks apart the usual dichotomy of the real and the fantastic. With clever irony, Dostoevsky's feuilleton persona embraces the titles of "fantast," "mystic" and "dreamer" that had long been used as charges against him, and at the same time suggests that the fantastic is rooted in the real and that an recognition of mystery allows one to provide a *more* faithful picture of real life with all its oddities. Russian urban life and newspaper reportage, it turns out, are full of the same strangeness and extremity that characterizes Dostoevsky's fiction, and that fiction, conversely, is a realistic reflection of life. Thus "Petersburg Visions" demonstrates that the vision of a strange reality expressed in the letters of 1868-69 was a conscious aspect of Dostoevsky's poetics in 1861 and can be traced all the way back to the period of the 1840s in which the feuilleton is set.

"Petersburg Visions" uses a web of allusions to relate the narrator's vision of the strangeness of life to the preceding tradition of Russian literature. Russian life is strange in a way that reminds the narrator of Gogolian grotesques and Pushkinian romance. But perhaps even more significant is the contrast the narrator draws with contemporary literary trends of the 1860s, in particular with the scientific materialism espoused by the radical realist critics Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov. When the narrator tells us, for example, that the fantastic behavior of a compulsive miser cannot be explained in strictly medical terms, with an autopsy and a diagnosis of mental illness (19:75), he insists that the world is not as transparent and explainable as the radical critics want it to be. Dostoevsky insists on the inescapable mystery of human life and implies that a narrow, rationalized version of verisimilitude cannot do justice to the remarkable phenomena of Petersburg life. With this conceptual move Dostoevsky opens the door to a representational flexibility that will be immensely useful in the project of "progressive realism." Like Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, Dostoevsky hoped to portray a positive hero within the realist novel. Because his concept of the real embraces extremity and strangeness, he will be in a better position, when he writes *The Brothers Karamazov*, to assert that an unusually good hero *can* exist within regular life.

In addition to the fantastic reconceptualization of reality described above, several other more straightforward factors support the argument that Dostoevsky's fiction is meant to be read as realistic on the concerete, surface level and not merely on a "deeper" symbolic level. For example, Dostoevsky's well-documented interest in current events, which turns up in several of the passages quoted above, suggests that his creative work was partially driven by a documentary motivation. At every stage of his wanderings through Europe, Dostoevsky sought out venues where he could read Russian newspapers (see e.g. 29.1:89, 29.1:115) and frequently drew on current events for episodes in his fiction—most prominently in the case of the Nechaev trial, which fed into *Devils*, but also, among many other instances, in the case of the various atrocities that Ivan cites during his conversation with Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* (14:219-221; 15:553-54). Second-hand accounts in newspapers, however, only partially satisfied his need for

contact with contemporary life. During his debt-induced exile in Europe, Dostoevsky frequently wrote of his deep yearning to be back in Russia and notably claimed that this immediate contact with Russia was essential to his creative work. For example, writing to his niece Sofya Ivanova of plans for a novel to be called *Atheism* (aspects of which entered into *Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*), Dostoevsky states, "и представьте же, друг мой: писать его здесь я не могу; для этого мне нужно быть в России непременно, видеть, слышать и в русской жизни участвовать непосредственно" 'and just imagine, my friend: I can't write it here; for that I definitely have to be in Russia, to see, hear, and participate in Russian life directly" (8 Mar. 1869; 29.1:24). These are not the yearnings of a Romantic dreamer but of a writer whose own impulses are in line with the dominant Realist aesthetic of his time, which directed the writer toward the concrete and the contemporary. Dostoevsky's constant efforts to keep up with the latest developments in Russian life, and his need for immediate contact with that life, remind us not to overemphasize a philosophical, symbolic reading of his fiction.

Certainly few readers or scholars would dispute that Dostoevsky's work is deeply rooted in the social, political and cultural currents of mid-nineteenth-century Russia, which he portrays in its often mundane or unsavory details. It is this orientation that grounds the general agreement that Dostoevsky is a "realist" writer. At the same time, the melodramatic quality of much of his fiction sometimes spurs readers to qualify his "realism." However, the passages discussed above remind us that Dostoevsky's idiosyncrasy ultimately resides not in his concept of realism or of mimesis, but in his concept of reality. Even though Dostoevsky's mimetic method injects "deeper" philosophical or spiritual concerns into the portrayal of concrete, specific characters and events, his concept of mimesis at its base is still essentially of the traditional empirical sort: the accuracy of his work is meant to be tested by comparing it to tangible life, not by analyzing the truth of its higher spiritual method, and the abstract, symbolic aspect of Dostoevsky's work is not meant to replace the more immediate, tangible verity of his fiction. If Dostoevsky's fiction strains credibility, it is because his concept of reality—not of realism—is so unusual. Dostoevsky's vision of reality as strange and mysterious, and his conviction that this extremity and mystery are the genuine face of normal life, gives his fiction its intense and exaggerated flair. We as readers may certainly disagree with Dostoevsky's vision of the world and charge that life is really not as melodramatic as his fiction suggests. But all the passages analyzed above suggest that this is not how Dostoevsky would have us read his work, and in fact his work becomes impoverished if we discount its immediate realism and read it only for allegorical significance. Dostoevsky aims to break down our conventionalized sense of the verisimilar, to remove the blinders that stop us from acknowledging the fantastic life situations occurring all around us, and finally also to expand our notion of the ways that it is possible to live a human life. That latter point in particular will be relevant for the analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov*, where one of the aims of the novel is to present a transformative and ideal, yet also realistically attainable, version of the human being; an exaggerated sense of what is possible within reality aids that endeavor.

Before turning to Dostoevsky's concept of the ideal, one more significant point needs to be made about his concept of the real, a point that ties him to the radical realist critics who were also working in the positive hero tradition. Like most of his contemporaries in post-Hegelian Russian culture, Dostoevsky assumed that history was progressing in a directional fashion, and this dynamic view of history made it easier to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal. Even if the world around him was dissatisfactory, Dostoevsky could claim that his idealistic models represented a new breed of people who were just beginning to appear. And just as Dobroliubov's fervent hope for sociopolitical change led him to be perhaps excessively optimistic about the

proximity of the revolution, so Dostoevsky's grand vision for a spiritual remaking of Russia made him at times unusually confident that major historical shifts were just around the corner. The specifics of Dostoevsky's ideal vision will be discussed below, but for now a few quotations will suffice to establish that Dostoevsky, like Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky, was convinced that a race of "new people" was just appearing in Russian society. Writing to his passing acquaintance and avid reader L. V. Grigoriev, Dostoevsky declares that the outdated generation of the 1860s will soon be superseded: "Несомненно тоже, что идут (и скоро идут) новые люди, так что горевать и тосковать нечего. Будем достойными, чтоб встретить их и узнать их… Огромное теперь время для России, и дожили мы до любопытнейшей точки" 'It also can't be doubted that new people are coming (and are coming quickly), so that there's no reason to grieve and pine. Let us be worthy of greeting them and recognizing them… It's a colossal time for Russia now, and we've lived to see a most interesting moment' (27 Mar. 1878; 30.1:19). Here the phrase "new people" creates an exact tie to Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* and establishes that Dostoevsky carries on the radicals' positive hero project—while of course giving it a new spiritual content. The quotation as a whole reveals Dostoevsky's vision of a reality marching inexorably forward as well as his conviction that the current historical moment in particular is poised on the brink of a great change. As it did for Dobroliubov, this optimistic, visionary perspective makes it much easier for Dostoevsky to justify the portrayal of remarkable characters within a realist novel. If, as he writes to Grigoriev, Russia really is in the midst of a "colossal time" that is about to see the appearance of "new people," then the drama, novelty and atypical characters of Dostoevsky's fiction are precisely necessary in order to represent contemporary life truthfully.

Dostoevsky's utopian visions of Russia's future remained strong through the period of the writing of *The Brothers Karamazov* and emerged notably in his sensational Pushkin speech in June 1880.[9] However, one of the best summaries of Dostoevsky's unique sense of his realist mission is found in a passage from the 1877 *Diary of a Writer*. Here everything comes together: his vision of a forward-advancing reality, his view of the strangeness of reality, and his empirical desire to portray a slice of life that is being ignored by his fellow novelists. The passage is part of a discussion of Tolstoy. While he speaks respectfully of Tolstoy's art, Dostoevsky observes that his fellow novelist focuses exclusively on the wealthy landowning class whose way of life is a relic of the past. Dostoevsky dubs Tolstoy the "историк" 'historian' of the "успокоенн[ое] и твердо, издавна сложивш[ее]ся московск[ое] помещичь[е] семейств[о] средне-высшего круга" 'placid, long-ago established and firmly settled Moscow landowning family of the middle-upper class' (Jan. 1877; 25:35). A great change is in store for this sector of Russian society: "для прежнего русского дворянского строя… пришел какой-то новый, еще неизвестный, но радикальный перелом, по крайней мере, огромное перерождение в новые и еще грядущие, почти совсем неизвестные формы" 'the former structure of the Russian nobility… had arrived at some new, still unknown, but radical crisis, or at least at the point of an enormous rebirth into new, not yet manifest, almost entirely unknown forms' (ibid.). Meanwhile, a chaotic, dynamic, and very important aspect of Russian life is being overlooked:

> Чувствуется, что тут что-то не то, что огромная часть русского строя жизни осталась вовсе без наблюдения и без *историка*. По крайней мере, ясно, что

[9] See Morson's *Boundaries of Genre*, 33-38, for comments on how Dostoevsky's utopianism had to adjust slightly when the particular apocalyptic convictions that he held around 1876-1877 did not come true.

> жизнь средне-высшего нашего дворянского круга, столь ярко описанная нашими беллетристами, есть уже слишком ничтожный и обособленный уголок русской жизни. Кто же будет *историком* остальных уголков, кажется, страшно многочисленных?... кто же осветит хотя бы часть этого хаося и хотя бы и не мечтая о руководящей нити?... У нас есть бесспорно жизнь разлагающаяся и семейство, стало быть, разлагающееся. Но есть, необходимо, и жизнь вновь складывающаяся, на новых уже началах. Кто их подметит, и кто их укажет?
>
> One senses that something is not right here, that an enormous part of the Russian order of life has remained entirely without observation and without any *historian*. At least it is clear that the life of the middle-upper noble circles, so vividly described by our writers, is already too much of an insignificant and dissociated corner of Russian life. Who, then, will be the *historian* of the other corners, of which, it seems, there are so awfully many?... who, then, will illuminate even a part of this chaos, without even dreaming of some guiding thread?... One cannot deny that life in Russia is disintegrating and that, consequently, family life is disintegrating as well. But, inevitably, there is also a life that is being formed anew, on new principles. Who will notice these and who will point them out? (ibid.)

First of all, this passage vividly reinforces the notion of a reality that is moving forward as it describes both the "radical" "rebirth" of the traditional landowning class as well as the "new life" just emerging in other spheres of Russian society—presumably in the form of the "new people" already mentioned in the letter to L. V. Grigoriev. Secondly, the passage calls for the portrayal of these developments in unmistakably empirical terms. The person who depicts these ongoing processes—presumably Dostoevsky himself—is not a *novelist* at all but a "historian" of certain "corners" of life; Dostoevsky seems to be calling for an art similar to the physiological sketches of the Natural School. These chaotic corners of Russian life are both very numerous and currently ignored, and thus the writer who describes them is producing a more relevant and accurate depiction of reality than those who remain in the outmoded tradition represented by Tolstoy. The empirical orientation of the entire passage is underlined by the fact that the article in question was inspired by a real-life incident from the newspapers: Dostoevsky compares the account of an actual adolescent's suicide with fantasies of suicide depicted in Tolstoy's *Childhood*. For all these reasons, Dostoevsky's vision of art as an impartial reproduction of life emerges particularly strongly in this passage. Finally, the third point about this passage is that the supposedly overlooked "corners" of Russian life are much more dramatic than the world portrayed in Tolstoy's novels. Dostoevsky's "corners" are characterized by chaos and disintegration and are so disordered that a writer can hardly hope to impose any sort of structure or "guiding thread" on them. In other words, the sector of Russian reality that cries out for description is strange and mysterious. Thus (if we assume that Dostoevsky is expressing his sense of his own creative mission here) this passage as a whole offers an excellent composite of the three major aspects of Dostoevsky's realist poetics. Dostoevsky apparently viewed himself as a historically accurate, empirical realist who was depicting a reality that is both weird and steadily advancing toward some renewal. The combined effect of this approach is to reverse the evaluation of verisimilitude in a way similar to what we saw in the passages discussed earlier.

Tolstoy's world, generally seen as the height of normality, is revealed as "insignificant" and out of touch, while extreme portrayals of disorder and utopia such as those found in Dostoevsky's novels are the ones that best capture the most contemporary, relevant, living and progressing reality of Russian life. In Dostoevsky's view, the strangeness of his fiction is a mark of its truth.

3. Dostoevsky's Utopianism: Review of Scholarship

The above discussion of Dostoevsky's realist poetics fills in one half of the conceptual background necessary to determine whether the project of "progressive realism"—the representation of an attainable and plausible ideal—is even possible. The other half of the dichotomy concerns Dostoevsky's vision of the ideal. Theoretically, Dostoevsky's realist poetics alone, with its openness to extremes and its faith in historical progress, is flexible enough to accommodate the portrayal of a positive hero. But as already seen in previous chapters, even the most promising theoretical foundations are often unable in practice to unite a mimetic poetics with a progressive vision. In the end, either reality is too bleak to offer adequate inspiration or the ideal is too powerful and uncompromising to remain within the bounds of the possible. Therefore it is not surprising that Dostoevsky's work exhibits the usual difficulties that arise when trying to contain the ideal within a realist mode. Even though Dostoevsky apparently viewed the world as full of extremities, he remained unsure whether the ideal could ever actually become real. An analysis of Dostoevsky's comments on the "golden age" will show that he sometimes suggests that it is incredibly simple to achieve utopia—but he also frequently asserts the opposite, acknowledging that it is probably impossible to achieve the ideal on earth. Dostoevsky's ambiguous vision of the ideal and his "strange" view of reality together create the conceptual background for the "progressive realism" of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The critical discourse on Dostoevsky has long recognized his utopian streak. The prominent early Dostoevsky scholars V. L. Komarovich and A. S. Dolinin both treated the theme, Komarovich with a 1924 article that traces Dostoevsky's vision of "worldwide harmony" to his Utopian Socialist-influenced dreams of the 1840s, and Dolinin with a 1956 article that concisely traces the recurring "Golden Age" theme throughout Dostoevsky's fiction. Joseph Frank notes that Dostoevsky's striving for a "golden age" of "human happiness" emerges consistently in his notebook jottings even if the theme is often only obliquely realized in his novels (*Mantle of the Prophet* 351-52; *Miraculous Years* 381). Richard Peace anchors Dostoevsky's "golden age" tendencies in the Lorrain painting referenced in *The Devils* and describes Dostoevsky's overall project as an attempt to create an alternative utopia to that of the radicals. A few scholars have also observed how Dostoevsky's visionary orientation parallels that of the radical critics and have pointed to some of the same similarities that I see among the "positive hero" projects of Dostoevsky, Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky. Scholars of Russian radical realism seem more eager to make this connection than scholars of Dostoevsky. For example, Victor Terras asserts that Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky's aesthetic theories are "virtually identical" and that it is only in the political sphere that they differ (*Belinskij* 253); Rufus Mathewson views Dostoevsky's novels as contributions to the Russian positive hero tradition and concludes that, with the creation of Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky "came as close to a successful image of the affirmative hero as any of the major writers of the century" (*Positive Hero* 20)—an opinion that I will only partially endorse in my discussion of the novel below. V. E. Vetlovskaia also implies clear parallels between Dostoevsky

and the radicals when she writes that both Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* belong to the genre of the tendentious "philosophical-publicistic genre" (8).[10]

Most scholars who discuss Dostoevsky's utopian yearnings also point out the tension between his visionary orientation and his fascination with the unsavory and unredeemed details of contemporary life. G. M. Fridlender sees these impulses as the two major halves of Dostoevsky's aesthetics; in his view, Dostoevsky was drawn to the aesthetic of beauty embodied in Homer or Rafael but at the same time recognized that the artist needs to portray the objective, contemporary world in all of its disharmony and fragmentation ("Estetika" 97-112). Fridlender's characterization suggests that Dostoevsky's dual tendencies coexist in a stable balance: Dostoevsky can admire the beauty of Classicism while pursuing a realist poetics himself. Robert Louis Jackson's study of Dostoevsky's aesthetics takes a fairly similar approach: he too centers his analysis around the core contrast between Dostoevsky's "practical, working aesthetic" of realism and the striving, expressed mainly in his criticism, toward a "classical higher aesthetic" that privileges beauty and form (*Quest for Form* ix). Jackson suggests that Dostoevsky, in his fiction if not in his critical writings, is able to unite these two impulses by depicting earthly characters who nevertheless strive toward an eternal higher goal of beauty (3-4). Both Fridlender and Jackson thus downplay the dynamic and ongoing tension between the ideal and the real that can be observed in Dostoevsky's work and that culminates in the odd mix of saintliness and depravity in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's final novel aspires not just to show characters yearning for the ideal but to provide actual concrete representations of ideal characters, an ambition that does not placidly coexist with his realist aesthetic. Many readers of *The Brothers Karamazov* do notice the problems generated by Dostoevsky's contradictory ambitions in the form of a certain awkwardness in the portrayal of the positive characters of Zosima and Alyosha. Dolinin, for example, ends his account of Dostoevsky's "golden age" strivings by asserting that the figure of Zosima is "comical" and "boring" (186). Thus the relation of the ideal and the real in Dostoevsky's art is a problem that may best be understood not by bringing the two terms into a neat balance but by embracing the unresolved complexity and tension of their interaction.

Another point of debate in discussions of Dostoevsky's ideal is the question of the content or nature of the ideal. Recent scholarship on Dostoevsky is certainly very aware of the dominant spiritual and Christian orientation of his visions of world harmony.[11] But Fridlender and Jackson

---

[10] Charles Moser and William Leatherbarrow also suggest the parallels between Dostoevsky and his radical opponents when they call *The Brothers Karamazov* an "anti-nihilist" novel (Moser "Novel of the 1860's" 74; Leatherbarrow *The Brothers Karamazov* 16)—even through *The Brothers Karamazov* was written in opposition to the "nihilists," it shares the idealistic tendentiousness of their work. Readings that stress the tendentious aspects of *The Brothers Karamazov* create a strong contrast to M. M. Bakhtin's celebrated analysis of Dostoevsky's "polyphonic" technique, in which the author's voice is minimalized and the heroes are allowed to develop into strong, independent voices for their individual points of view. Vetlovskaia deliberately polemicizes with Bakhtin when she precisely describes the various ways that the novel grants "authority" to one voice over another (52-68). I think it is true that *The Brothers Karamazov* strongly privileges some voices over others, and it is undeniable that Dostoevsky was sharply tendentious in his overall career. But it is also true that the novel gives remarkably powerful expression even to views that are ultimately rejected. Dostoevsky wants his own vision to prevail in a field of strong competitors. Since he lets those competitors speak, they sometimes drown out the other side; readers such as Lev Shestov thus end up preferring Ivan over Alyosha and Zosima.

[11] See e.g. the work of Cassedy, Esaulov, Stepanian and Zakharov, the 2001 collection edited by Pattison and Thompson, and several contributions to the 2007 volume edited by Kasatkina. Of course, the interest in

(despite their very different ideological orientations) both stress the aesthetic rather than the religious dimension in their description of Dostoevsky's ideal. Soviet critics also often emphasized the humanitarian and sociological dimensions of Dostoevsky's ideal, as seen for example in Dolinin's description of Dostoevsky's visions for a communitarian-communist harmony. Certainly all of these different permutations of the ideal are present in Dostoevsky's aesthetic. Particularly in the critical writings of the 1860s, he tends to present his ideal in secular, aesthetic and humanitarian terms, and even when moral considerations become paramount, he often describes moral perfection with the aesthetic language of beauty (for example, see the quotation about Prince Myshkin below). Nevertheless, this aesthetic formulation does not change the fact that Dostoevsky is primarily concerned with spiritual and religious goodness, and that images of physical beauty ultimately serve as inspiring symbols of moral aspiration and perfection. The moral, universally Christian formulation of Dostoevsky's ideal emerges unabashedly toward the end of his life, and will be the major influence in the composition of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Finally, any discussion of the scholarship on Dostoevsky's ideal must mention the work of Gary Saul Morson, whose 1981 book reads Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* as part of the larger genre of the "literary utopia." Most relevant for my current approach is Morson's discussion of the "metaliterary" and "meta-utopian" aspects of the *Diary*: unlike classic literary utopias, Morson argues, Dostoevsky's *Diary* questions the possibility of the utopia and alternates between admiration for and ridicule of idealistic visions (178). The discussion below will delve further into Dostoevsky's ambiguous relation to the ideal and will describe how, for him, utopia could be both so easy and so difficult to achieve. This ambiguity in turn helps explain why, in his fiction, the embodiments of the ideal are occasionally possible yet also often completely implausible.

4. The Golden Age in Dostoevsky's *Diary*: "In Your Pocket" or Forever Distant?

Dostoevsky was drawn to portrayals of the ideal throughout his career, both in the work of others and in his own fiction. His 1861 article "Mr. –bov and the Question of Art" asserts that art caters to a universal human thirst for beauty and higher inspiration (18:94). Dostoevsky's fictional writings of the 1860s are much more subtle in their evocation of the ideal than the "Mr. –bov" article would suggest, but they do consistently hint at transcendent possibilities. *Notes from Underground* (1864) dramatizes the way that even the most deformed human personality retains a conscious yearning for a non-material "ideal," one that, unlike the Crystal Palace in London, would rise above the status of a "chicken coop" (5:120). The full description of the ideal in this text, however, was apparently eliminated by the censors. Raskolnikov's conversion at the end of *Crime and Punishment* (1866) hints at a loving alternative to his hubristic nihilism. Thus, a utopian yearning glimmers through the often dark atmosphere of these works.

However, in these works from the first half of the 1860s, the positive hints of a Christian ideal are overshadowed by the critical portrayal of misguided ideals and their destructive consequences. As his career advanced, Dostoevsky apparently grew impatient with these mostly negative denunciations. Just as was the case with Dobroliubov, Dostoevsky's later work shows

---

Dostoevsky's Christian themes can be traced back at least to Merezhkovsky and the Symbolists, and was also treated in the mid-20th century by Cox, Dirscherl, Losskii and others.

signs of an increasingly urgent desire for a concrete positive model. In *The Idiot* (1868-69), Dostoevsky moves the ideal from the periphery to the center of the novel in the person of the Christ-like Prince Myshkin. Myshkin, however, proved to be an unsatisfactory instantiation of the ideal; Dostoevsky himself admitted that the depiction fell far short of his original vision (e.g. 29.1:10, 19). Dostoevsky's correspondence from this period reveals both his ongoing commitment to the vision of the ideal person as well as his frustration at the difficulty of the task. In a letter to his niece Sofia Ivanova, he laments:

> Идея романа — моя старинная и любимая, но до того трудная, что я долго не смел браться за нее, а если взялся теперь, то решительно потому, что был в положении чуть не отчаянном. Главная мысль романа — изобразить положительно прекрасного человека. Труднее этого нет ничего на свете, а особенно теперь… Прекрасное есть идеал, а идеал — ни наш, ни цивилизованной Европы еще далеко не выработался.
>
> The idea of the novel is an old and favorite one of mine, but such a hard one that for a long time I didn't dare to take it up, and if I have taken it up now, then decidedly because I was in a nearly desperate situation. The main idea of the novel is to portray a positively beautiful person. There's nothing more difficult than that in the whole world, and especially now… The beautiful is an ideal, and the ideal, whether ours or that of civilized Europe, is still very far from being fully worked out. (1 Jan. 1868; 28.2:251)

This passage underlines the fact that a fleshed-out representation of the ideal was one of Dostoevsky's most cherished and long-held creative goals, while also suggesting the challenges that would continue to hinder the completion of that goal throughout the rest of his career. Dostoevsky notes that the bare concept of the ideal has not even been worked out yet. Thus even a purely utopian literary mode would have trouble representing a positive figure—such ideals, this passage suggests, cannot even be adequately imagined. To place an ideal figure within a realist text, then, would be nearly impossible.[12] Yet rather than retreat from this obviously quixotic goal, Dostoevsky will make several more attempts to represent an unambiguously positive figure.

The dream of the golden age makes only a brief (and ultimately excised) appearance in *The Devils* (1871-72) when Stavrogin dreams of the harmonious human life depicted in Lorrain's *Acis and Galatea*. But the goal of depicting a "positively beautiful person" emerges again in full force in the short story "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" ("Son smeshnogo cheloveka," 1877), which will be discussed below, and then even more extensively in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The religious ideals and semi-saintly figures of this novel grew out of creative ideas that Dostoevsky had begun to formulate even before he composed *The Devils*. His notes for the unwritten novel *Life of a Great Sinner* include plans for an ideal monk character and for the grand Christian

[12] Dostoevsky's struggle with the creation of the ideal also enters into the text of *The Idiot*, when Prince Shch. tells Myshkin, "Милый князь… рай на земле нелегко достается; а вы все-таки несколько на рай рассчитываете; рай—вещь трудная, князь, гораздо труднее, чем кажется вашему прекрасному сердцу" 'My dear prince… paradise on earth is not easily obtained; and yet you are counting on paradise just a bit; paradise is a difficult thing, much more difficult than it appears to your beautiful heart' (8:282).

conversion of a "great sinner," both of which enter into *The Brothers Karamazov* in some form.[13] Thus, in Dostoevsky's final novel, the realist orientation discussed earlier, which directed him to depict the fantastically disharmonious world of contemporary newspaper reports, intersects with his persistent, visionary passion for the portrayal of a human ideal. The features and feasibility of that ideal will be discussed below.

The ideal that eventually becomes embodied in *The Brothers Karamazov* is discursively explored at many points throughout the *Diary of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatelia*, 1876-1877[14]). These writings help us understand how Dostoevsky's concept of the ideal, with all of its ambiguities, delimits the representational goals and possibilities of the novel. First of all, the particular content of Dostoevsky's ideal, while always somewhat vague, can nevertheless be sketched in general terms. By this point in his career, in Frank's words, Dostoevsky was taking on the "mantle of the prophet," and he frequently expresses his prophetic, utopian visions in the *Diary* while assuring readers that grand transformations are nigh. Some of his writings include more sublime rhetoric than substantive description. In "Three Ideas" ("Tri idei," Jan. 1877), for example, Dostoevsky claims that a "Slavic" idea is coming to replace the "Catholic" and "Protestant" ideas of Western Europe: "...на Востоке действительно загорелась и засияла небывалым и неслыханным еще светом третья мировая идея — идея славянская, идея нарождающаяся, — может быть, третья грядущая возможность разрешения судеб человеческих и Европы" 'in the East, the third world idea—the Slavic idea, an idea just coming into being—has truly blazed up and begun to shine with a light that has never before been seen or heard; it is, perhaps, the third future possibility for settling the destinies of Europe and of humanity' (25:9). The reader naturally wants to know the content of this unheard-of, transformative idea, but Dostoevsky pulls back from providing the details: "Что это за идея, что несет с собою единение славян? — всё это еще слишком неопределенно, но что действительно что-то должно быть внесено и сказано новое, — в этом почти уже никто не сомневается" 'What sort of idea is this that will come about through the union of the Slavs? This is all too indefinite at the moment, but that something truly will be contributed and something new will be uttered—that scarcely anyone doubts' (ibid.). Dostoevsky's flat refusal to answer his own question, and his invocation of a vague "something," all point to the problem that he had referenced earlier in his letter about the *Idiot*: even to conceive of the ideal in precise terms is difficult, since it has not yet been worked out by history. The emotions surrounding the ideal are strong—eager anticipation, boundless hopes—but their fulfillment is vague.

This empty, mere form of the ideal would be impossible to translate into fictional representation. In other passages, however, Dostoevsky gives a bit more information on the mechanism of the coming transformation. His ideal becomes more definite in these passages, but it still clearly strains the normal range of the realist novel. Dostoevsky's vision operates on both the political-historical and the personal levels. The foundation of his ideal, on the individual level, is a selfless brotherly love combined with an all-accepting, ecstatic embrace of the mere fact of earthly existence; these qualities are meant to arise from a spontaneous faith that exists

[13] For more information on the composition of *The Brothers Karamazov*, including the ways in which it draws on Dostoevsky's reading and on his earlier creative ideas, see Frank (*Miraculous Years* 343-348, 372-379; *Mantle of the Prophet* 390-94) and Belknap (*Genesis*, especially 48-51). The notebooks for *The Brothers Karamazov* are published along with extensive commentary in Dolinin (*Materialy i issledovaniia*), and are translated by Wasiolek.

[14] Dostoevsky also published works under the title *Diary of a Writer* in 1873 (as a column in the journal *Grazhdanin*), 1880 (the Pushkin speech), and 1881, but the most consistent, extensive and successful period of its publication was 1876-1877.

independently of rational or scientific calculation. This is the world sketched, for example, in "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" ("Son smeshnogo cheloveka," Apr. 1877), where the inhabitants of the imagined utopia experience "какая-то влюбленность друг в друга, всецелая, всеобщая" 'some sort of state of being in love with each other, complete and all-encompassing' (25:114) and the narrator realizes that his own earth is "несчастная, бедная, но дорогая и вечно любимая" 'unhappy, poor, but dear and eternally loved' (25:111).

Other *Diary* entries make it clear that this shift in personal moral outlook was to have political and world-historical significance. Dostoevsky's spiritual and ethical visions blended with his nationalism and xenophobia to produce the conviction that it was Russia's job to lead the world to universal harmony under the banner of Orthodox Christianity. This vision emerges prominently in "The Utopian Understanding of History" ("Utopicheskoe ponimanie istorii," June 1876), in which Dostoevsky insists that Russia will soon gain hegemony over all the Slavic lands. But this will be a selfless hegemony, according to Dostoevsky, on that grows out of "почти братская любовь наша к другим народам" 'our almost brotherly love for other nations' and "потребность наша всеслужения человечеству" 'our need to serve humanity universally' (23:47). A similar prophecy emerges at the end of the Pushkin speech, where Dostoevsky claims that Pushkin's universal receptivity to external cultural influences prefigures Russia's mission to unite the world in Christian love (26:147-49). All of these worldwide political consequences, however, are the result of the initial shift in individual moral character, which is where the primary transformation occurs; Dostoevsky opposed political agitation in the absence of moral edification. And so it is this personal level that is the main concern of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the broader world only slightly penetrates into provincial Skotoprigonevsk, while the spiritual morality of individuals has cosmic consequences.

The key question for the project of "progressive realism," even more important than the particular content of the ideal, is whether the ideal can be portrayed as attainable. Dostoevsky's vision of selfless brotherly love and the universal embrace of life certainly does set a lofty standard; it seems more difficult to achieve than Dobroliubov's revolutionary ideal (the revolution did eventually happen), and is perhaps just as counter to human nature as Wieland's resistance to human sexuality. But the determining factor for an analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov* is Dostoevsky's own outlook on the question. His writings in the *Diary* evince a curious duality when it comes to the plausibility of the ideal: the vision of universal brotherhood is presented both as immediately attainable and as ridiculously impossible. Dostoevsky wavered between these two extremes, sometimes quite openly admitting the utopian implausibility of his vision, while at other times his intense commitment to his vision led him to stubbornly maintain its possibility.

Dostoevsky's brief reflection "The Golden Age in Your Pocket" ("Zolotoi vek v karmane," Jan. 1876) offers a compelling description of just how easy it could be to reach his utopia. In this piece the narrator is observing the attendees of a Christmas party at the Artists' Club; he suddenly imagines how simple it would be for them to all turn into different people:

> Ну что, — подумал я, — если б все эти милые и почтенные гости захотели, хоть на миг один, стать искренними и простодушными, — во что бы обратилась тогда вдруг эта душная зала? Ну что, если б каждый из них вдруг узнал весь секрет? Что если б каждый из них вдруг узнал, сколько заключено в нем прямодушия, честности, самой искренней сердечной веселости, чистоты, великодушных чувств, добрых желаний, ума… Но беда ваша в том,

что вы сами не знаете, как вы прекрасны! Знаете ли, что даже каждый из вас, если б только захотел, то сейчас бы мог осчастливить всех в этой зале и всех увлечь за собой?... И неужели, неужели золотой век существует лишь на одних фарфоровых чашках?

Вы смеетесь, вам невероятно? Рад, что вас рассмешил, и, однако же, всё, что я сейчас навосклицал, не парадокс, а совершенная правда… [ellipsis in orig.] А беда ваша в том, что вам это невероятно.

What if all these dear and respectable guests wanted, even for one brief moment, to become sincere and honest—what would this stuffy hall suddenly transform into then? What if each one of them suddenly learned the whole secret? What if each one of them suddenly learned how much there is in him of candidness, honesty, the most sincere hearty cheerfulness, purity, magnanimous feelings, good will, intelligence… But the trouble is that you yourselves don't know how beautiful you are! Do you know that each of you, if you only wanted, could at once make everyone in this room happy and captivate them all?... Is it true, really true, that the golden age exists only on porcelain teacups? (22:12)

You're laughing; you find it implausible? I'm glad I made you laugh, and yet my whole outburst just now is not a paradox but the complete truth… [elipsis in orig.] And your trouble is that you find it implausible. (22:13)

The whole pathos of Dostoevsky's ideal is contained in this passage. The ideal is simple, so simple that the speaker can hardly stand to see the people at the party continue to ignore its possibility. Far from being impossible, the ideal can be realized by a simple act of will, by just "wanting" it to happen. In fact it already exists—it is a real potential within us that will emerge as soon as we just realize it is there and unlock one little secret. The whole passage gives the impression that the golden age can be achieved, so to speak, by just flipping a switch.

The above passage furthermore makes it clear that the key change relates to our concept of verisimilitude. Dostoevsky explicitly raises the problem of verisimilitude, or of plausibility, by repeating the precise word "neveroiatno" "implausible" as he accuses his addressees of too easily dismissing the possibility of a utopian transformation. Here, just as he did in the comments on realism discussed above, Dostoevsky is resisting and trying to undo the ingrained, mistaken concepts of verisimilitude held by society—he insists that his vision is not as laughable as people think it is.

In this passage Dostoevsky also pushes his concept of verisimilitude to a new level of circular self-reflexivity: he suggests that it is the mistaken sense of verisimilitude itself that is keeping that which *should* be verisimilar from becoming *actually* verisimilar. In other words, if we just realized that the honest, sincere mode of existence is fully true and possible, then it would become so. Our sense of verisimilitude, then, is not so much a reaction to what really exists as an attitude that determines what *can* exist. If this is true, the real barriers to the golden age are located in our subjective perspective rather than in objective realities. This in turn means that literary fiction has access to a powerful transformative mechanism: literature can change reality by changing the reader's sense of what is possible within reality. If Dostoevsky's novels can convince readers to accept ideal depictions as plausible, then the necessary mental shift for

the achievement of the golden age will have occurred. As will be described below, one of the functions of *The Brothers Karamazov* is in fact to prod readers to shift their sense of the verisimilar closer to the ideal end of the spectrum, thus creating the mental conditions for the realization of the ideal.

"The Golden Age in Your Pocket" is a leading example of the view that the "golden age" can be attained virtually with a snap of the fingers, but many other passages in the *Diary* similarly insist that Dostoevsky's idealistic vision is fully real and possible. For example, reflecting on the scene of Anna's near-death in *Anna Karenina*, Dostoevsky claims that this is an instance when the usually hidden loving and forgiving potential of human beings becomes a reality. He views the scene as "proof" that his golden age vision is possible: "Поэт доказал, что правда эта существует в самом деле, не на веру, не в идеале только, а неминуемо и необходно и воочию" 'The poet proved that this truth exists in actual fact, not only as a matter of faith, not only as an ideal, but inescapably and unavoidably and in plain view' (Feb. 1877; 25:53). Here, in his trademark repetitive style, Dostoevsky hammers in the reality of his ideal with phrase after phrase that links the ideal to facts and to undeniable sensual perceptions. In another instance, after sketching his vision of Russia's benevolent hegemony in "The Utopian Understanding of History," Dostoevsky again underlines the serious possibility of his idea: "это не игра в слова, а тут *действительно* будет нечто особое и неслыханное"; "это будет настоящее воздвижение Христовой истины"; "можно серьезно верить в братство людей, во всепримирение народов, в союз, основанный на началах всеслужения человечеству" 'this is not playing with words; there *truly* will be something special and unprecedented here'; 'it will be a true exaltation of the truth of Christ'; 'one can seriously believe in human brotherhood, in the universal reconciliation of nations, in a union founded on principles of universal service to humanity' (23:50). Here Dostoevsky once more explicitly forestalls any metaphorical interpretation of his utopian vision and insists we take it as a literal, believeable "truth." Passages like these rest on a legitimate argument: there *is* something simple about Dostoevsky's transformative vision and we really *can* choose to act kindly toward others if we really want to.[15] Meanwhile, Dostoevsky aims to make this benevolent outlook even more likely precisely by continually reminding us that it *is* possible. These assertions that the ideal is easily attainable make up one of the major strands in the discussion of utopia in the *Diary*.

At the same time, Dostoevsky's repeated protestations only make more evident his own insecurity about the plausibility of his vision. He has to keep reminding himself and others that his ideas are viable because he is well aware that they seem incredible not only to others but also, as becomes clear, to himself as well. Just after insisting on the viability of his ideal, he will often suddenly switch into a mode that admits that his ideal may be impossible or may exist only as an eternally distant object of aspiration. For example, the quotation at the end of the previous paragraph, in which Dostoevsky insisted that his prophecy for Russia's future is genuinely viable, is immediately followed by an equivocation: "И если верить в это 'новое слово', которое может сказать во главе объединенного православия миру Россий, — есть 'утопия', достойная лишь насмешки, то пусть и меня причислят к этим утопистам" 'And if believing in this 'new word,' which Russia can utter to the world at the head of a united Orthodoxy—if this is a 'utopia,' worthy only of derision, then you can go ahead and number me among these

[15] See Gary Saul Morson's *Narrative and Freedom* for a discussion of how Dostoevsky's work dramatizes the possibility of such choices by using the technique of "sideshadowing" to emphasize the contingency and alternative paths present in history.

Utopians' (23:50). Here, after insisting earlier that he is not writing from an impossibly utopian perspective, Dostoevsky suddenly gives in and agrees to be considered a Utopian. This switch brings in a newly skeptical yet defiant perspective on the ideal. Apparently the literal plausibility of the ideal, which was just asserted so forcefully, no longer matters as long as one has an unshakable faith in the ideal. And this is not even the sort of faith that, by enacting a shift in our concept of the verisimilar, immediately turns the object of our faith into reality; it is the sort of faith that willingly attaches itself to unattainable, transcendent, implausible visions. Just as in his famous comment about how he would rather be with Christ than with the truth, Dostoevsky is willing to accept that his ideal might not be the truth after all—and he chooses to live in his utopia regardless. His vision of the ideally moral human has changed from a concrete plausibility into a potentially ridiculous idea that can only be accepted on blind faith.

A similar shift—from protestations of truth to a sudden admission of implausibility—occurs at the end of "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man." In the closing pages of this short story, the narrator initially insists that everything that he saw in his utopian dream is as real and true as can be: "я видел истину, я видел и знаю, что люди могут быть прекрасны и счастливы, не потеряв способности жить на земле"; "я видел истину, — не то что изобрел умом, а видел, видел, и *живой образ* ее наполнил душу мою навеки" 'I've seen the truth, I've seen it and know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing their capacity to live on the earth"; "I have seen the truth—it was not some invention of the mind; I saw it, I truly saw it, and its *living image* has filled my soul forever' (25:118). Here Dostoevsky underlines his point with his trademark redundancy of terms. He repeats the word "truth" several times—but lest we be tempted to understand this truth in only an abstract sense, he emphasizes the concreteness of his vision: it is something he "saw" as a "living image." And in case we still find these images too otherworldly to be plausible, the narrator, in a passage that precisely formulates the goal of "progressive realism," tells us that this beautiful existence *is* compatible with earthly life ("people can be beautiful and happy without losing their capacity to live on the earth"). In the narrator's view, his dream is proof that real people can genuinely live in universal harmony. "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" seems to come down solidly on the side of the literal plausibility of a utopian mode of life.

But doubts penetrate even into Dostoevsky's most confident assertions. Right in the midst of the confident phrases quoted above, the narrator declares, "Я не хочу и не могу верить, чтобы зло было нормальным состоянием людей" (25:118). Suddenly, amid the insistence on concrete truth, we find a reference to faith—a faith that would be superfluous if the utopian vision were as unequivocally real as the narrator claims it is. Now it appears that the narrator is hanging on to his happy vision only because he willfully refuses to accept its impossibility. The doubts grow more prominent several lines later: "пусть, пусть это никогда не сбудется и не бывать раю (ведь уже это-то я понимаю!), — ну, а я все-таки буду проповедовать. А между тем так это просто: в один бы день, *в один бы час* — всё бы сразу устроилось!… Если только все захотят, то сейчас всё устроится" 'suppose this never comes to pass, suppose paradise never is realized (that much I do understand, after all)—well, I shall still go on preaching. And yet it is so simple: in a single day, *in a single hour*—everything could be established at once!... If only we all want it, everything will be arranged at once' (25:118-119). The lines here about how everything could be achieved "in a single hour" seem to reinforce the idea of "The Golden Age in Your Pocket"—namely that the transformation of humanity is an easy task. But at the same time, this passage unmasks the hollowness of that claim as the narrator openly admits that paradise might never arrive and declares that he will continue to preach about

paradise even though fully aware of its implausibility. These lines, then, reveal that the mental transformation that unlocks the golden age may be simple, but is not actually *easy*. It could happen in an hour if only humans wanted it—but apparently they do not want it or are not as capable of it as Dostoevsky claims. His vision thus becomes an irrelevant hypothetical that asks people to suddenly regain an innocence that is irrevocably lost. The perspective that emerges in these more skeptical passages from the *Diary* counterbalances the vision of the simple and achievable ideal discussed earlier. Dostoevsky admits that his paradise is a utopia that, like all miracles, can only be accepted on faith. The ideal exists as an extremity, forever inspiring us and leading us on, but never quite attainable. It is this skeptical view of the ideal that will make it difficult to adequately incorporate the most admirable characters of *The Brothers Karamazov* into the realist mode.

If Dostoevsky manages to achieve any balance between his competing concepts of the ideal—the ideal as easily achieved paradise or as impossible utopia—it comes when he develops the notion of the ideal as an object of faith. Whenever he backs away from his more rigid attempts to insist that his ideal vision is absolutely realistic, he evocatively describes how a belief in an elevated vision can be a useful force in our lives. For example, in "An Isolated Case" ("Edinichnyi sluchai," Mar. 1877), a discussion of the recent death of a famously charitable and prejudice-free doctor, Dostoevsky asserts that such rare and almost legendarily good individuals give people something to believe in: "Эти мысль дают, эти веру дают, живой опыт собою представляют, а стало быть, и доказательство… нужно очень немного таких, чтоб спасти мир, до того они сильны" 'They are the ones who inspire ideas; they are the ones who give us faith; they provide a living example, and so a proof as well… we need very few such people in order to save the world, so powerful are they' (25:92). A passage from the short piece "Is It True That Ideals Can Be Bad As Long As Reality Is Good?" ("Verna li mysl', chto 'pust' luchshe idealy budut durny, da deistvitel'nost' khorosha?'," March 1876) also offers a strong statement on the power of the ideal: "без идеалов, то есть без определенных хоть сколько-нибудь желаний лучшего, никогда не может получиться никакой хорошей действительности"; "если теперь неприглядно, то, при ясно сознаваемом желании стать лучшими (то есть при идеалах лучшего), можно действительно когда-нибудь собраться и стать лучшими" 'without ideals, that is without an at least somewhat defined desire for the good, no good reality can ever be achieved at all'; 'if things are unappealing now, then, with a clearly cognized desire to become better (that is, with ideals of the good), it is truly possible to pull ourselves together at some point and become better' (22:75). In these two passages, Dostoevsky balances the ideal somewhere between plausibility and impossibility. On the one hand, he distances his ideal from everyday reality in that he views the kind doctor as a strong exception to the norm and presents our "desire to be better" as more of a subjective aspiration than a model that is likely to be realized on earth. Yet on the other hand these passages leave open the option of turning the ideal into a reality. The doctor and the ideals he represents are not only an object of faith but also a "proof"—proof presumably that such a mode of life is possible on earth. The image of the ideal, Dostoevsky claims, affects our mental subjectivity so powerfully that it can move us to bring ourselves closer to a more perfect existence. As long as we have an ideal, we also have the potential to realize it. Thus Dostoevsky's discussions of the ideal as an object of faith position the ideal as a limit case but not as an absolute; its image forever hovers above us but is not completely out of reach. The exceptional individuals who inspire "faith" both call us to lead a better life and, by their existence—rare as it is—"prove" that a fully moral life is possible. If Dostoevsky is going to reconcile his transcendent visions of the Christian ideal with the

empirical mode of the realist novel, he will have to draw on this category of characters who are exemplary yet not impossible.

Overall, however, figures like the kind doctor do not make the ideal plausible enough to fit completely into the realist novel. People like the doctor can hover on the margins of a realist novel since they do have the barest sheen of possibility, but they are too exceptional to convincingly ground the verisimilitude of a text. If the goal of "progressive realism" is to demonstrate that exemplary ideals can be broadly attainable, then these figures who exist in tiny numbers, and these purely subjective visions of a marginally possible future, hardly fulfill the task of establishing the ideal in the here and now. Something more will be needed to fully map out the transition from fallen everyday reality to transformed paradise. *The Brothers Karamazov* includes some exceptionally good figures like the deceased doctor, but it will require other characters to take on the task of creating more substantial connections with the average reader.

In the attempt to create connections between earthly reality and the religious ideal of universal brotherhood, one more factor was of use to Dostoevsky. Both in his overall career and within *The Brothers Karamazov*, a pragmatic gradualism coexists with his utopian extremities. Dostoevsky's visions are lofty, but the concrete actions that contribute to the transformation of the world are prosaic, small deeds. For example, writing for his journal *Time*, Dostoevsky asks educated Russians to stop complaining about the impossibility of grand actions and instead just teach one boy to read (18:68); in a notebook entry from 1864 he criticizes revolutionaries for moving too fast and suggests that excessive demands (such as those of the 1848 revolutionaries) will outstrip the ability of society to assimilate them and lead to more harm than good.[16] Going hand in hand with this preference for small steps was Dostoevsky's tendency to take moderate positions and act as a mediator. In the 1860s, for example, he was more charitable to the young radicals than were his fellow editors (Frank *Stir of Liberation* 53-55); in the 1870s, he had the remarkable ability to appeal both to reactionary government leaders and to political agitators among the youth—and he himself recognized and reveled in this "phenomenal" position as national cultural mediator (30.1:121). The odd combination of absolutism and moderate gradualism in Dostoevsky's outlook will help him bridge the gap between his visions and reality when it comes time to write his novel. Alongside his ethereal vision of universal love and his grand hopes for world transformation, we find an appreciation for small deeds and a remarkable willingness to forgive human fallibilities and embrace even only partially redeemed characters.

All of the conceptual tools described above are employed in *The Brothers Karamazov* in the attempt to create a place of contact between idealistic vision and everyday reality. The greatest challenge to this project is Dostoevsky's almost inhuman vision of selfless, loving perfection, a vision that he himself occasionally admits is an impossible utopia. But, as elaborated above, Dostoevsky draws on an array of methods to make this vision more approachable. He vividly reminds us how simple and immediately achievable the golden age could be if we were just able to shift our subjective expectations; he insists that the transformation of the world is a real potential within us; and he points to at least a few isolated concrete examples of people who have managed to realize the ideal of brotherly love. Meanwhile, he articulates a realist poetics that is able to accommodate extremes based on his

[16] An excellent short article by Gary Saul Morson ("The God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic") argues that the emphasis on small deeds is one of the most significant themes in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Morson claims that the novel promotes the "mythic prosaic," i.e. the view that small acts of kindness can have grand eschatological significance. With this approach, Morson says, Dostoevsky manages to connect his "ecstatic visions" to his prosaic pragmatism.

conviction that the world really is more extreme than commonly believed; he also affirms that reality is steadily advancing toward imminent change, suggesting that the individuals who now stand as isolated, ideal models can gradually develop into the norm. All of these techniques work to reverse our perspective on the world and make the transition from the vision of the ideal as impossible to the vision of the ideal as simple, attainable and real. None of these methods fully succeeds in overcoming the unsettling and undeniable implausibility of Dostoevsky's vision of a perfectly harmonious human community. Nevertheless, these factors generate a productive volatility and variety in *The Brothers Karamazov*, allowing different elements of the novel to try out different approaches and contribute to an at least approximate realization of the project of "progressive realism."

PART II: *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* AND THE PATH FROM THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL TO REALITY

1. Formal, Thematic and Mimetic Readings of the Novel: Review of Scholarship

Scholarship on *The Brothers Karamazov* has fruitfully explored both the formal and the thematic aspects of the novel. The novel's condensed and highly patterned structure has been a productive site for formal analysis; multiple studies have teased out the subtle connections that link together disparate elements of plot and character. Robert L. Belknap's 1989 *The Structure of The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, deliberately sets aside questions of thematic interpretation in order to investigate Dostoevsky's structural techniques. He describes several "inherent relationships" (14) within the novel, including the traits of "Karamazovism" that link together Fyodor Pavlovich, Dmitri, Ivan and Alyosha (18-23), or the motifs of seeds and rays of light that are associated with divine grace (39-42). Robin Feuer Miller's 1992 *The Brothers Karamazov* builds on this approach, tracing the recurrence throughout the novel of situational "rhymes" such as stones, seeds, memory, or the three temptations of Christ; she notes that these "motifs" can "cut both ways," taking on both positive and negative connotations (37, 102). Overall, Miller thoroughly demonstrates the "contrapuntal," "musical quality of Dostoevsky's prose" (36). Both Miller and Belknap credit J. M. Meijer's 1958 discussion of "situation rhyme" in Dostoevsky as a predecessor to their approach. And K. Mochulsky broached the topic even before Meijer: his 1947 monograph *Dostoevskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (*Dostoevsky: Life and Works*) points out how the characters of the novel are connected and contrasted with each other in a way that produces an "architectonic" sense of balance and symmetry in this "most constructed" of all Dostoevsky's novels (521).

The narratorial technique of the novel is another structural feature much commented on by those who read it from a formal perspective. Belknap describes how Dostoevsky employs "primary," "secondary" and "tertiary narrators" (69); both Belknap and Miller discuss how the narrator manipulates the reader by withholding or hinting at information; and Joseph Frank notes that Dostoevsky moves at will between a characterized narrator with a distinct perspective on events and a nondescript, omniscient narrator whose voice recedes into the background (*Mantle of the Prophet* 572-574). One of the most notable comments on Dostoevsky's narrator comes

from V. E. Vetlovskaia, whose 1977 *Poetika romana Brat'ia Karamazovy* (*The Poetics of* The Brothers Karamazov) makes a detailed case for the argument that Dostoevsky's narrator, with his intimate, modest, tendentious, and occasionally hyperbolic or repetitive tone, is a modernization of the typical narrator of hagiographic texts.

The structural feature that is most relevant for the arguments I will be making is the distribution of the hero function among several different characters, a feature that has been noted by many readers. For example, K. Mochulsky writes that the three Karamazov brothers form a single spiritual unit or "collective personality" ("sobornaia lichnost'," 521), with Ivan standing for reason, Dmitri for emotion and Alyosha for will. W. J. Leatherbarrow likewise asserts that the three brothers "perform the structural function of a single central hero" which results in a "fragmented hero" (31); he slightly modifies Mochulsky's assignation of qualities so that Alyosha represents the soul, Ivan the intellect and Dmitri both physicality and emotion. Belknap's description of the hero function in *The Brothers Karamazov* uses a slightly different model. Instead of classifying the brothers according to the distinct piece each contributes to a larger whole, he writes of a "hierarchical distribution of attributes" (23) in which the same traits—sensuality, love of life, etc.—are distributed among the brothers at different levels of concentration. In my analysis below, I will show that the collective hero is one of the most important devices in enabling the transition from an impossible to an attainable utopia. Belknap's hierarchical model is the best fit for this approach, since it allows the brothers to be aligned along a spectrum of plausibility rather than placed in different categories.

Other readers of *The Brothers Karamazov* have preferred to focus on the formidable philosophical, moral and spiritual themes whose intense dramatization helped the novel make such a mark on European intellectual history. Joseph Frank's reading is an exemplary instance of this approach: for him the entire novel centers around the conflict between reason and faith, a conflict that is explored as each brother undergoes his own conversion experience (*Mantle of the Prophet* 567-572). For Frank, the most impressive points of the novel are also its most overtly philosophical segments, namely Ivan's tavern conversation with Alyosha and his later dialogue with the devil (*Mantle of the Prophet* 600, 667). Frank's interpretation owes much to Mochulsky, who also reads *The Brothers Karamazov* as a dualistic religious drama, in particular as a tragedy focusing on the split between good and evil within the human personality (*Dostoevskii* 522-23). Michael Holquist, meanwhile, performs a unique psychological reading that secularizes the novel's key conflict, turning it from a problem of religious faith into a problem of "how sons become fathers" according to the model presented in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Holquist examines how certain characters become "good" fathers who liberate their children instead of oppressing them, and at the same time break out of group psychology in order to become individuals (*Dostoevsky and the Novel* 165-191).

Whether religious or psychological, these thematic interpretations inevitably give a more satisfactory account of the actual motivations and significance of the novel than the purely structural discussions; certainly some sort of moral-spiritual-psychological struggle and attainment lie at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov*. But heavily thematic readings also risk turning the novel into a philosophical treatise, even if they pay due attention to how the ideology is fleshed out in plot and character. An alternative way to deepen our understanding of the novel's engagement with philosophy is to examine how ideological content intersects not with plot, character, or the structural problems mentioned above, but with that foundational aspect of fictional poetics, mimesis. The realist novel is uniquely poised between the real and the imagined, as it allows for invention while constraining its inventions to be verisimilar. As a

result, any theme that enters into a novel gets caught up in the ongoing investigations of plausibility that are at the foundation of realist fiction. Thus novels do more than just flesh out philosophical propositions or dramatize their consequences; they also test the propositions by seeing whether they can live up to the realist genre's demand for verisimilitude. And so *The Brothers Karamazov*, similarly, does not just offer the literary embodiments of various moral dilemmas and their possible spiritual solutions; it also dramatizes the process in which the very solutions and moral programs that are on display try to make themselves realistic. In the discussion that follows, then, I will investigate the mimetic drama of *The Brothers Karamazov* as I trace the unresolved struggle between visionary themes and the demands of realism.

Many scholars have commented on the mimetic status of the novel in one way or another, mainly by discussing which characters are or are not plausible. One of the most common criticisms of *The Brothers Karamazov* is that the attempt to embody the ideal in Zosima or Alyosha makes one or both of them into an unconvincing character who cannot be integrated into the realist mode. Dolinin, for example, finds Zosima ridiculous and unconvincing ("Zolotoi vek" 185-186); Mochulsky, although much more sympathetic to Dostoevsky's Christian viewpoint than Dolinin, views Alyosha as a weak portrayal, too thinly drawn to offer more than a slight hint of the human ideal (536). Leatherbarrow focuses his ire on Zosima, declaring him the embodiment of "that most heinous of the novelist's crimes—direct and overt moral idealism and didacticism" (*The Brothers Karamazov* 76); ultimately Leatherbarrow finds that the whole novel misses its ideological aim: "Dostoevsky fails to rise… to the challenge of incorporating the mystery of faith and salvation within the limits of realistic art" (81).

These rejections of Zosima and Alyosha are an understandable response to the inevitable strains that arise from the project of "progressive realism," but their peremptory tone hinders understanding of the more intricate ways that *The Brothers Karamazov* both succeeds and fails at its utopian-mimetic mission. Other accounts offer a more nuanced, mixed judgment of the achievements and plausibility of the main characters. For example, Holquist's Freudian reading claims that Zosima cannot offer a desirable psychological model because he is stuck in the hagiographic mode, while Alyosha does escape the sinner-saint dichotomy and achieve a functional existence as individual and as "father" (in Freud's understanding of the terms). Sven Linnér's *Starets Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov* addresses the problem of plausibility even more directly: he opens by assuming that a central aim of *The Brothers Karamazov* is to make Zosima a believable positive figure or, as Linnér's subtitle puts it, a "mimesis of virtue." Like many readers, Linnér concludes that this project fails, but he adds an interesting nuance to his evaluation: the problem, he claims, is not that such saintly figures are unrealistic—Linnér says that very good people do truly exist, and points to Zosima's real-life models—but that saintly characters just cannot be portrayed convincingly in literature, since fiction cannot function without some conflict. My own approach will pick up on the notion that Zosima is at least minimally possible while offering a more flexible evaluation of his success within the novel: he can in fact be read as a functional character if he is placed back within his context as one of a whole spectrum of characters. Robert Bird, like Linnér, reads *The Brothers Karamazov* as an attempt to create a realistic model of a beautiful person, but his 2004 article "Refiguring the Russian Type" turns the spotlight from Zosima to Alyosha. Bird concludes that Alyosha is in fact a completely successful literary portrayal in that he functions not as a "mimesis" but as a "mathesis," i.e. not as a representation of what already exists but as a "mode of learning" and a "revelation" of what will come in the future (19). Certainly, the reading of Alyosha as a figure who points to the future is accurate, but Bird's reading seems to hail Alyosha as a innovative new

realist type based on the very quality that in fact makes it difficult for Alyosha to fit within realism at all. The awkwardness of Alyosha's position within the novel cannot be easily exorcised. Finally, Kate Holland's 2007 article "Novelizing Religious Experience" refreshingly shifts the focus from Zosima and Alyosha to Dmitri. Her idiosyncratic approach focuses on the role of religious legend in *The Brothers Karamazov* and suggests that the folk legend in particular is able to integrate religious experience with real life, or "fuse the earthly with the divine" (79). Holland asserts that Dmitri is the character most strongly associated with the folk legend and therefore most able to make Christianity intelligible within his life. Although I do not share Holland's particular focus on religious legend, I appreciate the way she moves beyond Alyosha and Zosima in order to highlight Dmitri's key role in the novel's thematic project. As I will show below, the functioning of *The Brothers Karamazov* depends on the presence of an entire array of characters, each of whom is best understood against the backdrop of a larger collective. None of the characters can be dismissed as entirely unrealistic; instead, the multiple main characters work together to sketch out a field of plausibility that tests the novel's philosophical propositions against its mimetic poetics.

2. Ivan's Unreasonable Ideal and the Ladder of Virtue

Ivan's "Rebellion" and "Grand Inquisitor" speeches are well known for voicing the problems of theodicy, faith and reason that constitute the core philosophical themes of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Less recognized is the fact that Ivan's impassioned discourse also articulates the central representational problem of the text, namely the question of whether human excellence is plausible. This question is at the heart of Ivan's spiritual rebellion: Ivan rejects God because God expects too much of us. In Ivan's opinion, God puts humanity in an impossible position by giving us the freedom to choose between right and wrong without making us strong enough to reliably choose the correct path. God insists that our love for him be freely granted, but most humans cannot live up to this challenge, and their weakness opens the door to the evils of the world. It is the horrible price of these evils, particularly cruelty toward children, that leads Ivan to "return his ticket" to a God who asks more of us than we can give. With this gesture, Ivan declares that the Christian ideal is not humanly attainable and suggests that the world would be better off if humanity were spared the confrontation with such high moral expectations. The rest of the novel will attempt to demonstrate that Ivan's version of verisimilitude is wrong.

Ivan first expresses his complaint at the very beginning of his conversation with Alyosha as he complains about how repellent his fellow humans are: "По-моему, Христова любовь к людям есть в своем роде невозможное на земле чудо. Правда, он был бог. Но мы-то не боги" 'In my opinion, Christ's love for people is in a way a miracle impossible on earth. True, he was God. But we are not gods' (14:216). Here Ivan flatly rejects as impossible what will be the key tenet of Zosima's doctrine—love for all. Such a demand can be made of divine beings, but to expect universal love from human beings is unrealistic. Ivan's low opinion of human moral capacity surfaces several times again in his parable of the Grand Inquisitor, who is portrayed as protesting Christ's unreasonable expectations for humanity: "Клянусь, человек слабее и ниже создан, чем ты о нем думал! Может ли, может ли он исполнить то, что и ты? Столь уважая его, ты… слишком много от него и потребовал" 'I swear, man is created weaker and baser than you thought him! How, how can he ever accomplish the same things as you? Respecting

him so much, you… demanded too much of him' (14:233). The Grand Inquisitor admits that a select few do live up to God's call, but the rest of humanity is left behind, leading to Ivan's complaint: "И чем виноваты остальные слабые люди, что не могли вытерпеть того, что могучие?... Да неужто же и впрямь приходил ты лишь к избранным и для избранных?"; "Ты гордишься своими избранниками, но у тебя лишь избранники, а мы успокоим всех" 'How can all the other weak people be faulted for not being able to endure what the mighty endured?… Can it be that you indeed came only to the chosen ones and for the chosen ones?'; 'You are proud of your chosen ones, but you only have the chosen ones, while we will put everyone at ease' (14:234, 235). These later passages amplify the pathos of the speaker's indignation at a God who demands too much, while also making clear the distinction between the few and the many. Whether in realistic literature or in real life, a workable model of human excellence cannot be one that only a few exceptional individuals can achieve. The ideal must be reasonably attainable for the average person, or it will be dismissed as too difficult and, from a literary point of view, too implausible.

Thus Ivan articulates the literary project of "progressive realism" in theological terms, and declares flat out that the loving, Christian version of the ideal that the rest of the novel will attempt to promote is not realistic. This point of view puts him in the same category as the other two non-redeemed characters in the novel, Fyodor Pavlovich and Smerdiakov. They too reject the idea that humanity should aspire to a transcendent moral standard. In a well-known passage, Smerdiakov scandalizes his listeners when he claims that any person would be justified in renouncing Christianity under torture. After all, Smerdiakov argues, no one "кроме разве какого-нибудь одного человека, много двух" 'except for maybe one person on the whole earth, two at the most' (14:120) has the amount of faith the Bible says every believer should have—enough to move mountains. Like his "double" Ivan, Smerdiakov claims Christianity is a matter for a tiny, select few, for that pair of hermits he thinks might live somewhere in the desert; it is not an attainable goal for the masses. Fyodor Pavlovich takes a slightly different tack in his rejection of the Christian ideal: he does not say it is necessarily impossible, but he finds that such harmonious perfection is inappropriate in any case for the human realm. While chattering to Alyosha about how he hopes to enjoy his sensual pleasures for decades to come, he states: "А в рай твой, Алексей Федорович, я не хочу, это было бы тебе известно, да порядочному человеку оно даже в рай-то твой и неприлично" 'And I don't want to go to your paradise, Aleksei Fyodorovich, let it be known to you; it's even unseemly for a decent man to go to your paradise' (14:158). Fyodor Pavlovich's remark strikes a blow to the whole project of trying to bring paradise to humankind, whether in literary representations or in real life. Although his reference to a certain indecency is vague, he seems to suggest that the two realms simply do not belong together, that perhaps a human cannot truly be human in paradise, or that the price we pay in order to enter paradise makes the whole enterprise undesirable. His offhand remark is compelling in its suggestion that we should allow humans to be humans and let go of visionary ideals.

Ivan, Fyodor Pavlovich and Smerdiakov, outsiders to the project of "progressive realism," are the ones who most explicitly articulate the project in all of its difficulty. While they claim that we should quit expecting humanity to ever access divinity, the novel devotes all of its resources to refuting their skepticism and tracing out a path from human fallibility to saintly love and grace. The novel does so by offering us a hierarchy of characters who realize the ideal of Christian love to varying degrees. *The Brothers Karamazov* gives us an excellent image for understanding how this hierarchy works—the image of a ladder. The passage in question comes

in the middle of Dmitri's "confession" to Alyosha when the latter tells his brother that he also has sensed inside himself some slight stirrings of the trademark Karamazov sensuality: "Всё одни и те же ступеньки. Я на самой низшей, а ты вверху, где-нибудь на тринадцатой. Я так смотрю на это дело, но это всё одно и то же, совершенно однородное. Кто ступил на нижнюю ступеньку, тот всё равно непременно вступит и на верхнюю" 'The steps are all the same. I'm on the lowest, and you are at the top, somewhere on the thirteenth. That's how I see it, but it's all one and the same, all exactly the same sort of thing. Whoever steps on the lowest step will surely step on the highest' (14:101). If we substitute Christian love for sexual desire in this image, we have the model we need. The image of the ladder[17] removes the absolute divisions that otherwise make it so hard to connect human fallibility with divine perfection. With this model, even if we only realize the ideal in an extremely modest form, we are at the same time connected to it in its highest, purest form—for as Alyosha says, it is all part of the same impulse. The same lofty ideal informs even its slightest manifestations. Furthermore, once we take that small step to at least slightly partake in the ideal, the path is open to further advancement all the way to the top, and thus we are tempted to move toward perfection via a gradual, manageable progression. The ladder model allows both sides of the real/ideal dichotomy to connect to each other without having to compromise their individual natures. Humanity can still be 95 percent fallible while incorporating a small percentage of the ideal morality, and meanwhile the ideal can remain sublime on the thirteenth step, injecting parts of itself into humanity without sullying its own purity, and holding open the option and the immense aspiration of perhaps climbing all the way to the top step. This, at least, is the structure that the novel hopes to instantiate. But, as we will see, it is not so easy for an earthly resident to climb the ladder, and conversely the highest levels of the ladder are quite resistant to earthly existence; thus the promising ladder model is nonetheless strained by the pressures of the dichotomy it attempts to bridge.

3. The Outer Limits of Possibility: Markel and Zosima

If we wish to follow the ladder from the top down, the natural starting point in *The Brothers Karamazov* would seem to be Zosima. But to begin with him would be to overlook the original source of the ethos of love and forgiveness that represents the ideal of this novel. Zosima receives his teachings from his older brother Markel, who dies of tuberculosis at age 17. Markel had started to develop atheist leanings as a youth, but just before his death he has an epiphany and begins expressing the same utopian vision found in Dostoevsky's *Diary*. Just as Dostoevsky had written that the golden age is "in our pocket," able to be realized as soon as we wish, Markel declares that the earth would be a paradise if we could only recognize it as such. He then carries out the personal moral transformation that points the way to the golden age: he forgives others, accepts his own guilt, aspires to be the servant of his servants, and generally is animated by an undiscriminating and boundless love for all living beings. Markel's epiphany is the purest form of the moral ideal in the novel, but in his extremity he also represents the problematic side of the ideal, namely the difficulty of realizing the Christian ideal on earth. Markel is angelic because he already has one foot in heaven. Having embraced the ideal of universal love, he cannot mature

[17] The image could also be a staircase; Alyosha refers only to "steps" (*stupen'ki*). A staircase image better captures the gradual progression I wish to emphasize in my model, but it is a ladder that appears in Orthodox icons such as "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" (I owe this observation to Irina Paperno). For the religious context in which I use the image, "ladder" is most appropriate.

with it into a fully realized life; his death just before the age of adulthood mirrors the way that the Christian ideal cannot completely develop itself within earthly parameters. Markel himself expresses a sense of his incompatibility with earthly life. About a year before he dies, he tells his family, "Не жилец я на свете меж вами, может, и года не проживу" 'I'm not long for this world [lit., 'am not a resident of the world'] among you, I may not live another year' (14:261). The highly concentrated form of the ideal seen in Markel is too pure to make the earthly accommodations required for the project of progressive realism, and he exits the scene very soon after dropping the seed of Christian love and forgiveness into the world.

Markel's seed falls into Zosima, or more accurately into Zinovii, as Zosima was known when he was still a member of the secular world. Zinovii embarks on a career in the military and lives the typical dissipated life of the officer until he has his own epiphany, arising out of a set of circumstances in which he insults a romantic rival, vindictively challenges him to a duel, and also unjustly gives his orderly Afanasii several sharp blows to the face. On the morning of the duel, Zinovii suddenly recalls his brother's words about universal guilt, apologizes deeply to his orderly, declines to shoot at his rival, and embarks on the path that eventually makes him into a revered *starets* (elder) who preaches the doctrine of love and forgiveness that he had originally received from his brother. But a key transformation happens as this doctrine moves from Markel to Zosima. In receiving the seed from his brother, Zosima also moves it one step down the ladder: the Christian ideal becomes considerably more compatible with human character and earthly life than it had been. We saw that for Markel, the moral epiphany arrived together with a death sentence. But Zosima lives—he in fact lives for several decades, all the while maintaining the doctrine of universal love as his guiding principle, living and preaching it through a full career until his death at age 65 (14:37). And so he gives the Christian ideal the first pragmatic qualification that it needs if it is going to be made to function in the real world: he demonstrates that it is livable.

Of course, the life that Zosima leads occurs behind the walls of a monastery, so his experience is certainly not a viable model for the average person. It is a life that removes itself physically and mentally from conventional human experience; by entering the monastery, Zosima takes up residence in an in-between space, a space that is on the earth, yet is sanctified and separated from the secular in order to act as a foothold for the divine in the world. Zosima, therefore, only barely fits within the limits of worldly life. However, this is precisely his function: he is the furthest outpost of human life in its approach to the ideal. Many readers, as described in the review of scholarship above, find Zosima to be thinly portrayed and stuck in the hagiographic rather than the realist mode. The entire story of his life is, of course, explicitly presented as a saint's life, and much of his communication about the ideal occurs as preaching and exhortation rather than in fleshed-out representations of lived experience. All of these factors distance Zosima from realist plausibility. But to make him more "realistic" might have ruined his function as the second-from-the-top step in the ladder to the ideal. It does not matter that Zosima is so far from average human life as long as he has done the job of making the ideal at least minimally possible.

Much of the portrayal of Zosima, then, is devoted to persuading us that his life, despite its high degree of virtue, *is* in fact possible. In other words, Zosima can be a saint, i.e. an extremely excellent version of humanity, but he cannot be a god. The first and most basic step in underlining Zosima's status as a human being is to deny him any of the supernatural powers that would obviously place him in an entirely different category of being. Any hint of miraculous power is meticulously avoided in the "Women of Faith" chapter, where the narrator provides us

with naturalistic explanations for all of the healing interventions that Zosima performs. A particularly lengthy discourse describes exactly how a mentally ill "shrieking" woman is calmed not via any special powers but merely by the psychological and physiological effect of the encounter with a revered personage. Here the narrator uses ostentatiously biological terms, speaking of the experience as a "сотрясение всего организма" 'shock to her whole body' (14:44). Zosima's other actions are so clearly non-miraculous that they do not even require this deliberate medicalization: in his conversations with the grieving mother or the guilt-ridden murderer he acts essentially as a particularly sensitive and experienced therapist, dispensing the wisdom that will best help them manage their emotional distress. Any magic that resides in these actions arises from the natural powers of empathy and love that any human can cultivate if desired.

This avoidance of the supernatural is a feature of the entire text. For example, the narrator claims that the pregnant "Stinking" Lizaveta made it over the fence into Fyodor Pavlovich's garden "хоть и весьма мудреным, но натуральным образом" 'in a natural, if rather complicated, way' (14:92), and Ivan's conversation with the devil turns out to be a fever-induced hallucination. These small but pointed reminders of the novel's naturalistic outlook allow the text to demonstrate that it adheres to a realist mode.

Admittedly, *The Brothers Karamazov* does gratuitously flirt with the supernatural at certain times. For example, in a remarkable coincidence, the woman who has long heard nothing from her son in the military receives a letter from him just a few days after Zosima predicts something of the sort. The text also emphasizes the extraordinary, almost unbelievable nature of Lizaveta's feat of climbing while pregnant, even though the narrator simultaneously assures us that there must be *some* natural explanation. These hints of the extraordinary testify to Dostoevsky's fondness for mystery and suspense, which coexisted with the sober nineteenth-century realism of the educated engineer and doctor's son. On a more significant level, the passages that push at the limits of the real prod readers to expand our sense of what is possible in the world. Dostoevsky's yearning for an intense ideal leads him to incorporate these ambiguous little episodes that bring human experience to the threshold of a higher supernatural realm. When the text toys with the supernatural, readers are induced to consider our own unrealized capacity to be remarkable.

In his mature fiction, however, Dostoevsky never crosses into the unambiguously supernatural, since the whole point of his program is to convince us that great power resides within the normal human being. Any magical effects would undermine his program and would be exposed as useless charlatanism within the realist mode of the text. And so the central model of the ideal is Zosima, who is extraordinary but not supernatural. Any miracles that Zosima performs are the small miracles of consolation and wisdom that can be achieved with the cultivation of our best *human* capacities.

While denying Zosima any supernatural features, the novel grants him a host of mundane characteristics that underline his connection to the earthly realm. Any humanizing trait is fair game in the portrayal of Zosima as long as it does not detract from his core morality of love and forgiveness. Many of the traits assigned to him are made distinctly unappealing in order to counterbalance the perfection of his universal love. For example, Zosima's physical appearance displays him as both unhealthy and unattractive, with weak legs and patchy grey hair (14:37). These physical traits reduce the impression of absolute perfection while doing no harm to Zosima's inner moral sublimity. Zosima's moral doctrine also makes concessions to certain normal human appetites. For example, Zosima is not particularly strict in matters of food and

drink, a fact that is highlighted by creating a foil in his adversary, the extremely ascetic monk Therapont. And the doctrine Zosima preaches embraces pleasure in general, proclaiming that the divine destiny for human beings is happiness. As he tells Madame Khokhlakova, "для счастия созданы люди, и кто вполне счастлив, тот прямо удостоен сказать себе: 'Я выполнил завет божий на сей земле'" 'people are created for happiness, and he who is completely happy can at once be deemed worthy of saying to himself: 'I have fulfilled God's commandment on this earth" (14:51). We are reminded of Zosima's tolerant outlook after his death when his enemies begin to attack his reputation: "'Несправедливо учил: учил, что жизнь есть великая радость, а не смирение слезное,' — говорили одни, из наиболее бестолковых… 'К посту был не строг, сладости себе разрешал, варение вишневое ел с чаем'" "He taught unrighteousness; he taught that life is great joy and not tearful humility,' some of the more muddleheaded said… 'He was not strict in fasting, allowed himself sweets, had cherry preserve with his tea" (14:301). Here, just in case any readers miss the proper interpretation of Zosima's permissive regime, the narrator directly tells us that the criticisms of Zosima's enemies are "muddleheaded." Zosima's celebration of the pleasures of life communicates the idea that virtue need not be practiced in total opposition to human nature. The features that matter in Zosima's Christianity are love, forgiveness and humility. Dostoevsky pushes *those* traits to the most sublime levels in the figure of Zosima—but at the same time makes concessions to human reality in any areas that are not essential to the Christian ideal. The text highlights these relatively minor concessions in order to downplay the self-abnegation required by Zosima's absolutist demands for loving humility. Zosima's joyful version of Christianity helps cast the novel's ideal as one that accommodates normal human nature.

The flexible aspect of Zosima's doctrine is succinctly summarized by Fyodor Pavlovich in a gushing farewell as he exits Zosima's cell after the scandalous family meeting there: "Это я всё время вас ощупывал, можно ли с вами жить? Моему-то смирению есть ли при вашей гордости место? Лист вам похвальный выдаю: можно с вами жить!" 'I've been getting the feel of you, seeing whether one can get along with you [lit.: 'whether one can live with you']. Whether there's room for my humility next to your pride. I present you with a certificate of honor: one can get along with you ['one can live with you']!' (14:43). This passing comment sums up the way that the text positions Zosima's doctrine in order to attain the goal of integrating ideal visions with human realities. The key question in the novel's project of "progressive realism" is whether the ideal is humanly livable. Here the most depraved character of all is best qualified to give Zosima the stamp of approval: if an unredeemed person like Fyodor Pavlovich can "live" with Zosima, then the elder's doctrine of Christian love is surely one that accommodates human fallibility even as it maintains its high standard of universal love.

Another feature that makes Zosima's doctrine more "livable" is its gradualism and emphasis on small deeds. The notion that modest acts are more effective than grand gestures was a theme in Dostoevsky's earlier writings, as described above, and this approach emerges as a strong motif in *The Brothers Karamazov* as well. Zosima does not ask his fellow human beings for immediate acts of inimitable virtue, and in fact advises against them. Madame Khokhlakova, for example, claims that she occasionally considers leaving everything behind to become a nurse. Zosima immediately perceives the hollowness of this dream. From his perspective, any good deed from her at all would be a positive, respectable development: "Сделайте, что можете, и сочтется вам" 'Do what you can, and it will be reckoned unto you' (14:53), he advises her; "нет-нет да невзначай и в самом деле сделаете какое-нибудь доброе дело" 'Once in a while, by chance, you may really do some good deed' (14:52). Such moderate expectations serve to bring

the average person of limited ability into the fellowship of the Christian ideal. Zosima's respect for small deeds is further expressed when he joyfully accepts a 60-kopeck donation from a peasant woman (14:49), and is powerfully formulated in the seed motif that runs through the novel: "Нужно лишь малое семя, крохотное" 'Only a little, a tiny seeded is needed' (14:266), Zosima tells his listeners before his death, instructing them on how to spread God's word among the people. To drop a seed, do one good deed, or donate 60 kopecks—all of these gestures seem eminently attainable, yet at the same time they participate in the same sublime notion of universal love that grounds Zosima's doctrine. The novel suggests that the full intensity of the moral ideal can be tapped by the smallest gesture.[18]

The emphasis on small acts of kindness is not confined to Zosima, but permeates the entire novel in episodes that consistently remind us of the accessibility of the Christian ideal. The gradualist outlook is most memorably communicated in Grushenka's remarkable folk tale about the gift of an onion, in which this miniscule deed was almost enough to save a wicked woman from damnation (14:318-19).[19] The superiority of small deeds is further reinforced by the negative example of those who seek a misguided heroism. Ivan's rebellion against God, for example, is driven by the desire to relieve the suffering of all of humanity—and this grand aspiration results in his debilitating misanthropy, depression and illness. Katerina Ivanovna, too, perversely feeds her pride with her grand schemes to save people—the quality that Dmitri refers to as her "вызов и беспредельность" 'defiance and lack of measure' (14:143)—but her deluded plan to reform her fiancé only contributes to the tense situation that allows Fyodor Pavlovich to be murdered. Thus, with both positive and negative examples, the novel repeatedly promotes modest deeds over heroic gestures.

However, a closer look at this gradualist doctrine reveals an ambiguity that makes it unclear whether or not the promotion of small deeds really does make the ideal more accessible. At several points in the novel, we are told that consistent, modest effort is actually *more* difficult than conventional heroism. While introducing Alyosha, the narrator notes that the sacrifice of one's life—when compared, for example, to a disciplined, years-long course of study—is "самая легчайшая изо всех жертв" 'the easiest of all sacrifices' (14:25). Similarly, Zosima, when advising Madame Khokhlakova against becoming a nurse, declares that "любовь деятельная" 'active love' is a much more forbidding prospect than the "любовь мечтательная" 'dreamy love' exhibited in her vision of herself as a nurse. Zosima describes this "active" love as "дело жестокое и устрашающее… это работа и выдержка" 'a harsh and fearful thing… it is labor and perseverance' (14:54). A consideration of these passages reveals that two mutually contradictory transformations happen in the transition from heroic to prosaic love. On the one hand, as already described, the move toward an attainable, everyday level of action makes the sublime Christian ideal easier to achieve—we need do no more than "give an onion." On the other hand, a mundane sort of heroism can actually be more challenging since it asks us to exchange the appealing heroism of our dreams for tedious deeds that require long and consistent effort. The shift to an "active," mundane love turns out to be so difficult that it surpasses even the giving of one's own life; only exceptionally disciplined people can aspire to this most effective type of heroism.

---

[18] Morson has written an excellent article on the theme of small deeds in *The Brothers Karamazov*; see footnote sixteen.

[19] Robin Feuer Miller's perceptive reading of this scene notes how the novel actually rewrites the folk tale: the reciprocal kindness between Grushenka and Alyosha achieves a happy ending that is lacking in the actual folk tale, in which the old woman's selfishness causes her to fall back into hell (*Unfinished Journey* 81-84).

The contradictory view of small deeds as either simple or difficult captures the tensions in the novel's overall project. *The Brothers Karamazov* does aim to make the ideal more accessible to the common person, but only in a way that leaves the transcendent purity of the ideal intact. After all, the whole intense, visionary motivation that drives the novel would be ruined if its ideal *genuinely* turned into something commonplace. And thus we find that the very gesture that seems to make the ideal more accessible actually only elevates its status, as "active" (prosaic, earthly) love turns out to be superior to its "dreamy," heroic counterpart. The emphasis on small deeds, then, manages to fulfill two roles: it offers an accessible entry point into the practice of universal love, but it also reinforces the excellence of the ideal and draws those who begin to practice "active" love onto a ladder that leads to the heights of perfection.

Regardless of the ambiguous implications of the emphasis on small deeds, the multiple overall "humanizing" features of Zosima's ideal are drawn together in two instances. First of all, on a more immediate, discursive level, the "earthliness" of Zosima's ideal is summed up quite literally when he calls on his followers to kiss the earth: "Люби повергаться на землю и лобызать ее. Землю целуй и неустанно, ненасытимо люби" 'Love to throw yourself down on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it' (14:292). The earth-kissing image underlines the notion that Zosima's doctrine, however transcendent it may seem in its demands, is one that is to be carried out on the earth by earthly beings. The image also implies that the imperfections and concrete physical realities of the world are to be embraced and encompassed in the ideal rather than expelled as foreign. Zosima, in fact, goes so far as to suggest that the Christian ideal can *only* be enacted on earth when he describes to his followers what a precious gift it is to have been granted life: "Раз, только раз, дано было ему [духовному существу] мгновение любви деятельной, *живой*, а для того дана была земная жизнь" 'Once, once only, it [a spiritual being] was given a moment of active, *living* love, and for that it was given earthly life' (14:292). Only on the earth can one turn love from an abstract sentiment into concrete action. And if this "active" and "living" love is, as we have seen, also the superior form of love, then Zosima's comment implies that the earth is the preeminent and perhaps unique site for the realization of paradise. Thus Zosima's "earth-embracing" instruction to his followers lowers the ideal to the earth while also raising the earth to the level of paradise. This meeting of the two realms is of course not as simple as it seems; the vivid image of the embrace of the earth obscures the fact that the values Zosima inculcates in his followers do actually require superhuman (or unearthly) efforts of love, forgiveness and humility. Nevertheless, the prominent "earthly" terminology strongly urges readers to connect Zosima's ideal to the accessible world of ordinary experience, not to a heavenly realm that is beyond our reach.

The second culminating moment that drives home the "earthliness" of Zosima's ideal is embodied in one of the most memorable episodes of the plot, namely in the scandal that arises over the smell of his decaying body. The scene achieves a visceral impact in that it links Zosima to one of the most disgusting aspects of physical existence precisely at the time when he should be achieving his exaltation into paradise. The description of Zosima's unattractive exterior mentioned earlier is nothing in comparison with this extravagant emphasis on his rotting corpse; here the novel achieves the most extreme union of spiritual sublimity and physical corruption. Besides carrying out a dramatic symbolic linking of the high and the low, the scene communicates a deeper message about the status of religious belief. The incident teaches both Alyosha and the reader that spirituality does not depend on magic effects: the Christian ideal, even in its purest form, exists within the limits of natural law. Although some foolish observers, like Madame Khokhlakova, use this absence of a miracle as an excuse to reject belief altogether

(14:347, 348), the proper response of course is to realize that faith requires no support from the supernatural realm. The incident forcefully and graphically separates religious faith from mystical and supernatural claims, thus reminding the reader that one can hold on to the purest form of the Christian ideal without having to break the laws of earthly life. This scene, while drastically undercutting Zosima's potentially miraculous aura, tells us that Dostoevsky's Christian ideal is one that works within the natural world and not somewhere beyond it.

In sum, any aspect of Zosima's person that can be lowered to an accessible, everyday level is in fact lowered: he has no miraculous powers, he is physically unattractive and subject to decay, he preaches a philosophy that allows us to satisfy many of our normal human appetites, he embraces small deeds over grand ones, and he calls on his followers to orient themselves toward the earth rather than toward heaven. But amid all of these humanizing traits, his core feature remains untouched: he preaches an absolutist doctrine of universal love that includes such extreme and uncompromising statements as his instruction that the Christian admit to being, "не только… хуже всех мирских, но и пред всеми людьми за всех и за вся виноват" 'not only worse than all those in the world, but… also guilty before all people' (14:149). Zosima's doctrine clearly requires superhuman feats of love and humility, and none of the mitigating factors listed above can genuinely make his extraordinary way of life into something ordinary. Even if he eats sweets or suffers bodily decay, Zosima still exists on the very upper limits of human possibility. And so the persistently lofty demands of his doctrine lead us to question whether Zosima is even possible and plausible at all. As he suggests in the account of his youthful conversion experience, Zosima's doctrine may make him a *yurodivyi* in the eyes of others, unable to be accepted at all in regular earthly society.

Ultimately, Zosima can only be kept within the compass of the real and the possible if we draw on some of the distinctive features of Dostoevsky's poetics. As described earlier, Dostoevsky expands his concept of the real to encompass the extreme events that he asserts are the unacknowledged true face of reality. The extremes that he thus accredits include not just the fantastically dark and sordid corners of Russian life, but also the exceptional heights of human goodness. We saw this in many of the passages from the *Diary* quoted above, in which Dostoevsky repeatedly insists that the supposedly utopian vision of human love and forgiveness really *is* real. Zosima benefits from this expanded concept of the real, since it is only under a realism of extremes that he can be accepted as plausible. He is also himself a further example of this same project of expanding the real and adjusting our perceptions of the verisimilar. In letters written during the composition of *The Brothers Karamazov*, we find Dostoevsky defending Zosima's reality in a way that parallels the *Diary's* discussion of the feasibility of the golden age. In June 1879, writing to his editor N. A. Liubimov, Dostoevsky expresses his goal in the portrayal of Zosima: "Если удастся, то сделаю дело хорошее: *заставляю сознаться*, что чистый, идеальный христианин — дело не отвлеченное, а образно-реальное, возможное, воочию предстоящее" 'If I manage it, I'll do a good thing: *I'll force people to recognize* that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstract matter, but one graphically real, possible, standing right before our eyes' (11 June 1879; 30.1:68). Two months later, after having finished the portrayal of Zosima in book six of the novel, Dostoevsky expresses satisfaction that he did achieve his goal: "Я же считаю, что против действительности не погрешил: не только как идеал справедливо, но и как действительность справедливо" 'I however consider that I have not sinned against reality: it's correct not only as an ideal but as an actuality too' (7 Aug. 1879; 30.1:102). A melding of two realms is immediately apparent in the terminology of these passages: Dostoevsky admits that Zosima is an ideal, but asserts that he is also real, and states

that the mission of the novel is to prod readers to recognize this ideal as a genuine, concrete possibility. Good people *do* exist in the world, Dostoevsky insists, and to back up his claim he points to several real-life saints, such as Tikhon Zadonsky and the "wandering" monk Parfeny, who were models for Zosima.[20] Dostoevsky certainly does not expect readers to accept Zosima as a normal or common specimen of humanity, but he does want readers to admit that the immense range of human character can truly encompass a few such remarkable individuals. Dostoevsky can advance his utopian project merely by forcing readers to acknowledge that a figure like Zosima is possible, for, as discussed earlier, a change in our perception of the possible can spur a radical change in our actual behavior. As Dostoevsky describes in "The Golden Age in Your Pocket," all we need do is stop insisting that the golden age is implausible and recognize the potential for goodness that lies within us; then we will be transformed into the excellent individuals that we previously never knew we could be. The portrayal of Zosima carries out this project, both relying on Dostoevsky's poetics of the extreme and promoting it by asking us to include this extraordinary man in our concept of reality and its possibilities.

Of course, even if we accept Zosima as plausible, he still represents the far limits of the range of human excellence. And so a further function of Zosima draws on that other idea found in the *Diary*: the notion that the ideal may not actually be plausible after all, but is necessary to give us an object of faith and aspiration. This concept appears in *The Brothers Karamazov* during the young Zosima's conversations with the mysterious visitor who turns out to be a murderer. The mysterious visitor declares that the golden age is very far away and that humanity will be stuck in a period of selfishness and isolation for a long time to come. However, a select few will keep the flame of the ideal alive: "до тех пор надо все-таки знамя беречь и нет-нет, а хоть единично должен человек вдруг пример показать… Это чтобы не умирала великая мысль" 'until then we must keep hold of the banner, and every once in a while, if only individually, a man must suddenly set an example… This is so that the great thought does not die' (14:276). Such a passage reminds us of Smerdiakov's belief in the few desert hermits who retain faith enough to move mountains. Thus this passage, rather than promote the attainability of the ideal, seems almost to support Smerdiakov and Ivan's opinion that the Christian morality asks more than what humanity can offer. But such is the ambiguity that arises when trying to span the contradictions of the visionary and the ordinary. Zosima resides precisely at the meeting point of two realms, at the point where impossibility turns into bare possibility. Thus he carries two functions: he acts as the rare, extraordinary, inspiring beacon for our highest aspirations, while also acting—to use Dostoevsky's words from the *Diary*—as "proof," as a demonstration that this loving way of life is possible and could someday become ordinary. Once we realize that this is his function, Zosima's uncomfortable position within the realist novel ceases to be a problem. He is meant to be the highest aspirational point in the hierarchy that spans the real and the ideal, and thus the hagiographic aspects of his portrayal are unsurprising: he is meant to act as a saint, i.e. as an inspiring model of the greatest heights that real human character can attain.

[20] For information on various historical Orthodox figures who may have been partial models for Zosima, see Frank (*Mantle of the Prophet* 451-55), Linnér (*Starets Zosima* 86-11), Gorodetzky and Dunlop.

4. The Angel in the World: Alyosha

The figure of Zosima is too lofty to be allowed to stand alone in the novel. He anchors the upper end of the hierarchy of human excellence, but the average reader requires a more accessible entry point to the ideal. These more attainable instantiations of the ideal are supplied by the characters who occupy successively lower steps in the ladder. The character of Alyosha, while still far from average, represents the next stage in the gradual attempt to make the vision of Christian love more compatible with ordinary reality. Alyosha's key contribution is that he takes Zosima's doctrine out into the world. In doing so he remains a vessel for Zosima's views: not only is he the elder's acolyte, pledged to obedience, not only does he embrace the earth in the exact manner called for by Zosima, but he also physically resembles Zosima's brother Markel, the original source of the ideal of universal love (14:259). But, unlike Zosima, Alyosha is not allowed to pass his life within a holy sanctuary as one of a tiny group of saints who keep the Christian ideal alive. Instead, Zosima deliberately sends Alyosha out "на великое послушание в миру" 'for a great obedience in the world' (14:71), thus symbolically challenging the religious ideal to make the worldly connections that are necessary if the earth is to be changed for the better.

By going out into the world, Alyosha increases the accessibility of the Christian ideal, but he does not bring it all the way down to the level of the ordinary. Instead he makes Zosima's doctrine applicable to a group that lies somewhere between the exclusivity of a few saintly individuals and the general level of the masses. Alyosha is meant to be a model for a social type—an exceptional type, but a type nonetheless—namely, that of the committed young revolutionaries and members of the intelligentsia. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the narrator tells us that Alyosha's character is as suited to socialism as it is to Christian faith; his key trait, and the trait of the group to which he is meant to appeal, is his uncompromising desire to find and serve the truth. His portrayal in *The Brothers Karamazov* is meant to convince other idealistic young truth-seekers to abandon the mistaken path of socialism—the path taken by that other exceptionally talented and passionate truth-seeker, Ivan—and instead promote the spiritual regeneration of Russia. As Dostoevsky mentions in an 1878 letter, the Russian youth "ищет правды… и лишь руководителей потеряли" 'is seeking the truth… and have only lost their leaders' (21 Jul. 1878; 30.1:41). The figure of Alyosha is meant to capture and divert the admirable impulses of this group onto a better alternative path. As such, he acts as a model for a group that is well above average, but that is more widely present in the world than a revered elder like Zosima.

Although Alyosha is thus positioned to take the Christian ideal out of the monastery, the details of his portrayal do little to connect him even to the more exceptional members of the non-monastic public. The text places more importance on emphasizing his remarkable characteristics and preserving his status as an exceptional model than on making any of the accommodations to human fallibility that one might expect on exiting the saintly sphere. The very first sentences of the novel are devoted to making sure we do not overlook Alyosha's special status, presumably because readers might not recognize his subtle moral heroism. "Для меня он примечателен" 'To me he is noteworthy,' the narrator tells us in the prologue; a few sentences later he sets Alyosha apart from the norm even more strongly, calling him, "человек странный, даже чудак" 'a strange person, even an eccentric one' (14:5). Alyosha's unusual nature is further established when we are given a full introduction to him in one of the early chapters of the novel. Here we learn that he is "очень странен, начав даже с колыбели" 'very strange, having been so even

from the cradle' (14:18) and that to many onlookers he seemed to be "из таких юношей вроде как бы юродивых" 'one of those youths, like holy fools, as it were' (14:20). Such comments hardly serve to differentiate him from the exceptional sainthood of Zosima.

A few aspects of Alyosha's opening description do partially anchor him in the real world. The narrator tells us that he is "вовсе не фанатик и, по-моему, по крайней мере, даже и не мистик вовсе" 'not at all a fanatic, and, in my view at least, even not at all a mystic' (14:17); a later passage even more provocatively notes that, far from being a "бледный мечтатель" 'pale dreamer' Alyosha is "больше, чем кто-нибудь, реалистом" 'even more of a realist than the rest of us' (14:24). These comments warn the reader not to consign Alyosha to practical irrelevance; the narrator instructs us to take him seriously as someone whose views and actions are applicable to ordinary experience. But these bare assertions do little to genuinely establish Alyosha's claim to pragmatic relevance. Their main purpose is to communicate the same point already encountered in our discussion of Zosima, namely that religion can coexist with "realism," and that a highly moral Christianity has nothing to do with supernatural mysticism. Regardless of whether he is a "realist" (in Dostoevsky's expanded, religion-friendly use of the word), Alyosha continues to be an almost impossibly good character.[21]

In fact, Alyosha is elevated so far above the human norm that other characters in the novel perceive him as an otherworldly, superhuman being. Almost everyone he interacts with at some point calls him an "angel" or a "cherub" (e.g. Fedor Pavlovich 14:131, Dmitri 14:97, 15:34, Madame Khokhlakova 14:177; Grushenka 14:323; Ivan 15:85). Rakitin even feels the need to remind Alyosha that he is not Christ (14:325). Thus, even though he brings the Christian ideal out into the world, Alyosha does not compromise its sublime status, nor does he manage to bridge divine morality and earthly realities. He functions as a highly exceptional model who challenges his fellow idealistic truth-seekers to rise to a higher level of integrity.

Even though the text generally separates Alyosha from ordinary experience, some sort of mechanism is necessary in order to bridge the gap between this angelic young man and the world for which he is supposed to be a viable model. In order to give Alyosha some semblance of

[21] Although this chapter focuses on the way a certain mode of realism is actually instantiated in the characters and plot of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the novel also explicitly references "realism" on several occasions. Besides the comment from the narrator that labels Alyosha a "realist," the term is also used by Dmitri, Madame Khokhlakova and Kolya Krasotkin. Dmitri exclaims about "realism" (*realizm*) whenever he is confronted with particularly trying circumstances (e.g. during his desperate and failing attempts to borrow money, 14:335, 14:339, 14:347, or during his post-arrest interrogation, 14:424). Madame Khokhlakova proclaims that the scandal of Zosima's stinking corpse has turned her into a "realist" (*realistka*, 14:348, also see 14:347). Kolya sees "realism" in the way that dogs sniff each other (14:473) and opines that the "mystic" (i.e. religious) Alyosha needs more contact with "reality" (*deistvitel'nost'*) (14:499); he also pretentiously spouts a few commonplace ideas of the "realist" critics that he has picked up from Rakitin. Except for the comment that comes from the narrator, all of these are instances where Dostoevsky mocks a shallow, clichéd understanding of realism. Kolya and Madame Khokhlakova's comments display the mistaken notion that "realism" means "atheism" and that faith is by definition unrealistic or "mystical." Dmitri's exclamations display the superficial idea that "realism" is just a shorthand for the unpalatable aspects of life. The novel satirizes these shallow views of realism in order to replace them with a more insightful understanding of the concept, namely the concept suggested in the narrator's comment on Alyosha: a true realism *is* actually compatible with religious faith. The entire project of the novel, according to my interpretation, is to demonstrate that a transcendent religious morality can coexist with ordinary life; in other words, *The Brothers Karamazov* elaborates a new version of realism that incorporates what might otherwise be dismissed as idealism or utopianism. The characters' explicit references to "realism" are not part of this serious and implicit discourse; they are light satire that places the term in our minds while making us eager for a more insightful elaboration of "realism" than that provided by Dmitri, Kolya or Madame Khokhlakova—all unreliable spokespeople.

human plausibility, Dostoevsky draws on a semantic trick already seen in the radical criticism of Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky: he suggests that the ideal embodied in Alyosha is actually more normal than the normality of the empirical world. The current state of the world, supposedly, is an aberration; eventually people will return to the state of being represented in Alyosha. From this point of view, Alyosha's exceptional character is not a sign of his lofty unattainability, but an expression of the fully "normal" and "natural" development of human nature. This idea emerges in the prologue just after the narrator has labeled Alyosha as eccentric: "Ибо не только чудак 'не всегда' частность и обособление, а напротив, бывает так, что он-то, пожалуй, и носит в себе иной раз сердцевину целого, а остальные люди его эпохи — все, каким-нибудь наплывным ветром, на время почему-то от него оторвались" 'For not only is an eccentric person 'not always' a particular and isolated case, but, on the contrary, it sometimes happens that it is precisely he, perhaps, who bears within himself the heart of the whole, while the other people of his epoch have all for some reason been torn away from him for a time by some kind of burst of wind' (14:5). This passage neatly reverses the usual viewpoint: formerly on the periphery of normal humanity, Alyosha is now holding down the center while everyone else is being buffeted by a temporary storm. He becomes the ordinary case while everyone else is an extremity.

This useful conceptual move, so tempting to the radical critics as a method for arguing away the implausibility of their transformative visions, also proved irresistible to Dostoevsky. In a number of written comments from this period, he implies that his idiosyncratic, visionary understanding of the world is more fundamentally realistic than any ideas held by his opponents. In an 1879 letter, for example, Dostoevsky notes that *The Brothers Karamazov* depicts certain "blasphemous" or atheist trends "в среде оторвавшейся от действительности молодежи" 'among young people divorced from reality' (10 May 1879; 30.1:63)—note the implication that reality is on the side of religious believers, while the youthful atheists are the deluded ones. Similarly, Zosima, explaining why it is that people find him ridiculous, claims that the mistake lies with the rest of the world, not with him: "весь мир давно уже на другую дорогу вышел и… сущую ложь за правду считаем" 'the whole world has long since gone off on a different path, and… we consider utter lies to be the truth' (14:273). Zosima's mysterious visitor, finally, notes that people "неестественно отделились один от другого" 'have separated themselves unnaturally one from another' (14:276); thus he labels the actually existing state of affairs as abnormal. All of these passages, quite conveniently for Dostoevsky's intellectual purposes, reverse our normal conception of the real and the unreal. The current, empirical state of the world turns out to be false and aberrant compared to the supposed normality of Zosima and Alyosha's ethic of universal human harmony. Thus the novel acquires at least some theoretical justification for including these remarkable figures in a realist text: their doctrine, supposedly, engages with *real* reality and the portrayal of their exceptional way of life is, so to speak, "empirical on a higher plane."

But this claim to some sort of higher normality, while a significant tendency in the poetics of both Dostoevsky and the radical realists, ultimately has only limited and secondary utility in the project of integrating the ideal into the real. The above-mentioned passages may claim that Zosima and Alyosha are normal in some deeper, fundamental sense, but readers will not accept this idea uncritically. Readers must be given a reason to interpret the Christian ideal as normal and feasible. Therefore Dostoevsky's project still faces the same problem: he must bring the Christian ideal close enough to ordinary experience to convince readers to incorporate this ideal into a slightly expanded understanding of what is real and possible in the world. Thus, even

if we recognize that Alyosha is primarily meant to be a model only for a particularly gifted and committed subset of Russian society, his exceptionalism still needs to be grounded with something more than just the *a priori* claim that this is how humans really would function if they were normal. The portrayal of Alyosha is only partially successful at demonstrating that Zosima's ideal can function within a world that is at all close to the one in which readers live.

Alyosha does effectively put into practice Zosima's philosophy of small deeds. He continually performs little interventions that subtly shift human interactions toward more positive outcomes. One of Alyosha's main methods is simply to respect people and express trust in their sincerity; this allows them to let the best sides of their character emerge. Alyosha does this for his father (14:123), for Grushenka at their first meeting (14:323), for Lise as she expresses and retracts her confessions of love for him (14:167), and for Dmitri when he expresses belief in his brother's innocence (15:36). Alyosha's other powerful act is to speak key truths in difficult situations, as he does for the tortured relationship of Katerina and Ivan (14:174-75), or by telling Ivan he is not the murderer (15:40). Finally, Alyosha gently encourages others to act with the same simple, open kindness that he himself exhibits, as when he brings the schoolboys to visit the dying Ilyusha. The actions Alyosha performs here are ones that we could all achieve if we just let our better selves emerge for a moment; thus these scenes present the transcendent ideal as one of simple, attainable actions.

Even as he injects doses of kindness and truth into the world in general, Alyosha also, in a key scene during his first meeting with Kolya Krasotkin, founds a lineage of exceptionalism that corresponds to his general function as model for the more select group of the young Russian intelligentsia. As Alyosha walks with Kolya, his usual methods of respect and sincerity induce the boy to drop his usual bravado. Then, after Kolya recognizes Alyosha as a "редкое существо" 'rare person' (14:499), Alyosha bestows this designation on Kolya as well and calls him to join a select group of people who rise above the insecurity and self-consciousness that generate so much evil: "не надо быть таким, как все, вот что… Вы и в самом деле не такой, как все: вы вот теперь не постыдились же признаться в дурном и даже в смешном" 'you ought not to be like everyone else, that's what… And in fact you're not like everyone else: you weren't ashamed just now to confess bad and even ridiculous things about yourself' (14:503-504). In this scene we see one exceptional person calling another to join an elite group—but a group that is not quite as exclusive as the tiny set of perfect saints. Thus the intervention in Kolya's life is a successful instantiation of Alyosha's role in making the Christian ideal accessible for a slightly broader yet not completely ordinary audience.

However, these small successes are overshadowed by the many ways that Alyosha fails to convince us that he is a human being in the world of real experience. Even if Alyosha's particular deeds are plausible and attainable, his constant, unfailing capacity for humility, kindness and sincerity is not. This implausibly good character is the reason why the entire apparatus of the realist novel, in the voice of the narrator and the other characters, must push him into a special non-ordinary category of the angelic, as was already described above. Alyosha exhibits the moral character of a saint,[22] and thus the representation of him in the novel intrinsically resists the fallen, worldly realm. Alyosha's visceral resistance to an engaged earthly life emerges powerfully in a passage where he expresses his reluctance to obey Zosima's instructions to leave the monastery. After a day of confronting his family's problems, he comes

[22] See Vetlovskaia for an in-depth reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a hagiography of Alyosha (162-192). Also, Harriet Murav interprets Alyosha (and Zosima) more specifically as holy fools.

back to the monastery and laments, "Зачем, зачем он выходил, зачем тот послал его 'в мир'? Здесь тишина, здесь святыня, а там — смущенье, там мрак" 'Why, why had he left? Why had that one sent him 'into the world'? Here was quiet, here was holiness, and there—confusion, darkness' (14:144). Alyosha would much rather stay within the purity of Zosima's ideal than work out how to put that ideal into practice in the real world. In particular, three major aspects of his portrayal demonstrate that his character is not ready to be a human in the outside world.

First of all, one aspect of entering into the world as a non-monastic human is to develop a functional sexuality. Zosima makes this qualification explicit when he tells Alyosha to get married in the same breath as telling him to exit the monastery (14:71). As we saw in chapter two's analysis of Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*, one of the most difficult tasks in the project of "visionary mimesis" is to accommodate normal human sexuality within idealistic morality. One might expect that Alyosha would accomplish this more easily than Agathon, since nineteenth-century European culture was not quite as strongly focused on chastity as the main measure of virtue, and since Dostoevsky's art in particular seems to make a strong statement that the value of a person is not linked to his or her sexual purity, as seen in the kind prostitute Liza of *Notes from Underground*, the virtuous prostitute Sonya of *Crime and Punishment*, or the tragically doomed Nastasya Filippovna in *The Idiot*. Yet none of these melodramatically fallen women have a positive, well-adjusted sexuality; their virtue exists in spite of their sexual activity, not in any smooth integration with it. Dostoevsky's art has trouble constructing a positive, moral version of sexuality, and Alyosha fully confirms this difficulty. Even though we are told on several occasions that Alyosha has the Karamazov sexual appetite (in conversation with Rakitin, 14:74; by Dmitri, 14:100; by Alyosha in conversation with Lise, 14:199), these claims are merely empty assertions since Alyosha remains a virgin through the entire novel and only manages to kiss Lise once (14:198).[23] Although he discusses marriage with Lise, the two of them act like awkward children rather than sexually capable adults. Alyosha never moves beyond the "дикая исступленная стыдливость и целомудренность" 'wild, frantic modesty and chastity' (14:19) that characterized him as a child; as an adult, his inner sexual stirrings continue to generate feelings of shame and fear. Alyosha's mix of chastity, morality and Karamazov sensuality has the potential to make him the sort of mixed character who could begin to build bridges to the regular human world, but this integration never happens since his sexuality remains an empty assertion rather than a concrete experience.

Another feature of a human who hopes to be taken at all seriously as a resident of the world is fallibility. Here too, as with Alyosha's sexuality, the novel makes small gestures to give Alyosha a mixed character, but these moments have little credible impact on his exceptionally perfect character. On a few occasions, Alyosha does make mistakes, but they are small mistakes of judgment, not actual failings of moral character. For example, he feels that he did wrong in blurting out the opinion that Ivan and Katerina Ivanovna are playing false roles (14:177), and he recognizes that his lack of delicacy in giving money to Captain Snegiryov causes the poor man to initially reject the offer of support (14:195-96). In these instances, Alyosha's intentions are good; his missteps arise only from inexperience. His sole flaw of any deeper consequence is his expectation of a miracle after Zosima's death. But this failing, although it is built up as a major turning point in Alyosha's life, is so minor, and Alyosha moves so quickly through his few hours

[23] But see Susanne Fusso's fascinating argument that the "Cana of Galilee" scene represents a symbolic orgasm and sexual maturation for Alyosha. Fusso finds convincing sexual implications in several details of Alyosha's portrayal—e.g. his red cheeks, for nineteenth-century readers, are a sign that he does not masturbate.

of bitter disappointment and disillusionment to his epiphany in the "Cana of Galilee" vision, that he hardly acquires plausibility as a human with any character faults at all. And so in this area too he remains a saint rather than a figure who moves Zosima's ideal any closer to ordinary human existence.

Finally, the most damning aspect of the portrayal of Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the very meagerness of that portrayal: the actual development of his character is postponed to a never-written continuation of the novel. Readers have noted that Alyosha functions as what Henry James calls a "ficelle" (Miller *BK* 23)—he ties together the different parts of the novel by acting as a go-between among the characters, and he listens to and advises them more than he acts himself. The real substance of the novel is the murder plot and Dmitri's trial, while Alyosha mostly responds to events in the lives of others; we are left wondering how his own life will take shape.[24]

The vagueness that surrounds Alyosha is not an artistic failing but a deliberate feature in the novel. The narrator, after opening the prologue by naming Alyosha as the hero of the novel, subsequently tells us that Alyosha will *actually* be the hero of the next novel and therefore is indistinctly portrayed in the current volume: "это, пожалуй, и деятель, но деятель неопределенный, невыяснившийся" 'he is, perhaps, an active figure, but a figure of an indefinite, indeterminate sort' (14:5); "жизнеописание-то у меня одно, а романов два. Главный роман второй — это деятельность моего героя уже в наше время, именно в наш теперешний текущий момент. Первый же роман произошел еще тринадцать лет назад, и есть почти даже и не роман, а лишь один момент из первой юности моего героя" 'while I have just one biography, I have two novels. The main novel is the second one—about the activities of my hero in our time, that is, in our present, current moment. As for the first novel, it took place thirteen years ago already and is even almost not a novel at all but just one moment from my hero's early youth' (14:6). This odd passage postpones into the future the one portrayal that was just claimed to be the main interest of the novel. *The Brothers Karamazov* is presented as a biography of Alyosha, who presumably in "our time" (i.e. 1880) is a mature, active member of society—but in order to avoid portraying his fully realized life, the novel deliberately jumps to a peripheral "moment" thirteen years in the past. Opinions are mixed about whether or not Dostoevsky literally intended to write a continuation of *The Brothers Karamazov*.[25] But whether it is Dostoevsky speaking in the preface or his fictional narrator, the function of these comments with regard to the project of "progressive realism" is clear. The simultaneous centralization and postponement of Alyosha allows Dostoevsky to put his character forward as the leading model of the Christian ideal while avoiding the nearly impossible task of fully portraying just how that ideal is realized in the regular world. The character of Alyosha exists as a gesture toward a hope—toward the hope that a person with his excellent morality of universal love could find a place in the secular world. But to actually work out the integration of the ideal into the world would run the risk of severely compromising the ideal. And so the novel instead, quite deliberately, gives us a half-fulfilled intention instead. The resulting text has a slightly unsettled,

[24] For information on the little we know about how Dostoevsky may have planned to continue *The Brothers Karamazov*, see Volgin ("Alyosha's Destiny") and Frank (*Mantle of the Prophet* 726-29).

[25] One topic of debate has been the question of who is speaking in the prologue: Dostoevsky or his fictional narrator. Vetlovskaia reads the prologue as the genuine voice of Dostoevsky and takes him at his word that he intended to write a continuation of the novel (162); Miller argues that the prologue comes from the person of the narrator (*BK* 81); Frank leans toward the view that this is Dostoevsky's voice (*Mantle of the Prophet* 572-74); Bagby argues that three different voices are in dialogue with each other in the preface.

off-kilter feel to it: we have it set in our minds from the start that Alyosha is the hero, but almost everything that grabs our attention in the plot centers on Dmitri or Ivan. It is this awkwardness, however, that makes it possible for the novel so powerfully to evoke a mission that it cannot fulfill.

Thus Alyosha ends up much closer to the saintly end of the spectrum than he should be if he is to genuinely fulfill his role of bringing Zosima's ideal out into the world. The novel does not convince readers that Alyosha's exceptional nature is "normal" in any sense. The aspects of his character that are most developed present him as almost superhuman; the few attempts to humanize him are hollow and superficial; and the substance of his portrayal is postponed into a never-realized future. In Alyosha, Zosima's doctrine continues to be resistant to any accommodation with the world, and Alyosha hardly offers an accessible model even for the exceptionally capable and virtuous segments of Russian society.

5. The Russian Everyman and His Inconclusive Epiphanies: Dmitri

The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* deliberately works to prevent Dmitri from becoming the center point of the novel, despite the elder Karamazov brother's dominant role in the plot. After introducing us to Dmitri relatively briefly in one of the opening chapters, the narrator tells us that the conflict between Dmitri and Fyodor Pavlovich "составит предмет моего первого вступительного романа или, лучше сказать, его внешнюю сторону" 'will form the subject of my first introductory novel, or, better, the external side of it' (14:12). This comment instructs us to read the entire murder plot centered around Dmitri as just an external vehicle for some other, more significant themes that presumably have little to do with Dmitri. The subtle reminder that this is only an "introductory" novel also directs us to downplay its significance in favor of the coming novel, which, we have been told, will focus on an older Alyosha. The reasons for this very self-aware, deliberate de-emphasis of Dmitri in favor of Alyosha have already been described: the narrator wants us to extract the main message of the novel from the excellent example set by Alyosha, who best embodies the ideal of Christian love.

But readers should be suspicious of such awkward attempts to influence our reception of the novel. If we disregard this comment, we can very successfully read Dmitri as not just the center of the plot, but also as the center of the novel's thematic preoccupations. For if any character in *The Brothers Karamazov* manages to unite the utopian vision of brotherly love with the fallen, problematic world demanded by the realist genre, it is Dmitri—together with his female counterpart Grushenka. Dmitri and Grushenka represent a substantial step down from the moral heights of Alyosha and Zosima to a space roughly in the middle of our imagined "ladder" of virtue. Thus, even though they are not as excellent as the preferred model of Alyosha, they offer a much more accessible entry point to the moral message of the text. While the novel connects Alyosha to an elite group of committed truth-seekers, Dmitri and Grushenka are clearly established as the Russian everyman and everywoman. And while the portrayal of Alyosha makes no deep concessions to human fallibility, Dmitri and Grushenka are consistently presented as mixed characters who combine occasional insights into Zosima's ethic with typical relapses into human pettiness.

Dmitri is a character of gargantuan passions embroiled in a melodramatic murder plot—yet despite the trademark Dostoevskian heightening of his character, he is also solidly established as a stand-in for the average Russian. "Average Russian" in this case refers mainly to

the educated classes who were the audience for Dostoevsky's novels, but Dmitri does also embody some of the characteristics that Dostoevsky associates with the common people, so that Dmitri truly represents the typical Russian man. Our first introduction to Dmitri comes in a short chapter in book one, where the narrator tells us as much about the minor character Miusov as about Dmitri. The chapters on Ivan and Alyosha paint details portraits of distinct individuals, but of Dmitri we learn only that he has been in the military and that he conducted himself like the stereotypical carousing young officer before coming to town to clarify his financial situation. The vagueness of this description is not inconsequential; it allows Dmitri to act as a malleable placeholder for a very general Russian type—the semi-educated, semi-wealthy, not too Europeanized, not particularly self-aware young man who has taken one of the conventional career tracks in government service. In other words, the brevity of Dmitri's characterization is itself a significant aspect of his characterization.

As we learn more about Dmitri, the characteristics that stand out are precisely the ones that Dostoevsky elsewhere labeled as typically Russian. Dmitri has a "broad" nature, as expressed in his famous comment "широк человек, слишком даже широк, я бы сузил" 'man is broad, even too broad, I would narrow him down' (14:100). He also, like the common people (in Dostoevsky's view of them), has an ingrained reverence for native Russian orthodoxy that persists in spite of the external disorder and sinfulness of his life: he alone, arriving late to the meeting in Zosima's cell, bows to receive a blessing from the holy elder. Furthermore, even if Dmitri does behave badly, he at least admits to himself the wrongness of his actions; this was another supposed trait of the common people that Dostoevsky admired. Finally, if the parallels just mentioned are too subtle to fully communicate Dmitri's status as the Russian everyman, other passages in the novel are more explicit—most prominently the description of Dmitri given during the trial by the prosecutor Ippolit Kirillovich:

> В противоположность 'европеизму' и 'народным началам' братьев своих, он как бы изображает собою Россию непосредственную… тут она, наша Россеюшка, пахнет ею, слышится она, матушка! О, мы непосредственны, мы зло и добро в удивительнейшем смешении… мы натуры широкие, карамазовские, — я ведь к тому и веду, — способные вмещать всевозможные противоположности и разом созерцать обе бездны…
>
> In contrast to the 'Europeanism' and the 'popular foundations' of his brothers, he seems to represent Russia in immediate form… she is here, our dear mother Russia, we can smell her, we can hear her. Oh, we are spontaneous, we are an amazing mixture of good and evil… we are of a broad, Karamazovian nature—and this is what I am driving at—capable of containing all possible opposites and of contemplating both abysses at once… (15:128)

Here the Russian character, the "broad" character and the Karamazov character are all tied to each other and summed up in Dmitri. Dmitri represents the average Russian man, whether nobleman or commoner, with his immediacy, his "broad" combination of good and evil tendencies, and his imperfect yet deeply rooted religiosity.

As the Russian everyman, Dmitri, unlike Alyosha, has the normal complement of human foibles, especially those likely to be seen as typically male: he drinks, he fools around with too many women, and he gets drawn into physical brawls. Particularly notable is his very well-

developed sexuality in contrast to Alyosha's chastity. Any redemption of Dmitri that occurs will have to find reasonable accommodation for this undeniable aspect of human life. Going hand in hand with these more immediate flaws is a general lack of adequate concern for the well-being of others. Throughout the novel we get hints of the various major and minor victims of Dmitri's excesses, such as the women he has toyed with (14:100-101), the peasants he has insulted (14:372), or the indigent Snegiryov family whom he publicly shamed. The faulty aspects of Dmitri's character are thoroughly displayed in the novel.

Yet all of Dmitri's moral failings stem not so much from active malice as from a heedless, unaware selfishness and failure of discipline. Thus, in Dmitri's "broad" nature there is plenty of room for good impulses as well. The narrator explicitly tells us that another of Dmitri's faults, excessive jealousy, is one that frequently coexists with nobility of character (14:343-44), and we find plenty of signs of Dmitri's noble impulses in the novel—not so much in his pride-based sense of personal honor as in actions that show a capacity for kindness and self-criticism. Early in the novel, for example, the narrator mentions that Dmitri has already reproached himself internally for some of the sharp insults directed at his father (14:30); Dmitri also shows consideration for Alyosha by promising in writing to behave respectfully during the visit with Zosima (14:31). Thus, despite everything we have been told about Dmitri's reckless way of life, the novel gives us early signals of his complexity and capacity for goodness. Dmitri exhibits the mixed character that he himself memorably characterizes as the battle of "Madonna" and "Sodom," of God and the devil, in the human heart. Dmitri is therefore poised to provide the needed link between the high and the low: he has the moral failings to connect to ordinary human life as well as the capacity for virtue that makes it possible for him to model a gradual, partial adoption of Zosima's higher vision for human behavior.

Dmitri fitfully advances higher in the ladder of virtue by means of a series of moral epiphanies. Because Dmitri must remain a mixed character, none of these epiphanies can be absolute; instead they occur as an ongoing series of partial advances followed by retreats. Dmitri's dream of a hungry, sick child is the most memorable of his moral revelations, but it is neither unique nor final. The novel describes multiple dramatic and culminating moments in Dmitri's development, and in each case Dmitri's faulty character reemerges once the impact of the event has faded. The realist underpinnings of the novel prevent a definitive transfiguration; an absolute change would only make Dmitri into another Alyosha or Zosima, out of our reach, incapable of injecting the required human plausibility into the novel's idealistic moral program. Dmitri's role is moderate: he shows how people can become better, but not perfect.

The traits that mark Dmitri's gradual moral progression are the same ones emphasized in Zosima's doctrine: increasing self-criticism and recognition of one's own guilt, a forgiving attitude toward others, and feelings of genuine, not merely physical love. Although Dmitri has the capacity to experience these feelings from the start of the novel, they begin to emerge prominently in books eight and nine, which chronicle Dmitri's final frantic search for money, his trip to Mokroe and the preliminary questioning after his arrest. Shortly after returning from his failed appeal to the merchant Samsonov, for example, Dmitri senses new, deeper feelings for Grushenka that show how his sexual appetite is developing a new moral and emotional resonance: "в любви его к этой женщине заключалось нечто гораздо высшее, чем он сам предполагал, а не одна лишь страстность, не один лишь 'изгиб тела'" 'in his love for this woman there was something much higher than he himself supposed, and not passion alone, not merely that 'curve of the body'" (14:344). The love between Dmitri and Grushenka, as it deepens over the next several chapters, will allow the novel to suggest that human sexuality can in fact be

indulged in a moral way when it occurs within a relationship based on mutual caring, support and commitment.

Dmitri's gradual moral elevation is also displayed as he begins to admit his faults more readily than before. In conversation with Madame Khokhlakova he freely acknowledges that he has treated Katerina Ivanovna poorly (14:349). His self-recrimination becomes more intense once his last hope has disappeared and he begins planning his trip to Mokroe. Speaking with Perkhotin, for example, he admits he is "подл" 'base' (14:366) and calls himself a "смрадное насекомое" 'foul insect' (ibid.). He also apologizes to Fenia for frightening her so violently earlier: "Да вот что, Феня, — крикнул он ей, уже усевшись, обидел я тебя давеча, так прости меня и помилуй, прости подлеца" "And something else, Fenya,' he shouted to her, already seated in the cart, 'I hurt you earlier, so forgive me and have mercy, I'm a scoundrel, forgive me'" (14:368). In all of these passages we see how the emotional blow of Dmitri's financial and romantic ruin has already aroused his feelings of love, personal responsibility, and humble forgiveness.

These developments then reach a high point—just one of many such climaxes—during Dmitri's carriage ride to Mokroe, when he feels his love for Grushenka intensify, and also, in a grand gesture that approximates Zosima's vision of universal guilt and forgiveness, asks his coachman Andrei to forgive him on behalf of everyone. Both experiences are presented as something new, absolute and uncompromising, as if they mark an indelible shift in Dmitri's character. The love Dmitri feels as he rides to Mokrow is described as an unprecedented sensation: "никогда еще не подымалось из груди его столько любви к этой роковой в судьбе его женщине, столько нового, не испытанного им еще никогда чувства" 'never before had such love for this woman, so fatal for his destiny, risen in his breast, such a new feeling, never experienced before' (14:370). Dmitri's request for forgiveness is full of an eschatological finality: "А ты, ты простишь меня, Андрей?.. за всех, за всех ты один, вот теперь, сейчас, здесь, на дороге, простишь меня за всех?" 'And you, will you forgive me, Andrei?... for everyone, for everyone, will you alone, right now, this moment, here on the road, forgive me for everyone?' (14:372). The impression of irrevocable change conveyed in these passages is only underlined when, on arrival, Grushenka is struck by Dmitri's atypical behavior. In his newly meek and loving mode, Dmitri refrains from even thinking anything bad of his Polish rival: "Ну что же такое, ну и хорошо, что он курит трубку… Значит, так и надо, коли парик" 'Well, what of it? It's good that he smokes a pipe… So, if there's a wig, that's how it should be' (14:378). (This is the same wig that the narrator directly tells us is "преглупо" 'incredibly stupid' (ibid.)). Had the novel ended here, we might conclude that Dmitri has already mostly concluded his moral transformation.

However, although Dmitri's inner capacity for goodness has surged to the surface, he has not, of course, magically turned into a saint. The exaggerated rhetoric of the above passages most likely arises from the love of sweeping gestures typical of his Karamazovian character. Meanwhile, the reader notices signs of the ongoing human failings that will make Dmitri's transformation into a continually unfinished project. At this point in the narrative Dmitri's gravest failure is his plan to kill himself, which represents an absolute rejection of God's world and of the earthly life that the ethic of the novel directs us to embrace. Dmitri's suicidal intentions arise from the mistaken notion that he can take it upon himself to punish himself (e.g. 14:364). True repentance, the novel will eventually make clear, entails the humble acceptance of the suffering that the world imposes on you, and Dmitri's plan to somehow inject a melodramatic nobility into his self-punishment reveals the ongoing falsity in his feelings.

Dmitri's foibles are also apparent in many smaller instances. One motif that the novel regularly uses to signal a moment of moral failure is a feeling of *zloba* (anger, spite, malice). We know that Dmitri felt a tremendous surge of this feeling while gazing at his father during the near-murder (14:355)—even though new feelings of love for Grushenka were developing in other parts of his soul at the same time. *The Brothers Karamazov* also marks the moral status of a character in the tics of his or her speech: good or bad disposition is indicated according to whether one invokes God or the devil while swearing. This pattern is established early in the novel when unambiguously negative characters such as Miusov and Rakitin utter the devil's name while on the holy ground of the monastery (Miusov 14:33, Rakitin, 14:74). In Dmitri's case, a mix of holy and profane oaths signals the inner war of good and bad impulses within him during the lead-up to his trip to Mokroe. Exasperated by Madame Khokhlakova, he exclaims, "О, чтобы черт!" 'Ah, devil take…' (14:351); questioned about the blood on his clothing by Perkhotin, he says, "к черту его, слышите, Петр Ильич, к черту, не надо!" (14:361). Speaking to Fenya, however, the positive side of Dmitri's character emerges when he invokes Christ while begging Fenya to tell him where Grushenka is: "Феня, ради господа Христа нашего, скажи, где она?" 'Fenya, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, tell me where she is' (14:352). This pious exclamation comes immediately after having screamed, "Врешь, проклятая!" 'You're lying, damn you!' (ibid.). These small linguistic details help us track the progress of the war between Sodom and Madonna in Dmitri's soul. Just as they signal the mixed state of Dmitri's moral character just before he departs for Mokroe, his oaths also indicate how the effect of his carriage-ride epiphany fades as the raucous night advances; for example, Dmitri swears in response to Maksimov's desire for one of the dancing girls (14:394).

As the carriage-ride epiphany fades into the background, the next stage in Dmitri's vacillating moral elevation occurs after he is arrested for the murder of his father. Now he will be challenged to overcome some remaining formidable and intransigent flaws in his character. First of all, after the partial lapse in his moral character during the height of the party, the spiritual insights of the last day or so come to the surface once again. Dmitri cries out with humility and pious thanks to God when he learns Grigorii is alive: "Господи, благодарю тебя за величайшее чудо, содеянное тобою мне, грешному и злодею, по молитве моей!" 'Lord, I thank you for this greatest miracle, which you have done for me, a sinner and evildoer, according to my prayer!' (14:413). Under questioning, Dmitri makes no attempt to deflect guilt from himself for what he has done. He honestly admits that he did beat his father a few days ago (14:415) and that he coveted his money (14:416); then, in a freely given expression of magnanimous humility, he declares that he is no better than the father he despised: "Сам-то я нехорош, господа, вот что, сам-то я не очень красив, а потому права не имел и его считать отвратительным, вот что!" 'I'm not good myself, gentlemen, that's the thing, I'm not so beautiful myself, and therefore I had no right to consider him repulsive, that's the thing' (14:417). Here Dmitri's assumption of personal guilt and his forgiveness toward others exactly match Zosima's Christian ideal. His newly profound love for Grushenka is also as strong as ever, as we see when he praises her and tries to shield her from suspicion (14:417, 418).

Dmitri's transfiguration, however, continues to be held back by his personal pride and his expectation of reciprocity. During his interrogation, he struggles to control the situation and to uphold his personal dignity, and he expects his newly magnanimous behavior to be paid back in kind. He does not yet grasp how great are the demands of the doctrine of universal love, which he has heretofore practiced perhaps in a slightly self-indulgent way as a vaguely pleasurable novelty. In its pure form, the Christian ideal requires him to maintain a kind attitude even in the

face of rude treatment from others, and to surrender personal control and dignity to the law of humble, universal love. Dmitri is far from such an ideal as he fights for the class-based respect that he has always taken as his due: "Мы тут трое сошлись люди благородные, и пусть всё у нас так и будет на взаимном доверии образованных и светских людей, связанных дворянством и честью" 'We are three noble men come together here, and let everything with us be on the footing of mutual trust between educated and worldly men, bound by nobility and honor' (14:421). When the investigators continue to insist that he bare his soul to them, that he give himself up to their barely concealed position of authority over him, Dmitri's cordial insistence on mutual respect gives way to active bitterness, insults and stubborn pride: "Ну пишите, пишите что хотите… не боюсь я вас и… [ellipsis in orig.] горжусь пред вами… Уж и так об вас замарался. Не стоите вы, ни вы и никто" 'Well, write, write whatever you want… I'm not afraid of you, and… [ellipsis in orig.] I'm proud before you… I've already dirtied myself enough on you. You're not worthy, you or anyone else' (14:432). All previous epiphanies are undone as Dmitri's desire to become better runs up against the stark reality of his natural human resistance to the doctrine of universal love. Zosima's call to think completely of others and not at all of oneself is not compatible with the ingrained requirements of the human ego.

Dmitri's frustration adds a needed note of credibility to the newly meek and loving version of himself. We also see signs of the resurgent "Sodom" aspect of his personality in his frequent curses during the questioning (14:424, 429, 431, 447). The final humiliation of his strip search then gives him a moral shock that perhaps loosens his stubborn pride, but also evokes another bitter, profane outburst against the youth Kalganov, who here is performing a kind act in offering Dmitri his clothing: "Давайте мое, к черту Калганова, и его платье, и его самого!" 'Give me mine! Devil take Kalganov, him and his clothes!' (14:436). Dmitri was happy to be kind while he felt on an equal basis with others, but he cannot stand to be the object of charitable pity, and so he responds to kindness with bitterness. Dmitri avoids the overly perfect, consistent humility and love associated with Zosima and gives vent to his malice. The moral crucible he has passed through does not eliminate the ordinary human faults of the Russian everyman.

Dmitri's moral resolve has weakened enough in the upheaval of the party, arrest and questioning that he now stands in need of a new epiphany. And so when the questioning is over, and when he has finally given in and confessed his most shameful secrets, Dmitri lies down to rest and has the dream that is the most memorable of his series of moral revelations. Confronted with a suffering mother and baby, Dmitri shifts his focus decisively from his own suffering to that of others, temporarily achieving the evacuation of the ego that is the prerequisite for a life according to Zosima's teachings. The effects of this epiphany are seen after Dmitri wakes when he feels nothing but gratitude for the unknown person who gave him a pillow.

Because this dream occurs at the end of Dmitri's symbolic "journey through torments," and because he continues to mention the striking image of the poor child later in the novel, some readers interpret the dream as a moment of culminating transformation (e.g. Frank *Mantle of the Prophet* 659-661). But we should be careful not to inflate the importance of the dream-epiphany. First of all, as recounted above, the process of Dmitri's moral development stretches at least back to his frantic search for money the day before, and includes more than one epiphany, and thus should not be centered only on the three chapters that are literally marked as the "torment" chapters. Secondly, Dmitri retains plenty of faulty characteristics even after this dream. But the most important problem with reading the dream as the towering experience in Dmitri's progression is that the dream itself contains a major moral flaw if we examine in the light of Zosima's teachings. As I have discussed above, the novel consistently promotes the superior

utility of small acts instead of abstract heroic aspirations. But Dmitri's dream is centered around a general, iconic, not literally existing child, who inspires in him an absolutist urge to suddenly fix everything at once: "хочет он всем сделать что-то такое, чтобы не плакало больше дитё, не плакала бы и черная иссохшая мать дити, чтоб не было вовсе слез от сей минуты ни у кого и чтобы сейчас же, сейчас же это сделать, не отлагая и несмотря ни на что, со всем безудержем карамазовским" 'he wants to do something for them all, so that the wee one will no longer cry, so that the blackened, dried-up mother of the wee one will not cry either, so that there will be no more tears in anyone from that moment on, and it must be done at once, at once, without delay and despite everything, with all his Karamazov unrestraint' (14:457). Dmitri's dream is one of impatience and absolutism: *right now* Dmitri wants to put an end to *all* tears. Dmitri's desire strongly reminds us of the aspiration of another character in the novel, and the comparison is not a flattering one: Ivan also is motivated by the desire to save the children, and his compassion was similarly abstract and ultimately fruitless. The "correct" attitude according to the doctrine that illuminates the novel is to do a concrete, kind deed for the real (and perhaps not so attractive) person next to you, not to love all of humanity in the abstract. Thus Dmitri's dream contains a major moral weakness that requires us to give it a more mixed evaluation than we might initially be inclined to do.

Of course, the dream does have significant positive effects; instead of sending Dmitri toward the dead end of Ivan's Grand Inquisitor, it apparently reinforces his ongoing moral regeneration. Dmitri is certainly much kinder and more docile up through the conclusion of the novel. And the immediate effect of his dream is expressed very powerfully when, just before being driven away to prison, Dmitri launches into a final grand piece of self-incrimination and acceptance of suffering: "Господа, все мы жестоки, все мы изверги, все плакать заставляем людей, матерей и грудных детей, но из всех — пусть уж так будет решено теперь — из всех я самый подлый гад!... Принимаю муку обвинения и всенародного позора моего, пострадать хочу и страданием очищусь!" 'Gentlemen, we are all cruel, we are all monsters, we all make people weep, mothers and nursing babies, but of all—let it be settled here and now—of all, I am the lowest vermin!... I accept the torment of accusation and of my disgrace before all, I want to suffer and be purified by suffering!' (14:458). Cast out from respectable society, exhausted by days of stress, and inspired by his dream-vision, Dmitri briefly takes on the role of moral prophet, preaching a doctrine of humility and universal guilt very similar to that of Zosima.

But his words ring slightly hollow. We know that, although Dmitri continues over the next few months to mutter about the suffering child (e.g. 15:10), he never translates this impulse into anything concrete. His "acceptance of suffering" on leaving Mokroe is certainly overblown, since he later comes to realize that he will not be able to put up with the constant humiliation and deprivation of prison camp life (15:185). The incompleteness of the dream-epiphany in Mokroe is also made apparent by the fact that the narrator later finds it necessary to hint at yet *another* transformative moment, this one occurring at the close of Dmitri's trial: "Он как будто что-то пережил в этот день на всю жизнь, научившее и вразумившее его чему-то очень важному, чего он прежде не понимал" 'He seemed to have experienced something that day for the rest of his life, which had taught and brought home to him something very important, something he had not understood before' (15:175). Here, we do not even learn what this "something" is that Dmitri learns, but we certainly know that we should take the claim that it impacts "the rest of his life" with a grain of salt, since these pseudo-culminating moments have become almost routine for Dmitri. Clearly, his epiphanies are an ongoing, unfinished process of moral elevation and

inevitable downturns; none of them can be put forward as the central moment that changes everything.

We do not even need to look as far ahead as the trial in order to receive confirmation of the limitations of Dmitri's Mokroe dream-epiphany, for the narrator relates a telling incident that occurs while the dream is still perfectly fresh in Dmitri's mind. As he sits in the carriage that will take him off to prison, even though his magnanimous and self-critical feelings have just reached their highest point yet, Dmitri cannot hold himself back from a passive-aggressive jab at the innkeeper, Trifon Borisovich. When the latter ignores Dmitri's farewell, Dmitri deliberately says goodbye a second time in order to make the innkeeper feel uncomfortable: "Прощай Трифон Борисыч! — крикнул опять Митя, и сам почувствовал, что не от добродушия теперь закричал, а со злости, против воли крикнул" "Farewell, Trifon Borisich!' Mitya called out again, and felt himself that this time he had called out not from good-naturedness but from spite, against his will' (14:461). He has hardly been awake for an hour, yet Dmitri's epiphany has already started to reveal its superficiality: he wants to save all the innocent children, but he cannot refrain from needling the faulty, unappealing, real person in front of him. That such petty feelings coexist with more noble aspirations is certainly not surprising, but they underline the strong contrast between Dmitri and Alyosha: unlike his angelic brother, Dmitri constantly, even in the heights of his moral upsurges, continues to exhibit the "Sodom" characteristics that are a feature of any plausible human character. Dmitri's dream, then, is more complex than it seems at first. Its effect is positive in many ways, but it contains an admixture of reprehensible excess. It is a dream-epiphany that precisely matches the character of the person who experiences it, as we see from the explicit reference to Karamazovism in the description quoted two paragraphs above. Like his dream, Dmitri has many good impulses, but is prone to problematic excesses. His dream is the epiphany of a mixed character, who does his best to climb the ladder toward the Christian ideal, but who only ever experiences the ideal in an impure form. After each advance, he slips down again a few steps, thus always retaining a tie to the ordinary, fallible world of human experience.

6. Grushenka as Russian Everywoman

Grushenka's moral journey closely parallels Dmitri's, and she occupies a similar middle ground in the journey from human fallibility to the Christian ideal. First of all, just as Dmitri is the Russian everyman, Grushenka stands for the average Russian woman. Admittedly, her immense seductive powers may initially tempt us to place her in the category of the extraordinary, but a closer reading suggests that these features of her character are best read as a Dostoevskian heightening of what are essentially very run-of-the-mill traits. The first substantial description of her, from when she unexpectedly appears before Alyosha in Katerina Ivanovna's living room, underlines both her Russianness and her ordinariness:

> Пред ним стояло, казалось бы, самое обыкновенное и простое существо на взгляд, — добрая, милая женщина, положим красивая, но так похожая на всех других красивых, но 'обыкновенных' женщин! Правда, хороша она была очень, очень даже, — русская красота, так многими до страсти любимая… одним словом, красота на мгновение, красота летучая, которая так часто встречается именно у русской женщины…

> Before him stood what seemed, at first glance, to be a most ordinary and simple being—a kind, nice woman; beautiful, yes, but so much like all other beautiful but 'ordinary' women! It's true that she was very good-looking indeed—with that Russian beauty loved so passionately by many… in a word, a passing beauty, such as one so often finds precisely in a Russian woman… (14:136, 137)

Much later, during Dmitri's trial, all the female spectators confirm the impression that there is really nothing remarkable about Grushenka: "все, почти до единой, удивлялись, как в такую 'самую обыкновенную, совсем даже некрасивую собой русскую мещанку' могли до такой степени влюбиться отец и сын" 'all, almost as one, were surprised that father and son could both fall in love to such an extent with such a 'most common and even quite plain Russian tradeswoman" (15:90). Grushenka makes a powerful impression in the novel, but her character lacks distinct individual outlines: she does not have the striking beauty of Katerina Ivanovna or the idiosyncratic neurotic-playful personality of Lise Khokhlakova. Her impact derives merely from a concentration of what is, from a stereotypical cultural point of view, the most universal and defining feature of women in general: her sexual appeal to men. She is not an individual woman so much as a heightened version of the average woman—and thus her spiritual journey, like Dmitri's, is relevant to a broad spectrum of society.

Just as was the case with Dmitri, the early characterization of Grushenka presents her in a mixed light. As with her male counterpart, we are told early on of rumors that paint her as a negative figure, as a manipulative, greedy, unchaste woman. But the meeting in Zosima's cell hints to us that Grushenka is not simply the "скверного поведения женщин[а]" 'woman of bad behavior' that Miusov claims she is. During this scene Dmitri and Fyodor Pavlovich compete with each other to praise Grushenka as noble, honest and holy (14:67-69), and their praise, despite its biased exaggerations, introduces a note of ambiguity and uncertainty into Grushenka's character. Grushenka's appearance in Katerina Ivanovna's living room reinforces this dichotomy, as she appears there as both "ангел" 'angel' (14:136) and "мерзавка" 'scoundrel' (14:140). The flaws in Grushenka's character are multiple. In addition to her mildly promiscuous sexuality, the moral failings that she will have to overcome as she rises on the ladder of virtue are her cupidity (her shrewd financial deals have made her a small fortune in just a few years, 14:311) and the bitter pride that compels her to hold perverse grudges and toy with those who have fallen for her. But like Dmitri, the Grushenka of the first parts of the novel combines substantial character flaws with an occasional capricious ability to express nobler sides of her personality.

As the novel progresses, Grushenka experiences a series of partial moral epiphanies—milder than Dmitri's—that allow her to become a better but not a perfect person. And each advance in her spiritual character is accompanied with plenty of indications that her human fallibility persists; this keeps her from being vaulted into an entirely higher category on par with Alyosha. The first major shift in her character comes during Alyosha and Rakitin's visit. Here her best impulses emerge when she instinctually expresses sympathy for Alyosha's loss, and these impulses are reinforced when Alyosha responds to her with gratitude and respect. This positive interaction subsequently helps her rise above her pride and agree to return to the lover who spurned her years ago. As the narrator tells us, Grushenka seems to transform into a better version of herself in this scene: "Все манеры ее как бы изменились тоже со вчерашенго дня совсем к лучшему" 'Her whole manner also seemed to have changed for the better since the day before' (14:315). Other positive signs in this scene include some of the self-criticism that is such

an important first step for moral improvement—for example, she openly labels herself "низкая" 'base' and a "злая собака" "mean bitch" (14:317, 320). Grushenka's spontaneous exclamations also show her positive side as they indicate the natural, if underdeveloped, religiosity that we saw in Dmitri. This is seen particularly in her reaction to the news that Zosima has died: "Господи, а я того и не знала! — Она набожно перекрестилась" "Oh, Lord, I didn't know!' She crossed herself piously' (14:318). But the limitations of Grushenka's transformation are also apparent during this scene. For example, she speaks cruelly and sharply to Rakitin, even as the more morally excellent Alyosha retains a mild, conciliatory tone with the "friend" who has just tried to betray him. And Grushenka's identification with the woman who gave the onion in the folk tale also indicates that her loving side emerges very rarely. This combination of good and bad traits continues to establish Grushenka as a preeminently mixed character.

After the partial moral regeneration of the scene with Alyosha, Grushenka's fallible side shows itself more strongly again once she reunites with her former lover. By the time Dmitri arrives at Mokroe, Grushenka is in an imperious and demanding mood. "Молчать! не ссориться!" 'Silence! No quarreling!' (14:383), she snaps at the men around her. Laudable insights into her own failings—"Дура, дура была я, что пять лет себя мучила!" 'I was a fool, a fool to torment myself for five years!' (14:388)—mingle with malice and bitterness at the baseness of her former lover, as expressed for example when Dmitri refuses to take back the money of which the Poles cheated him: "Славно, Митя! Молодец, Митя! — крикнула Грушенька, и страшно злобная нотка прозвенела в ее восклицании" "Bravo, Mitya! Well done!' cried Grushenka, and a terribly malicious note rang in her exclamation' (14:389). As elsewhere in the novel, "malice" is used to indicate the emergence of the darker side of the human soul.

This inconclusive spiritual state then resolves itself into what appears to be another major epiphany, one in which Grushenka overcomes the two main moral failings that marked her earlier in the novel. First of all, she lets a deep and positive love emerge, one that can provide a morally uplifting vehicle for her formerly disreputable sexuality. Grushenka confesses her love for Dmitri and exclaims that she will give herself to him completely—but then, crucially, she stops his caresses before they fully evolve into what would be quite a sordid lovemaking session: "Стой! Подожди, потом, не хочу так" 'Stop! Wait, not now, I don't want it to be like that' (14:396); and later: "надо, чтоб это честно… и чтоб и мы были честные, чтоб и мы были добрые, не звери, а добрые" 'We should do it honestly… and we should be honest, and we should be good, not beasts but good' (14:398). Here Grushenka demonstrates how a measure of dignity and forbearance can transform the average human's carnal desires into an attribute of "good" people. Secondly, Grushenka overcomes her materialism, one of the major faults of her last few years of working with a local merchant, when she declares that she does not care about money and wants to perform honest work: "Что нам деньги? Мы их и без того прокутим… А мы пойдем с тобою лучше землю пахать" 'What do we care about money?... And you and I had better go work on the land' (14:399). As her greed and her baser sexuality mutate into higher impulses, Grushenka begins making comments that could have come straight from Zosima: "А я пойду прощения просить: 'Простите, добрые люди, бабу глупую, вот что'… Все люди на свете хороши, все до единого. Хорошо на свете. Хоть и скверные мы, а хорошо на свете" 'And I'll go and ask forgiveness: 'Forgive me, good people, I'm a foolish woman, that's what I am'… Everyone in the world is good, every one of them. The world is a good place. We may be bad, but the world is a good place' (14:397). Grushenka's moral elevation in this scene represents a high point that corresponds to Dmitri's feelings after his dream of the suffering child.

As was the case with Dmitri, at least some aspects of Grushenka's newly loving, humble outlook do last. Later, for example, we learn that she is financially supporting the Poles and that she has taken the hapless Maksimov into her home. But, as befits an ordinary, mixed character, her transfiguration is far from absolute. At the trial, her kind and her malicious sides are both on display, as the narrator tells us explicitly: "разговор ее был неровен — то гневлив, то презрителен и усиленно груб, то вдруг звучала искренняя сердечная нотка самоосуждения, самообвинения" 'she spoke unevenly—now angry, now contemptuous and overly rude, now suddenly with a sincere, heartfelt note of self-condemnation, self-accusation' (15:113). Later, Grushenka's refusal to forgive Katerina Ivanovna during their accidental encounter at the prison confirms that she has no superhuman power of self-abnegating love.

Both Grushenka and Dmitri, then, exhibit a natural human mix of positive and negative traits consistently throughout the novel, even as they explore some of the upper regions of the ladder of Christian virtue. The fluctuations in Grushenka's spiritual outlook are not quite as dramatic as Dmitri's, which may make her an even more functional and plausible emblem of ordinary humanity's quest to become slightly better. But overall, the two play a similar role in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a role with deeper philosophical significance than is sometimes recognized. Dmitri and Grushenka are not, as the narrator claimed, merely the "external" face of the novel (14:12), but also play perhaps the most central role in the novel's exploration of the potential for ordinary humans to experience the Christian ideal. Their fallibility and their positioning as a typical, ordinary Russian man and woman allow them to connect with a broad spectrum of readers. At the same time, their many spiritual epiphanies communicate the idea that all of us have within us immense capacities to become better people, more loving, honest and forgiving. While anchoring themselves strongly in the world of the average faulty person, they also prod readers to expand our view of the range of human character, and to open our minds to real possibilities for spiritual regeneration and transfiguration.

7. A Step Lower?

Although Dmitri and Grushenka's characters contain substantial faults, the heights of self-abnegation that they manage to achieve can still appear implausible. Rather than smoothly leading us up the ladder from ordinary to slightly better, perhaps they ask us to make too abrupt of a leap, from Dmitri's thoughtless life of excess to a meek, self-incriminating acceptance of public disgrace, or from Grushenka's life of manipulative, prideful, self-centered materialism to her magnanimous willingness to give money even to the man who hurt her so deeply in the past. Grushenka's transformation is not quite as caught up in extremes as Dmitri's, but her generosity toward Maksimov and the Poles at the end of the novel is probably more than most readers can imagine themselves doing. So are there any steps below Dmitri and Grushenka? Any emblems of an even more modest and therefore plausible and attainable form of human improvement? *The Brothers Karamazov* offers only a few slight alternatives to those who find Dmitri and Grushenka to be one step too high.

Ivan could be viewed as the very first step on the ladder to the Christian ideal in the same way that Alyosha has taken the first tiny step toward Karamazov sensuality. Just as Alyosha has imagined various sexual deeds, Ivan has at least considered accepting God—and even briefly feels what a more love-based way of life would be like when he saves the drunk peasant from the snow bank. The fact that his spiritual status is unresolved at the end of the novel means he has at

least the potential to begin advancing to higher levels of the loving, moral life. As an intellectual skeptic who nevertheless contemplates the existence of God, he offers a possible purchase point for the atheist reader who needs to be induced to take that first step of opening oneself up to spiritual uncertainty.[26] But Ivan's character experiences such mental and emotional torture that he is an unappealing starting point, and in addition his struggle is more narrowly about faith than about the broader moral issues of love and forgiveness represented by the other characters.

A very slight but compelling alternative to Ivan for the reader who remains unconvinced by Dmitri and Grushenka can be found in the account of Ilyusha's funeral. Here we are given a brief vignette of a certain Smurov, one of the schoolboys who, like all of them, has been touched to the point of tears by the Snegiryov family's loss. Yet this wave of tender feeling does not stop him from casually picking up a piece of brick and throwing it at some passing birds: "хоть Смуров… тоже ужасно как плакал, но успел-таки, чуть не на бегу, захватить обломок кирпичика… чтоб метнуть им в быстро пролетевшую стаю воробушков" 'though Smurov… was also crying terribly, he still managed, while almost running, to snatch up a piece of brick… and fling it at a flock of sparrows flying quickly by' (15:193). This seemingly superfluous detail testifies to the way that the thematic concern with the relation of good and bad impulses in human nature penetrates all levels of the text. Smurov is perhaps the simplest and most balanced emblem of the uncertain nature of the project of "progressive realism": even though touched by Alyosha's influence, he still heedlessly inflicts violence on the very birds from whom Zosima's brother Markel found it necessary to ask forgiveness. He appears as the "tipping point" between climbing up or falling down the ladder toward the ideal: he easily indulges his human propensity for the occasional nasty deed, but the "seed" planted in him by the funeral and by Alyosha's speech may well help make him a slightly better person than he was before.

CONCLUSION

The Brothers Karamazov draws on a complex, versatile set of devices and concepts in order to bring the project of "progressive realism" closer to a successful realization than was the case in the texts analyzed in previous chapters. The move from a single to multiple heroes is a powerful tool: arranged in a hierarchy of virtue, the multiple characters are able to span the extremities of virtue and fallibility in a way that a single hero cannot. The novel depicts the sublime heights of the Christian ideal in Zosima and Markel, an extremely unusual level of virtue in Alyosha, a slightly implausible but largely humanized virtue in Dmitri and Grushenka, and the barest hints of the beginning of a spiritual journey in Ivan or Smurov. The heroes on the lower steps give us the needed connection to ordinary experience, while the heroes on the upper steps ensure that the transcendent power of the ideal is not compromised in a way that would make it lose its point.

This range of depictions is allied with a concept of reality—elucidated mainly with respect to Dostoevsky's correspondence in 1868-69—that incorporates extremes on both ends of

[26] For a completely different perspective, see Susan McReynolds's article "You Can Buy the Whole World," which reads Ivan as the most moral figure in the novel because he rejects the "mercantile" religion and "exchange" philosophy embodied in Zosima's doctrine.

the spectrum. Dostoevsky's aesthetic asks us to expand the field of what we consider plausible by recognizing that reality really *is* strange and extreme. This expansion is necessary to validate the core assertion of the novel, namely the notion that a life lived according to the doctrine promoted by Zosima may be rare, but is at least humanly possible. To read Dostoevsky's realism as primarily "mythic" or "symbolic" would be to undermine this essential aim; *The Brothers Karamazov* makes the insistent claim that a life like Zosima's can be literally real. Meanwhile, Dostoevsky's convictions about the reality of extremely good characters are tempered by passages from the *Diary* that betray a certain instability concerning the attainability of the golden age. Paradise could be easily within our grasp if only we would embrace the positive impulses within us—but at the same time the idea that humanity would ever do so may be a utopian dream. The combination of these aesthetic and philosophical convictions about reality and the ideal generate the broad landscape of human experience depicted in Dostoevsky's last novel. In *The Brothers Karamazov* realism is expanded to the furthest heights of human excellence, yet ordinary characters are also incorporated just in case the utopian ideal is not easily "in our pocket" after all.

The ultimate project of *The Brothers Karamazov* is to shift readers from the skeptical to the confident perspective on the ideal, or in other words to move them from a rejection of earthly utopia to a faith in its possibility. This shift comes about via a modification of our sense of verisimilitude and a redefinition of "realism": both terms are expanded to suggest that sublime virtue is plausible and that religious faith belongs within realism. The reader is prodded to accept these expanded concepts by means of a range of heroes who map out a path for the transition. The "everyman" and "everywoman" characters of Dmitri and Grushenka give us a point of entry onto the lower steps of the Christian ideal, and once we have at least stepped onto the ladder, their constant epiphanies and surges of moral nobility, together with the shining examples of Alyosha and Zosima on the upper rungs, tempt us to step even higher. As we experience the ideal at least in partial, fleeting instances, we sense what it would be like if the morality of love, humility and forgiveness were able to reign completely. The upward pressure exerted by this range of spiritually striving characters, and the insistence that figures like Alyosha and Zosima are really real, prods readers to adjust their concept of verisimilitude upward, or in other words to expand their sense of the upper limits of the human capacity for a loving, moral life.

It may be that the whole complex of devices deployed in the novel nevertheless fails to change our subjective sense of reality. Perhaps the relevant symbol for us is the "shrieking" woman, who was only able to be cured by Zosima because she already believed in his powers. In that case, the only way that we will be convinced that the moral achievements of Zosima, Alyosha or Dmitri are actually possible will be if we were already convinced of this in the first place. In other words, *The Brothers Karamazov* may be a novel that works best for believers. But the novel was certainly not written with only a religious audience in mind; the images of faith in the novel are meant to capture any Russian readers who have lost touch with Christian Orthodoxy. The project of *The Brothers Karamazov* relies on the hope that the reader's sense of the verisimilar is not completely pre-set and judgmental, but can be shaped and challenged by fiction. If the spiritual journeys depicted in this novel convince us to adjust our conception of the range of human virtue at least a notch or two upward, that change in our sense of the possible, according to the grand hopes described in Dostoevsky's article "The Golden Age in Your Pocket," may induce us to turn the possible into the real, thus increasing the measure of genuine love present in human society and moving the world a few steps closer to the "golden age" that

Dostoevsky so fervently hoped was not the mirage he sometimes feared it was. The aim of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in sum, is to make us believe that extraordinary things are real.

Coda

Gottsched, Wieland, Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky each in their own way experimented with methods for uniting imitation and transformation within literature, and for portraying the present while projecting a possible improved future. They stretched the meanings of mimesis and the criteria for verisimilitude, as we saw in Gottsched's *Dichtkunst*, or expanded the concept of the real, as we saw in Dostoevsky; they extracted progressive implications from the most unpromising scenarios, as we saw in Dobroliubov, or threw up their hands entirely and retreated into fantasy, as we saw at the end of Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*. In analyzing all of these struggles, I have sometimes suggested that an issue of major import is at stake, that the successful depiction of plausible positive heroes is an important cultural tool for the practical betterment of society. But the significance of what I have variously called "visionary mimesis" or "progressive realism" may not be pragmatic at all. For in practice it seems that readers do not necessarily care whether an inspiring hero also manages to be plausible; we are more affected by a hero of towering stature than by a hero who makes compromises with reality. Readers of Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*, for example, latched onto Rakhmetov, not the more ordinary Lopukhov. And one of the "everyman" characteristics of Dmitri may be precisely the way that he is drawn to the heroic project of saving all the children, not to the disappointingly small deeds that Alyosha or Zosima actually demand. If it is correct that the loftiest visions are the most effective ones, then the project of bringing together the real and the ideal is best worked out not *within* literature at all, but only between literature and life: literature provides inspiring, utopian images, and readers figure out on their own how to work certain aspects of those inspiring figures into their daily lives. If our main concern is the moral and social improvement of society, this approach may be the best choice.

But, of course, as literary scholars we are not primarily trying to figure out how literature can best benefit society (not that it is a bad idea to have an argument for the practical benefits of literature at the ready); instead we are simply trying to explore and make sense of the diverse paths that literary activity has followed through history. Regardless of whether the project of creating a plausible positive hero is the best choice from a practical point of view, it is a project that many creative minds have adopted as they have found their artistic inspiration simultaneously in the concrete world around them and in the fervent hopes they have for the remaking of that world. Instead of keeping literature in the realm of fantasy and utopia, these writers use literature to explore the limits and the possibilities of the real; after all, one of the most fascinating aspects of lived experience is the intersection of hopes and aspirations with concrete realities. The attempt to portray a positive hero *within* realist literature is both an expression of the never-renounced hope that such positive images *can* become real, and a method of exploring the boundaries between possible and impossible adjustments to the world we live in. The literature of "progressive realism" or "visionary mimesis" engages precisely with one of the most viscerally relevant aspects of lived experience—with the gap between our

objective perceptions and our subjective visions. The textual interpretations in all the chapters demonstrate that many of the otherwise under-explained complexities of certain texts can be understood once we posit that the project of "progressive realism" is one of the fundamental motivations of the text.

Finally, even as this literature tests the boundaries of the real, it also thoroughly tests the literary concepts of mimesis, verisimilitude, and realism, as has been displayed in the preceding analyses. Precisely because the literature of "progressive realism" or "visionary mimesis" struggles to unite mimesis with tendencies that push beyond mimesis, it ends up exploring the many fascinating ways that mimesis can be understood, the ways that mimetic accuracy can be evaluated, and the ways that the concept of mimesis relies on the concept of the real. And so an investigation of "visionary mimesis" reminds us of the complexity, flexibility and vitality of a literary concept that, although it lies at the very origins of the deliberate study of literature, is not a term that looms large in contemporary literary studies. This dissertation has aimed to illuminate just a few of the intricate facets of the aesthetics of literary imitation within an exploration of the distinctive configuration of "visionary mimesis." The chapters demonstrate that the collision of reality with the desire to change reality produces some of the most interesting fireworks in literary history.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor. "Engagement." *Theodor W. Adorno: Eine Auswahl*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1971. 208-230. Print.

Alt, Peter-André. *Aufklärung*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996. Print.

Annenkov, P. V. "Literaturnyi tip slabogo cheloveka." *Kriticheskie ocherki*. Ed. I. N. Sukhikh. Sankt-Peterburg: Russkii khristianskii gumanitarnyi institut, 2000. 152-178. Print.

Aristotle. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Ed. James Hutton. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982. Print.

---. *The Poetics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. Print.

Attridge, Derek. "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other." *PMLA* 114.1. Special Topic: Ethics and Literary Study (1999): 20-31. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2009.

---. *The Singularity of Literature*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. 10th ed. Tübingen: A. Francke, 2001. Print.

Bagby, Lewis. "'Brief and Lame': The Introduction to Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*." *Slavic and East European Journal* 55.2 (2011): 229–244. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans by. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.

Baldwin, Claire. *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel: Christoph Martin Wieland, Sophie von La Roche, and Marie Anna Sagar*. Rochester, NY: Camden, 2002. Print.

Ball, Gabriele. *Moralische Küsse. Gottsched als Zeitschriftenherausgeber und literarischer Vermittler*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000. Print.

Ball, Gabriele, Katherine Goodman, and Helga Brandes, eds. *Diskurse der Aufklärung. Luise Adelgunde Victorie und Johann Christoph Gottsched*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006. Print.

Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1989: 141-148. Print.

---. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974. Print.

Batteux, Charles. *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*. Ed. Jean-Rémy Mantion. Paris: Aux Amateurs de livres, 1989. Print.

Beaumont, Matthew. "Introduction: Reclaiming Realism." *Adventures in Realism*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. 1-12. Print.

Becker-Cantarino, Barbara, ed. *German Literature of the Eighteenth Century: The Enlightenment and Sensibility*. Rochester, NY: Camden, 2005. Print. The Camden House Hist. of German Lit. 5.

---. "Introduction: German Literature in the Era of Enlightenment and Sensibility." Becker-Cantarino 1-31.

Beißner, Friedrich. "Poesie des Stils. Eine Hinführung zu Wieland." *Wieland. Vier Biberacher Vorträge. 1953*. Wiesbaden: Insel, 1954. 5-34. Print.

Belinskii, V. G. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. 13 vols. Moskva: Nauka, 1953-59. Print.

Belknap, Robert L. *The Genesis of The Brothers Karamazov*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1990. Print.

---. *The Structure of The Brothers Karamazov*. 1967. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1989. Print.

Bender, Wolfgang. "Nachwort." *Critische Dichtkunst.* Vol. 2. By Johann Jacob Breitinger. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "Christoph Martin Wieland. Zum zweihundertsten Jahrestag seiner Geburt." *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Vol. II.I. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977. 395-406. Print.

Berghahn, Klaus L. "Von der klassistischen zur klassischen Literaturkritik 1730-1806." *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturkritik (1730-1980)*. Ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985. 10-53. Print.

Bing, Susi. *Die Nachahmungstheorie bei Gottsched und den Schweizern und ihre Beziehung zur Dichtungstheorie der Zeit*. Würzburg: Triltsch, 1934. Print.

Bird, Robert. “Refiguring the Russian Type: Dostoevsky and the Limits of Realism.” Jackson *New Word* 17-30.

Birke, Joachim. “Gottscheds Neuorientierung der deutschen Poetik an der Philosophie Wolffs.” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 85.4 (1966): 560-575. Print.

Blanckenburg, Friedrich von. *Versuch über den Roman*. 1774. Ed. Eberhard Lämmert. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965. Print.

Böhm, Hans. Introduction. *Wielands Werke in vier Bänden*. Vol. 1. Berlin: Aufbau, 1984. v-xliii. Print.

Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1988. Print.

Bowlby, Rachel. “Foreword.” *Adventures in Realism*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. xi-xviii. Print.

Breitinger, Johann Jacob. *Critische Dichtkunst*. Facsimile reprint of the 1740 edition. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1966. Print.

Bruck, Jan. *Der aristotelische Mimesisbegriff und die Nachahmungstheorie Gottscheds und der Schweizer*. Diss. Friedrich-Alexander Universität zu Erlangen-Nürnberg. 1972. Print.

Bruck, Jan et al. “Der Mimesisbegriff Gottscheds und der Schweizer. Kritische Überlegungen zu Hans Peter Hermann, Naturnachahmung und Einbildungskraft.” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 90.4 (1971): 563-578. Print.

Budde, Bernhard. *Aufklärung als Dialog: Wielands antithetische Prosa*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000. Print.

Buddecke, Wolfram. *C.M. Wielands Entwicklungsbegriff und die Geschichte des Agathon*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966. Print.

Campe, Rüdiger. *Affekt und Ausdruck: Zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1990. Print.

---. “‘Improbable Probability’: On Evidence in the Eighteenth Century.” *Germanic Review* 76.2 (2001): 143-161. *Literature Online*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

---. *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit: Literatur und Berechnung zwischen Pascal und Kleist*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002. Print.

Carroll, Noël. "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60.1 (2002): 3-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Dec. 2008.

Cassedy, Steven. *Dostoevsky's Religion*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005. Print.

Chernyshevskii, N. G. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Ed. V. Ia. Kirpotin et. al. 16 vols. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939-53. Print.

Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000. Print.

Corbet, Charles. "Dobroliubov als Literaturkritiker." *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* 24 (1956) : 156-73. Print.

Cox, Roger L. *Between Heaven and Earth: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. Print.

Dirscherl, Denis. *Dostoesky and the Catholic Church*. Chicago: Loyola UP, 1986. Print.

Dobroliubov, N. A. (Nikolai Aleksandrovich). *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*. Ed. P. I Lebedev-Poliansky. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1934-41. Print.

---. *Sobranie sochinenii v deviati tomakh*. Ed. B. I. Bursov et al. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1961-64. Print.

---. *Sobranie Sochinenii v trekh tomakh*. Ed. Iu Burtin. Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986-87. Print.

Dolinin, A. S., ed. *F. M. Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia.* Leningrad: Nauka, 1935. Print.

---. "Zolotoi Vek." *Neva* 11 (1971): 179–186. Print.

Döring, Detlef. "Luise Adelgunde Victorie Gottsched (1713-1762)." *Sächsische Lebensbilder 5*. Ed. Gerald Wiemers. Stuttgart: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003. 213-46. Print.

Dostoevskii, F. M. (Fedor Mikhailovich). *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Ed. V. G. Bazanov et al. 30 vols. Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90. Print.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *A Writer's Diary: Abridged Edition*. Trans. Kenneth Lantz. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2009. Print.

---. *Complete Letters*. Ed. and trans. David A. Lowe. Vol. 4-5. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1990-91. Print.

---. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. Print.

Druzhinin, A. V. "Kritika Gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury i nashi k nei otnosheniia." *Prekrasnoe i vechnoe*. Ed. F. F. Kuznetsov et. al. Moskva: The Contemporary, 1988. 177-226. Print.

Dunlop, John B. *Staretz Amvrosy: Model for Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima*. Belmont, MA: Nordland Pub. Co., 1972. Print.

Eaglestone, Robert. "One and the Same? Ethics, Aesthetics, and Truth." *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 595-608. *Duke University Press Journals Online*. Web. 13 May 2009.

Egorov, B. F. "Dobroliubov i Chernyshevskii." *N. A. Dobroliubov i russkaia literaturnaia kritika*. Ed. G. G. Elizavetina. Moskva: Nauka, 1988. 13-36. Print.

---. *Izbrannoe: Esteticheskie idei v Rossii XIX veka. Borba esteticheskikh idei v Rossii serediny XIX veka.* Sankt-Peterburg: Letnii sad, 2009. Print.

Elizavetina, G. G. *N. A. Dobroliubov i literaturnyi protsess ego vremeni*. Moskva: Nauka, 1989. Print.

---, ed. *N.A. Dobroliubov i russkaia literaturnaia kritika*. Moskva: Nauka, 1988. Print.

Erhart, Walter. *Entzweiung und Selbstaufklärung. Christoph Martin Wielands "Agathon"-Projekt*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991. Print.

---. "Geschichte des Agathon." Heinz 259-274.

Esaulov, I. A. *Kategoriia Sobornosti v Russkoi Literature*. Petrozavodsk: Izd-vo Petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1995. Print.

Eskin, Michael. "On Literature and Ethics." *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 573-594. *Duke University Press Journals Online*. Web. 13 May 2009.

Evgen'ev-Maksimov, V. *"The Contemporary" pri Chernyshevskom i Dobroliubove*. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936. Print.

Fanger, Donald. *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965. Print.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Das Wesen Des Christenthums*. Ed. Erich Thies. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976. Print. Werke in sechs Bänden 5.

Fineberg, J., trans. *Selected Philosophical Essays*. By N. A. Dobroliubov. Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1956. Print.

Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002. Print.

---. *Dostoevsky: The Miracle Years, 1865-1871*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

---. *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976. Print.

---. *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986. Print.

---. *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983. Print.

Freier, Hans. *Kritische Poetik. Legitimation und Kritik der Poesie in Gottscheds Dichtkunst*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1973. Print.

Fridlender, G. M. "Estetika Dostoevskogo." *Dostoevskii—khudozhnik i myslitel'*. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972. 97–164. Print.

---. *Realizm Dostoevskogo*. Moskva: Nauka, 1964. Print.

Fusso, Susanne. "The Sexuality of the Male Virgin: Arkady in *A Raw Youth* and Alyosha Karamazov." Jackson *New Word* 142–154.

Gallagher, Catherine. "The Rise of Fictionality." *The Novel Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006. 336-363. Print.

Gebauer, Gunter, and Christoph Wulf. *Mimesis. Kultur – Kunst – Gesellschaft*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992. Print.

Gerhard, Melitta. *Der deutsche Entwicklungsroman bis hin zu Goethes Wilhelm Meister*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1926. Print.

Ginzburg, Lidia. "Literatura v poiskakh real'nosti." *Literatura v poiskakh real'nosti*. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987. 4-57. Print.

Ginzburg, Lydia. *On Psychological Prose*. Trans. Judson Rosengrant. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991. Print.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Ed. Karl Richter. 21 vols. München: btb, 2006. Print. Paperback reprint of the 1997 Münchner Ausgabe by Carl Hanser.

Goodman, Katherine. *Amazons and Apprentices: Women and the German Parnassus in the Early Enlightenment*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999. Print.

---. "Gottsched's Literary Reforms: The Beginning of Modern German Literature." Becker-Cantarino 54-76.

---. "Of Gifts, Gallantries and Horace. Luise Kulmus (Gottsched) in her early Letters." *Women in German Yearbook* 17 (2001): 77-102. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Dec. 2009.

Gorodetzky, Nadejda. *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk: Inspirer of Dostoevsky*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976. Print.

Gottsched, Johann Christoph. *Ausgewählte Werke*. Ed. Joachim Birke et al. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968. Print.

---. *Schriften zur Literatur*. Ed. Horst Steinmetz. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972. Print.

---. *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst.* Facsimile reprint of the 4th edition, Leipzig 1751. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962. Print.

Grimminger, Rolf. "Aufklärung, Absolutismus und bürgerliche Individuen. Über den notwendigen Zusammenhang von Literatur, Gesellschaft und Staat in der Geschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts." Grimminger *Deutsche Aufklärung* 15-99.

---, ed. *Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution 1680-1789*. München: Carl Hanser, 1980. Print. Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 3.

---. "Roman." Grimminger *Deutsche Aufklärung* 635-715.

Grossman, Leonid. "Problema realizma u Dostoevskogo." *Vestnik Evropy* 1917.2 (February 1917): 65–99. Print.

Halliwell, Stephen. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002. Print.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999. Print.

Heinz, Jutta, ed. *Wieland Handbuch. Leben - Werk - Wirkung*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008. Print.

Herrmann, Hans Peter. *Naturnachahmung und Einbildungskraft. Zur Entwicklung der deutschen Poetik von 1670 bis 1740*. Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970. Print.

Hohner, Ulrich. *Zur Problematik der Naturnachahmung in der Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1976. Print.

Holland, Kate. “Novelizing Religious Experience: The Generic Landscape of *The Brothers Karamazov*.” *Slavic Review* 66.1 (2007): 63–81. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Feb. 2012.

Holquist, Michael. *Dostoevsky and the Novel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977. Print.

Jackson, Robert Louis. *Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1966. Print.

---, ed. *A New Word on the Brothers Karamazov*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2004. Print.

Jacobs, Jürgen. *Wielands Romane*. Bern: Francke, 1969. Print.

---. *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder. Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman*. München: Fink, 1972. Print.

Jacobs, Jürgen, and Markus Krause. *Der deutsche Bildungsroman. Gattungsgeschichte vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*. München: Beck, 1989. Print.

Jakobson, Roman. "On Realism in Art." *Language and Literature*. Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1987: 19-27. Print.

Jørgensen, Sven-Aage et al. *Wieland. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*. München: Beck, 1994. Print.

Kaiser, Gerhard. *Aufklärung. Empfindsamkeit. Sturm und Drang*. 3rd ed. München: Francke, 1979. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Ed. Karl Vorländer. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1963. Print.

---. "Was ist Aufklärung?" *Was ist Aufklärung?: Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*. Ed. Horst D. Brandt. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999. 20-28. Print.

Kasatkina, T. A. *Roman F. M. Dostoevskogo "Brat’ia Karamazovy": Sovremennoe sostoianie izucheniia*. Moskva: Nauka, 2007. Print.

Klioutchkine, Konstantine. “Between Ideology and Desire: Rhetoric of the Self in the Works of Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Nikolai Dobroliubov.” *Slavic Review* 68.2 (Summer 2009): 335-354. Print.

---. "The Rise of *Crime and Punishment* from the Air of the Media." *Slavic Review* 61.1 (2002): 88-108. Print.

Komarovich, V. L. *“Mirovaia Garmoniia” Dostoevskogo*. 1924. *O Dostoevskom: Stat'i*. Ed. Donald Fanger. Providence, RI: Brown UP, 1966. 117-149. Print.

Kondakov, I. V. “Pokushenie na literaturu: O bor'be literaturnoi kritiki s literaturoi v russkoi kul’ture.” *Voprosy literatury* 1992.2 (August 1992): 75-127. *East View*. Web. 28 May 2011.

Kord, Susanne. *Little Detours: The Letters and Plays of Luise Gottsched (1713-1762)*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000. Print.

Krause, Frank. “Von der Theodizee-Krise zur ästhetischen Anthropodizee: Literarische Modernität in Romanen der Aufklärung.” *German Life and Letters* 55.1 (2002): 1-23. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 28 July 2010.

Kruzhkov, V. S. *N. A. Dobroliubov: zhizn', deiatel'nost, mirovozrenie*. Moskva: Nauka, 1976. Print.

Kuleshov, V. I. *Istoriia russkoi kritiki XVIII-nachala XX vekov*. 4th ed. Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1991. Print.

Lämmert, Eberhard. *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland 1620-1880*. Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1988. Print.

Lampert, E. *Sons Against Fathers: Studies in Russian Radicalism and Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford UP, 1965. Print.

Lavretskii, A. *Belinskii, Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov v bor'be za realizm*. 2nd ed. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1968. Print.

Leatherbarrow, W. J. *Fedor Dostoevsky: a reference guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990. Print.

---. *Fyodor Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.

Lebedev-Polianskii, P. I. *N. A. Dobroliubov: Mirovozzrenie i literaturno-kriticheskaia deiatel'nost'*. 2nd ed. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1935. Print.

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Ed. Wilfried Barner. Frankfurt am Main: DK, 1985-2003. Print.

Linnér, Sven. *Dostoevskij on Realism*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967. Print.

---. *Starets Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov: A study in the mimesis of virtue*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975. Print.

Losskii, N. O. *Dostoevskii i ego khristianskoe miroponimanie*. New York, Izd-vo im. Chekhova, 1953. Print.

Lukács, Georg. "Erzählen oder beschreiben?" *Probleme des Realismus I: Essays über Realismus*. *Werke* Vol. 4. Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971. 197-242. Print.

Lunacharskii, A. V. "O mnogogolososti Dostoevskogo (po povodu knigi M. M. Bakhtina 'Problemy Tvorchestva Dostoevskogo')." *Novyi Mir* 10 (1929): 195–209. Print.

Manger, Klaus. "Christoph Martin Wieland: Geschichte des Agathon." *Interpretationen. Romane des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996. 150-170. Print.

Manger, Klaus, and Jan Philipp Reemtsma, eds. *Wielandgut Oßmannstedt*. München: Hanser, 2005. Print.

Martens, Lorna. "Constructing Interiority in Eighteenth-Century Narrative Fiction: Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*." *German Quarterly* 81.1 (2008): 49-65. Print.

Martens, Wolfgang. *Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen moralischen Wochenschriften*. Stuttgart: J.G. Metzler, 1968. Print.

Mathewson, Rufus W., Jr. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*. 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975. Print.

Matlaw, Ralph E., ed. *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolyubov: Selected Criticism*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976. Print.

McReynolds, Susan. "'You Can Buy the Whole World': The Problem of Redemption in *The Brothers Karamazov*." *Slavic and East European Journal* 52.1 (2008): 87–111. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 Feb. 2012.

Meijer, J. M. "Situation Rhyme in a Novel of Dostoevskij." *Dutch Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavicists*. The Hague: Mouton, 1958. 115-128. Print.

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*. Leipzig, 1757-1767. Print.

Merezhkovsky, Dmitri. *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*. 1901. Moskva: Respublika, 1995. Print.

Miller, Robin Feuer. *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007. Print.

---. *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel*. New York: Twayne, 1992. Print.

Mitchell, P.M. *Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766): Harbinger of German Classicism*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995. Print.

Mochulskii, Konstantin. *Dostoevskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*. Paris: YMCA, 1947. Print.

Mordovchenko, N. I. *Belinskii i russkaia literatura ego vremeni*. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1950. Print.

Morson, Gary Saul. *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1994. Print.

---. *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's* Diary of a Writer *and the Traditions of Literary Utopia*. Austin, TX: U of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

---. "The God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic." Jackson *New Word* 107-124.

Moser, Charles A. *Esthetics as Nightmare: Russian Literary Theory 1855-1870*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989. Print.

---. "*The Brothers Karamazov* as a Novel of the 1860s." *Dostoevsky Studies* 7 (1986): 73–80. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.

Naumova, M. A. *Sotsiologicheskie, filosofskie i esteticheskie vzgliady N. A. Dobroliubova*. Moskva: Nauka, 1960. Print.

Nowitzki, Hans-Peter. "Wielands Leben und Wirken." Heinz 1-52.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism." *Philosophy and Literature* 22.2 (1998): 343-365. *Project MUSE*. Web. 17 June 2009.

---. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.

Oettinger, Klaus. *Phantasie und Erfahrung: Studien zur Erzählpoetik Christoph Martin Wielands*. München: Fink, 1970. Print.

Offord, Derek. "Nineteenth-century Russian Thought and Literature." *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*. Ed. Neil Cornwell. London: Routledge, 2001. 123-135. Print.

---. "Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinski." *Russian Literature in the Age of Pushkin and Gogol: Prose*. Ed. Christine Rydel. Detroit: Gale, 1999. Dictionary of Literary Biography 198. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 28 May 2011.

Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, D. N. "Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dobroliubov." *Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX v.* Ed. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii. Vol. 3. Moskva: Mir, 1911. 204-217. Print.

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

---. "La prose des années 1870 à 1890." *Histoire de la littérature russe. Le XIX-e siècle**: Le temps du roman*. Ed. Efim Etkind, Georges Nivat, Ilya Serman and Vittorio Strada. Paris: Fayard, 2005. 789-823. Print.

Peace, Richard. "Dostoevsky and the 'Golden Age'." *Dostoevsky Studies* 3 (1982): 61–78. Web. 2 Apr. 2012.

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Paul Shorey. 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1982-87. Print.

Posner, Richard A. "Against Ethical Criticism." *Philosophy and Literature* 21.1 (1997): 1-27. *Project MUSE*. Web. 17 June 2009.

Preisendanz, Wolfgang. "Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nachahmungsprinzip in Deutschland und die besondere Rolle der Romane Wielands (Don Sylvio, Agathon)." *Nachahmung und Illusion*. 2nd ed. Ed. H.R. Jauß. München: Fink, 1969. 72-95. Print. Proceedings of Kolloquium Gießen, June 1963.

---. "Mimesis und Poiesis in der deutschen Dichtungstheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts." *Rezeption und Produktion zwischen 1570 und 1730.* Ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch, Hans Geulen, and Klaus Haberkamm. Bern: Francke, 1972. 537-552. Print.

Prendergast, Christopher. *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval and Flaubert*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.

Putnam, Hilary. *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

Reiser, S. A. *Dobroliubov v Nizhnem Novgorode, 1836-1853*. Gorky: Gor'kovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961. Print.

Richards, Anna. "The Era of Sensibility and the Novel of Self-Fashioning." Becker-Cantarino 222-243.

Rieck, Werner. *Johann Christoph Gottsched. Eine kritische Würdigung seines Werkes*. Berlin: Akademie, 1972. Print.

Schaefer, Klaus. *Christoph Martin Wieland*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996. Print.

Scanlan, James P. *Dostoevsky the Thinker*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002. Print.

Schiller, Friedrich. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 5. Ed. Peter-André Alt, Albert Meier, & Wolfgang Riedel. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004. 570-669. Print.

---. “Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?".” *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 5. Ed. Peter-André Alt, Albert Meier, & Wolfgang Riedel. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004. 818-831. Print.

Schings, Hans-Jürgen. “Der anthropologische Roman. Seine Entstehung und Krise im Zeitalter der Spätaufklärung.” *Deutschlands kulturelle Entfaltung: Die Neubestimmung des Menschen*. Ed. Bernhard Fabian, Rudolf Vierhaus, and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann. München: Kraus, 1980. 247-275. Print.

Schmidt, Jochen. *Von der Aufklärung bis zum Idealismus*. *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik 1750-1945*. Vol. 1. 3rd ed. Heidelberg: Winter, 2004. Print.

Schrader, Monika. *Mimesis und Poiesis. Poetologische Studien zum Bildungsroman*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975. Print.

Schulte-Sasse, Jochen. “Poetik und Ästhetik Lessings und seiner Zeitgenossen.” Grimminger *Deutsche Aufklärung* 304-326.

Senese, Donald. “Nikolai Alexandrovich Dobrolyubov.” *Russian Literature in the Age of Realism*. Ed. Alyssa W. Dinega. Detroit: Gale, 2003. Dictionary of Literary Biography 277. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 28 May 2011.

Sengle, Friedrich. *Wieland*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1949. Print.

Shestov, Lev. "Dostevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy." Trans. S. Roberts. *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche*. Ed. Bernard Martin. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1969. Print.

Siegrist, Christopher. “Poetik und Ästhetik von Gottsched bis Baumgarten.” Grimminger *Deutsche Aufklärung* 281-303.

Siniavskii, Andrei (Abram Terts). “Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm.” *Literaturnyi protsess v rossii*. Moskva: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2003. 139-175. Print.

Stahl, Karl-Heinz. *Das Wunderbare als Problem und Gegenstand der deutschen Poetik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt am Main: Athenaion, 1975. Print.

Starnes, Thomas C. *Christoph Martin Wieland. Leben und Werk*. 3 vols. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1987. Print.

Steinmetz, Horst. "Nachwort." *Schriften zur Literatur.* By J. Chr. Gottsched. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998. Print.

Stepanian, Karen A. *Soznat' i skazat': Realizm v vysshem smysle kak tvorcheskii metod F. M. Dostoevskogo*. Moskva: Raritet, 2005. Print.

Stockinger, Ludwig. "Gottscheds Stellung in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte." *Gottsched-Tag. Wissenschaftliche Veranstaltung zum 300. Geburtstag von Johann Christoph Gottsched am 17. Februar 2000 in der Alten Handelsbörse in Leipzig*. Ed. Kurt Nowak & Ludwig Stockinger. Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002. 15-49. Print.

Swales, Martin. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978. Print.

Tatarkiewicz, W. "Mimesis." *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. Ed. Philip P. Wiener. Vol. 3. New York: Charles Scribner, 1973. 225-230. Print.

Terras, Victor. *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics*. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 1974. Print.

Thomé, Horst. *Roman und Naturwissenschaft: Eine Studie zur Vorgeschichte der deutschen Klassik*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1978. Print.

Todd, William Mills III. "The Ruse of the Russian Novel." *The Novel: Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006. 401-423. Print.

Vdovin, Aleksei. *Kontsept "glava literatury" v russkoi kritike 1830-1860-kh godov*. Diss. Tartu U, 2011. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Krjastus, 2011. PDF.

Vetlovskaia, V. E. *Poetika romana "Brat'ia Karamazovy."* Leningrad: Nauka, 1977. Print.

Volgin, Igor. "Alyosha's Destiny." *The New Russian Dostoevsky: Readings for the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Carol Apollonio. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2010. Print.

Voßkamp, Wilhelm. *Romantheorie in Deutschland. Von Martin Opitz bis Friedrich von Blanckenberg*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973. Print.

Walicki, Andrzej. *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1979. Print.

Waniek, Gustav. *Gottsched und die deutsche Literatur seiner Zeit*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1897. Print.

Wasiolek, Edward, ed. and trans. *The Notebooks for The Brothers Karamazov*. By Fyodor Dostoevsky. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1971. Print.

Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*. Vol. 4. New Haven: Yale UP, 1965. Print.

---. "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship." *Concepts of Criticism*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1963. 222-255. Print.

Wetterer, Angelika. *Publikumsbezug und Wahrheitsanspruch. Der Widerspruch zwischen rhetorischem Ansatz und philosophischem Anspruch bei Gottsched und den Schweizern*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1981. Print.

Wieland, Christoph Martin. *Briefwechsel*. Ed. Hans Werner Seiffert. Berlin: Akademie, 1963-2007. Print.

---. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Fritz Homeyer et al. *Werke* in 15 vols. Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1986. Print. Rpt. of Akademie-Ausgabe, Berlin, 1909-1939 and 1954-1976, *Werke* in 23 vols.

---. *Geschichte des Agathon*. Ed. Klaus Manger. Frankfurt am Main: DKV, 1986. Print.

---. *Geschichte des Agathon. Unveränderter Abdruck der Editio princeps, 1767*. Ed. Klaus Schaefer. Berlin: Akademie, 1961. Print.

---. *Sämmtliche Werke*. 15 vols. Hamburg: Hamburger Stiftung, 1984. Print. Rpt. of Göschen's 1794-1811 Leipzig edition in 39 vols.

---. *Werke*. Ed. Fritz Martini and Hans Werner Seiffert. 5 vols. München: Hanser, 1964. Print.

---. *Wielands Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* [Ossmannstedter Ausgabe]. Ed. Klaus Manger and Jan Philipp Reemtsma. 4 vols. to date. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008-. Print.

Wolfe, Tom. "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast." *Harper's Magazine* Nov. 1989:45-56. *Periodicals Archive Online*. Web. 30 Apr. 2012.

Wolff, Christian. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt (Deutsche Metaphysik)*. Ed. Charles A. Corr. *Gesammelte Werke* I.2. Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1983. Print.

Wolff, Eugen. *Gottscheds Stellung im deutschen Bildungsleben*. Kiel: Lipsius, 1895. Print.

Wood, James. "Human, All Too Inhuman." *The New Republic* 24 July 2000: 41-45. *The New Republic Archive*. Web. 30 Apr. 2012.

Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 4: 1925-28. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1994. 157-165. Print.

Zakharov, V. N. “Russkaia literatura i khristianstvo.” *Evangel’skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov*. Petrozavodsk: Izd-vo petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1994. Print.

Zaremba, Michael. *Christoph Martin Wieland. Aufklärer und Poet. Eine Biografie*. Köln: Böhlau, 2007. Print.

Zeller, Rosmarie. “Literary Developments in Switzerland from Bodmer, Breitinger, and Haller to Gessner, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi.” Becker-Cantarino 130-153.

Zhdanov, V. V. “Dobroliubov.” *Istoriia russkoi kritiki v dvukh tomakh*. Ed. B. P. Gorodetsky. Vol. 2. Moskva: Nauka, 1958. 90-145. Print.

---. *N. A. Dobroliubov: Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk*. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1961. Print.