

4 Allegories of the Material World: Dostoevsky and Nineteenth-Century Science

MELISSA FRAZIER

In *Demons* [Besy, 1872] Shatov rails against what he calls “half-science.” “Half-science is a despot such as has never been seen before,” he tells Stavrogin: “A despot with its own priests and slaves, a despot before whom everything has bowed down with a love and superstition unthinkable till now, before whom even science itself trembles and whom it shamefully caters to.”¹ What Shatov disparages as “half-science” is better known as Nihilism, a combination of Comte and the “vulgar” materialists together with a dash of Claude Bernard that lays claim to both an abstract mathematical rationality and a strict empiricism. Dostoevsky’s antipathy to this highly popular but entirely contradictory approach to the material world is often so extreme in its expression that readers have only recently begun to discern the richer and more complete science that his realism advocates.² In *Demons* this more capacious nineteenth-century science reveals itself most importantly in a complicated symbolic practice.

As Nikolai Chernyshevsky demonstrates in his compendium of Nihilist thought, *What Is to Be Done?* [Chto delat’?, 1863], “half-science” entails its own constellation of literary devices, including most notably a plot driven by the ideas and actions of a set of scientist-heroes who purport to explain and also manifest the “laws” of nature. As his enlightened heroes work to refashion their world along properly socialist lines, Chernyshevsky undermines his own claims to a world of matter alone, a paradoxical stance that finds its most striking literary realization in his frequent and invariably heavy-handed allegories: the allegory of the bride, the allegory of the cellar or underground, the allegorical function of the four dreams. If any figure of speech implies two levels of meaning, Chernyshevsky’s allegories are remarkable for their attempt to collapse the two into one, as Chernyshevsky tries and fails to reconcile his commitment to material monism with a utopian insistence that the ideal be made real. In *Demons* the characters’ often absurd allegorical assertion

of matter as the only measure of reality serves as a direct mockery of the Chernyshevskian world view, not that Dostoevsky rejects either materialism or allegory altogether. Dostoevsky instead reconfigures allegory to better accommodate a material world that his Underground Man calls “living life” [zhivaia zhizn'] (5:178).³

As Dostoevsky with his undergraduate training and life-long reading in the sciences was well aware, the most significant of nineteenth-century scientists from Charles Darwin (1809–82) through Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94) and James Clerk Maxwell (1831–79) tempered their scientific desire for natural “law” with an equally scientific recognition of the fundamental multiplicity and even indeterminacy of a material world that includes the material underpinnings and implications of our own minds. This commitment to relativity also marks the work of pioneering physiological psychologist George Henry Lewes (1817–78). While Lewes is most often remembered as George Eliot’s common-law husband, during his lifetime he was famous in his own right as the author of scientific works read across Europe, from *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859) to the partly posthumously published *Problems of Life and Mind* (1875–79). In the early twenty-first century, his star is also once more on the rise. Although Lewes as a practising scientist was necessarily committed to the premise of a real and really knowable material world, he was also clear in his still cutting-edge belief that scientific knowledge is not the reproduction of an already-existing and “objective” reality, but a link to what Bruno Latour in *Pandora’s Hope* (1999) calls an “aligned, transformed, constructed world.”⁴ Lewes’s great contribution to a newly emerging science of physiological psychology was the “dual-aspect monism” that claimed, in Richard Menke’s words, that “physiology and psychology, nerves and neuroses, are best understood as, respectively, the objective and subjective presentations of what are in fact the same phenomena.”⁵ For Lewes the dual workings of mind and matter both complicate our understanding of cause and effect and also guarantee the impossibility of a single objective reality “out there.” As Lewes firmly explained in *Problems of Life and Mind*: “objective existence *is* to each what it is felt to be.”⁶

Dostoevsky’s realism incorporates the insights of Lewesian physiological psychology in its own attentiveness to the interactions of minds and bodies, including the reader’s own as we thrill to the twists and turns of his suspenseful and often crime-ridden plots. The scientific instability of “dual-aspect monism” also finds reflection in a different kind of allegory. Certainly Dostoevsky derides the Nihilist urge to conflate reality as it is with reality as it might be, above all in *Demons*, where his mockery culminates in the “pathetic, trite, giftless, and insipid allegory” that is the quadrille of literature at the ball that is itself an allegory and that precipitates

the series of calamities that conclude the novel: as the fête descends into chaos, the town goes up in flames, Shatov is killed and Stavrogin commits suicide, Dostoevsky reveals the Nihilist insistence on a single and yet ideologically correct reality as not just ridiculous, but an actual dead end (10:389; 508).⁷ At the same time and in direct contrast to the would-be flatness of this failed allegory, Dostoevsky's own symbolic practice claims clearly defined yet multiple meanings in a duality that doesn't depart from material reality, but more fully expresses it.

Allegory in a Fallen World

While, in its simplest terms, as Angus Fletcher writes, allegory "says one thing and means another," as opposed to other forms of figurative language, allegory is usually also defined in terms of a certain lack of flexibility; as J. Hillis Miller argues, the "true" meaning of allegory is one, and it most often lies outside the text.⁸ With significant exceptions – C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–56) come to mind – the device also largely went out of fashion with the advent of Romanticism. It was first Goethe who famously distinguished allegory, "where the particular serves only as an example of the general," from the truly poetic device of symbol, "where the particular represents the more general, not as a dream or a shadow, but as a living momentary revelation of the Inscrutable."⁹ Coleridge then made Goethe's claim into a distinction between what he termed "mechanic" and "organic" form. Allegory for Coleridge "is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses"; symbol, on the other hand, "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity of which it is the representative."¹⁰ It is against this background that Chernyshevsky's reliance on allegory is all the more striking. It is also Chernyshevsky himself who draws attention to his use of the device.

When Mariya Alexeyevna drops hints about his supposed fiancée, Lopukhov asks himself, "Why did I devise such an allegory – it wasn't needed at all!"¹¹ If it wasn't needed, however, the allegory continues, first as Vera Pavlovna enters into a fictional marriage with Lopukhov and then as the "Bride of Her Bridegrooms" in Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream again represents the future of Vera Pavlovna herself. The didacticism that marks allegory as opposed to other, more open forms of figuration, already insists on a singular meaning; as Fletcher explains, since allegory "implies a dominance of theme over action and image ... the mode necessarily exerts a high degree of control over the way any reader must

approach any given work.”¹² Chernyshevsky makes very sure of that control, however, most often through the simple device of repetition.

In her first dream, for example, Vera Pavlovna sees herself “locked up in a damp, dark cellar [podval]” when the door “suddenly” flies open and “she finds herself in a field, running about and skipping.”¹³ After she recounts her dream to Lopukhov, it promptly comes true, as she says, “So, my dear, you are liberating me from this cellar,” and she then makes the same allegorical reference again and again: “I now know that I’m leaving this cellar”; “I shall escape from this cellar!”; How did I manage to breathe in that cellar?” until the allegory migrates to the narrator who addresses us, his readers: “Come up out of your godforsaken underworld [iz vashei trushchoby], my friends.”¹⁴ As Chernyshevsky forcefully urges his readers to flatten the two halves of his allegory into one reality, the connection with his social-utopian aspirations is clear: allegory in Chernyshevsky allegorizes what the novel presents as the function of art more generally, which is to make real its own fictions. Chernyshevsky’s own claims to the contrary, the reification of “abstract notions” that his allegory attempts is then also the guiding principle of his science.

What Is to Be Done? is very obviously a story of science, not just because the heroes all practise science, but because their conversations are littered with physiological jargon. Lopukhov and Kirsanov discuss their work on the “optical nerve” and the production of “artificial albumin,” while Kirsanov in particular offers long, apparently scientific disquisitions on the workings of sensation and the relationship of mind to body. “The intensity of sensation is in proportion to the level of feeling from which it evolves in the organism,” he tells Vera Pavlovna, or: “Statistics have already demonstrated that the female organism is more resilient. You’ve read these conclusions only in life-expectancy tables. If you add physiological evidence to the statistical data, then the difference emerges as much greater.”¹⁵ Our narrator also emphasizes the material dimensions of his heroes – Lopukhov’s broad frame, Vera Pavlovna’s well-developed bust – as well as the actual functioning of their bodies, for example when a troubled Lopukhov takes two morphine pills to help him sleep and finds that “the spiritual travail was roughly equivalent in strength (according to Lopukhov’s materialist viewpoint) to four cups of strong coffee.”¹⁶ This story of science is also one that derives from a few well-known sources.

By the 1860s Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was no longer quite as celebrated in progressive circles as he once was, so much so that Chernyshevsky’s merry picnic-goers adopt “Auguste Comtean” as an expression of apparently mild disparagement.¹⁷ As even this usage suggests, however, it was Comte’s Positivism that lay behind the Nihilist commitment

to both mathematical quantification and a strict if proximate cause and effect. Chernyshevsky's narrator also vouches for Kirsanov's fictional credentials with reference to both the real German cell biologist Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902) and the real French physiologist Claude Bernard (1813–78), the latter especially well known for his codification in his *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* [Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale, 1865] of what we would now call the scientific method. When it comes to a “materialist viewpoint” that would equate a certain amount of “spiritual travail” with “four cups of strong coffee,” however, the Western European science that mattered most for Chernyshevsky was the material monism that we know as “scientific” or, in Friedrich Engels's wonderful phrase, “vulgar itinerant preacher materialism.”¹⁸

The “vulgar” materialists were a trio of once-famous scientists and science writers, Ludwig Büchner (1824–99), Jakob Moleschott (1822–93), and Karl Vogt (1817–95). For Engels, the three were “vulgar” above all in that they failed to anticipate the fundamentally dualistic Marxist view that the material world is only a symbol of the “real” reality of economic relationships. They were also “vulgar” in that they were extremely popular. By Frederick Gregory's count, Büchner's 1853 *Matter and Force* [Kraft und Stoff], for example, went through twelve editions in seventeen years and was translated into seventeen foreign languages, including Russian; as readers of Russian literature may recall, the book even makes a brief appearance in Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* [Ottsy i deti, 1862] when Kirsanov senior spends too much time reading Pushkin, and Bazarov suggests that Arkady give him Büchner instead. Despite their materialist claims, the three were finally “vulgar” in that their work was so ideologically driven as to hardly qualify as “scientific.”

Like Büchner, Vogt was known for an engagement in radical politics that came at the expense of his career as an actual practising scientist. Despite his own inclination towards mind over matter, Vogt is best remembered for a single line from 1846, his inflammatory and highly reductive claim that “those capacities that we understand by the phrase psychic activities (Seelenthätigkeiten) are but functions of the brain substance; or, to express myself a bit crudely here, that thoughts stand in the same relation to the brain as gall does to the liver or urine to the kidneys.”¹⁹ Of the three, it is Moleschott who achieved the most in the way of actual institutional credentials, including a prestigious position as professor of anatomy and physiology at the University of Zurich. Even so, as Dmitry Pisarev's popular review of what was already a work of popular science, Moleschott's relatively late *Physiological Sketchbook* [Physiologisches Skizzenbuch, 1861], would suggest, Moleschott's reputation again

rested on the largely unsubstantiated assertion of a radically simple form of material monism.

In his review of the *Sketchbook* Pisarev makes a point of offering his readers an array of facts gleaned from his reading: “blood is made up of a combination of nitrogen, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, potassium, sodium, calcium, magnesium, iron, sulfur, phosphorus, chlorine and fluorine,” he explains; or: “In raw meat the meat fibers are surrounded by a sort of juice consisting of a solution of protein, various salts and nitrogeous creatine [Fleischstoff].”²⁰ For all the complicated pseudo-scientific jargon that Pisarev, like Chernyshevsky, a graduate in philology, clearly enjoys, the thrust of Moleschott’s argument in the *Sketchbook* as elsewhere is extremely simple. As Ludwig Feuerbach wrote in his review of Moleschott’s earlier *Die Lehre der Nahrungsmittel: Für das Volk* (1850; translated into English in 1856 as *The Chemistry of Food and Diet, with a Chapter on Food Adulterations*): “Man is what he eats,” and in his review of the *Sketchbook* Pisarev quotes from *Die Lehre* to hammer this point home: “Can lazy potato blood possibly lend muscles the strength for work and impart to the brain the life-creating impulse of hope?” his Moleschott cries, “Poor Ireland! Your poverty gives birth to poverty! You cannot remain unconquered in the struggle with a proud neighbor to whom plentiful herds impart power and boldness!”²¹

As this quote makes clear, the “vulgar” drive to equate living organisms with the inanimate matter that they ingest and excrete offers remarkably easy answers to what might seem complicated questions, from the apparently inevitable outcomes of British imperialism to the workings of plot and characterization in *What Is to Be Done?*. These answers also tend to suit the unfailingly left-wing politics of the so-called “scientists,” so much so, in fact, that it would seem obvious that the theoretical conclusions of “vulgar” materialism precede or even act entirely in the absence of any empirical evidence. As their would-be material monism reverts always to a set of theoretical assumptions, a now quasi-scientific over-determination has the curious effect of emptying “vulgar” materialism of any real matter at all; as Coleridge warns, it also tends to empty living organisms of any actual life. Like “life-expectancy tables” and “statistical data,” references to “nitrogeous creatine” and even “potato blood” only pretend to engage with actual living matter while really offering pseudo-scientific abstraction, a retreat from the very life that their science purports to explain. This reversal is still more striking in Bernard’s *Introduction*.

While Claude Bernard was a far more serious and scientifically grounded advocate of material determinism, still his attempt to reduce all of life to the law-like effects of quantifiable material conditions produces a similarly “vulgar” result. Although physiology, as Bernard explains, is

“the science whose object is to study the phenomena of living beings and to *determine* the material conditions in which they appear,” Bernard was controversial in his own day for the practice that he delicately termed “dissociation,” and in the *Introduction* he tackles the issue head-on.²² “If a comparison were required to express my idea of the science of life,” he writes, “I should say that it is a superb and dazzlingly lighted hall which may be reached only by passing through a long and ghastly kitchen.”²³ As he explains, over the course of his work the physiologist might “detach living tissues, and ... place them in conditions where we can better study their characteristics.” “We occasionally isolate an organ by using anesthetics to destroy the reactions of its general group,” he adds, or “reach the same result by cutting the nerves leading to a part, but preserving the blood vessels”; as he notes in another section, “This is what we observe when we place a small animal under an air pump; its lungs are obstructed by the gases liberated in the blood.”²⁴ Unfortunately for the small animals under the physiologist’s care, “[t]o extend his knowledge,” Bernard writes, “he has had to increase the power of his organs by means of special appliances; at the same time he has equipped himself with various instruments enabling him to penetrate inside of bodies, to dissociate them and to study their hidden parts.”²⁵ In *What Is to Be Done?* bodies en route to the Crystal Palace most often need to be disciplined by the rigours of theory, especially in the case of female bodies with their often unruly emotions, or Rakhmetov with his bed of nails. In the *Introduction*, those same bodies appear actually cut up into parts, as Bernard’s science of life, like Coleridge’s allegory, entirely fails to “partake[] of the reality which it renders intelligible.”²⁶

The Romantic response to the Enlightenment as an earlier iteration of Chernyshevsky’s combined rationalist and empiricist project was to reject allegory altogether in favour of what Murray Krieger calls “a form-making power that could break through the temporal separateness among entities, concepts, and words to convert the parade of absences into miracles of co-presence.”²⁷ To quote Goethe again, it is only symbol “where the particular represents the more general, not as a dream or a shadow, but as a living momentary revelation of the Inscrutable.”²⁸ More recently, Paul de Man simply accepts the belatedness of language. As Krieger argues, the postmodern attempt to recuperate allegory returns us to the same “vulgar” belief in a “bedrock existential reality,” only now combined with an embrace of the inevitable non-coincidence of sign and signified that a “bedrock” reality makes necessary; for de Man, the great virtue of allegory is not its drive to make dreams real, but its open acknowledgment of “the fallen world of our facticity.”²⁹ If we cast mind as part of a material world that is itself multiple and even shifting, however,

allegory can serve other ends, including Dostoevsky's project of a more complicated kind of realism. It is exactly this possibility that Lewesian science offers.

The Nineteenth-Century Science of Mind and Body

Although Bernard et al. were and remain highly popular, even by the mid-nineteenth century material monism was far from the only game in town. Just as physicist James Clerk Maxwell wrote that "the only laws of matter are those which our minds must fabricate, and the only laws of mind are fabricated for it by matter," so physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz's work on sound emphasized not just the source from which the sound emanates, but also the receiving capacity of the human ear; the same refusal to set the human mind apart from the natural world that it would consider is also reflected in Helmholtz's (qualified) dissemination of a non-Euclidean geometry that cuts off from the world as we know it to imagine other possible spaces.³⁰ What Aileen Kelly has recently described as Darwin's "theme of contingency" also undermines any strict notion of natural "law."³¹ As Gillian Beer writes, "Darwin was much wounded by Herschel's description of his theory as 'the law of higgledy-piggledy,' but the phrase exactly expresses the dismay many Victorians felt at the apparently random – and so, according to their lights, trivialized – energy that Darwin perceived in the natural world."³² Lewes offers a particularly striking example of this other strain of nineteenth-century thought, not least in the wide range of his intellectual activity. That activity is also not easy to characterize.

In an age when science was just beginning to become a professional pursuit, Lewes was self-taught and unaffiliated with any institution. He also refused to specialize, as Lewes not only actively fostered the career of his novelist-wife George Eliot, but was himself the author of a much-noted biography of Goethe, histories of philosophy and of theatre, a great deal of literary criticism, and even a few early novels. At the same time, in his experimental work Lewes, like Bernard, was an active and vocal vivisectionist; as a one-time advocate of Comte and like the "vulgar" materialists, Lewes was also often associated with left-wing politics, especially in Russia, indeed, so much so that he even makes a brief appearance in *Crime and Punishment* [Prestuplenie i nakazanie, 1866] when Lebezynnikov recommends that Sonya read his *Physiology of Common Life*. While Dostoevsky was evidently well aware of Lewes's reputation in Nihilist circles, still a highly positive if unsigned review of *The Physiology of Common Life* that appeared in Dostoevsky's own journal *Time* [Vremia] in 1861 rightly argues that the real complexity of Lewes's

thought often eluded his Russian readers. That complexity is already on view in Lewes's early novel *Ranthorpe* (1847), published in Russia in 1859 as *Zhizn' poeta* [A Poet's Life].

In its broadest terms Lewes's novel offers a retelling of Honoré de Balzac's *Lost Illusions* [Illusions perdues, 1837–43] with Percy Ranthorpe a Lucien de Rubempré who ends on a happier note. *Ranthorpe* also includes a proto-Chernyshevskian medical student, a “mixture of the gentleman and the Mohock” whose “dark eye was full of fire and intelligence; his open laughing face was indicative of malicious mirth and frankness; and the resolution about his brow, and sensibility about his mouth, redeemed his slang appearance, and showed the superior being, beneath the unprepossessing exterior.”³³ Harry Cavendish's first act in the novel is to knock to the ground a peddler who “was beating his donkey in so brutal a manner that several people were crying ‘Shame! shame!’”; in a chapter prefaced by an epigraph from Georges Sand's *Jacques*, Harry ends by breaking his engagement with Isola when he realizes that she loves Percy instead.³⁴ In between, Harry solves a violent murder wrongly attributed to Percy, and it is in this “sensational” subplot that Lewes's pioneering science of mind and body comes into play.

Like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Oliver Thornton apparently commits the perfect murder only to find himself overwhelmed with guilt: “He had thought of flying to America, but was afraid, lest it should look suspicious ... Such was his suffering, that he was often on the point of blowing his brains out, and so ending his misery”; “Every knock at the door went to his heart, as if it announced his arrest. Every noise in the street sounded like the mob coming to seize him. He read the morning and evening paper with horrible eagerness. Every line respecting the murder made him thrill.”³⁵ This “thrill” is equally a matter of body and of mind, as is his initial motivation for the crime. As Lewes's narrator explains:

His uncle's death soon became a fixed idea with him ... He must either become a murderer or a monomaniac! The tyrannous influence of fixed ideas – of thoughts which haunt the soul, and goad the unhappy wretch to his perdition – is capable, I think, of a physiological no less than of a psychological explanation ... In proportion to the horror or interest inspired by that thought, will be the strength of the tendency to recurrence. The brain may be then said to be in a state of partial inflammation, owing to the great affluence of blood in one direction. And precisely as the abnormal affluence of blood towards any part of the body will produce chronic inflammation, if it be not diverted, so will the current of thought in excess in any one direction produce monomania. Fixed ideas may thus be physiologically regarded as chronic inflammations of the brain.³⁶

The “tyrannous influence of fixed ideas” is exactly balanced by the “affluence of blood” and “chronic inflammations of the brain,” as Oliver’s murderous “monomania” is neither a product of thought alone nor a purely physical effect. The psychological and the physiological instead operate together and at the same time: as Lewes put it in his much later *Problems of Life and Mind*, “every mental phenomenon has its corresponding neural phenomenon (the two being as the convex and concave surfaces of the same sphere, distinguishable yet identical).”³⁷ “Dual-aspect monism” shows mind and body to work in tandem, as simultaneously both cause and effect. It also implicates both mind and body in a material world that comes into being only through the medium of our own perceptions.

What Lewes calls his “Reasoned Realism” in fact collapses any distinction between objects as they are and objects as they seem to be. As Lewes writes, “the external world exists, and *among* the modes of its existence is the one we perceive”; for what he calls “other forms of Sentience (if there are such) than our own,” reality takes on a very different shape that is no less real.³⁸ In Lewes’s argument, the “senses don’t directly apprehend – or *mirror* external things.” Instead, “[e]ach excitation has to be *assimilated*,” first in terms of the material reality of our particular perceptual apparatus, and then as a reflection of the subject’s own evolving history.³⁹ “What the Senses inscribe on [the mind],” Lewes writes, “are not merely the changes of the external world; but these characters are commingled with the characters of preceding inscriptions. The sensitive subject is no *tabula rasa*; it is not a blank sheet of paper, but a palimpsest.”⁴⁰ Either way and as Latour claims in *Pandora’s Hope*, phenomena “are not found at the *meeting point* between things and the forms of the human mind.” They are instead “what *circulates* all along the reversible chain of transformations” that makes us one with the material world.⁴¹

Lewesian physiological psychology finds literary expression most obviously in Dostoevsky’s own representation of bodies and minds, above all in *Crime and Punishment*. Like so many of Dostoevsky’s young heroes, Raskolnikov makes the Nihilist mistake of attempting to separate his mind from a material world that includes his own body. Despite his often “greedy” consumption of soup, bread, tea, and beer, despite even his fainting fits, his fever, and what we know to be his “disturbed and already excited organism,” Raskolnikov remains committed to an abstract theory; as Porfiry Petrovich explains, “There are bookish dreams here, sir; there is a heart chafed by theories” (6:46, 54).⁴² Where his friend Razumikhin, like the Underground Man, seeks “the *living* process of life,” Raskolnikov accordingly finds only death, not just the death of the old pawnbroker and her sister, but also his own. As he tells Sonya, “I killed

myself, not the old crone!" (6:197, 322; 256, 420). Long before Raskolnikov comes to that intellectual conclusion, however, his body rejects the deed that his rational mind has led him to perform. In his meetings with Porfiry Petrovich, Raskolnikov's nerves "hum" and his knees "tremble"; Raskolnikov is also driven to return to the scene of the crime by a desire to experience again "that spinal chill [kholod-to etot v spinnom mozgu]" (6:343; 449), and overwhelmed by a series of bodily "sensations" that he fully acknowledges only at the very end of the novel when a new "sensation" "seized him all at once, took hold of him entirely – body and mind" (6:347; 456) and he bows down at the crossroads to kiss the earth (6:405; 525). While words like "spinal cord" [spinnoi mozg] and "sensation" [oshchushchenie] deliberately invoke the central nervous system and bodily responses that bypass cognition, Dostoevsky like Lewes offers not bodies without minds, but minds and bodies functioning together in the world as two aspects of a single whole. Dostoevsky also doesn't just tell a story of "dual-aspect monism," but enacts one.

This enactment is most immediately a matter of the marked attention that his "psychological" novels give to his readers' own bodies. For all his materialist claims, when Chernyshevsky wants to gain our attention, he employs the highly rational expedient of simply and repeatedly addressing his "perspicacious" [pronitsatel'nyi] reader. To the dismay of his Nihilist critics with their theoretical bottom line, however, Dostoevsky instead draws on an emerging and partly Lewesian-inspired novel of sensation to provoke a visceral reaction. As a scandalized Pyotr Tkachev described what he saw as Dostoevsky's approach in his 1873 review of *Demons*, "Give us more and more gossip, scandal, irritate all the more strongly the reader's spinal cord make his hair stand on end, entertain him, amuse or frighten him, but just don't make him think or look up from the page."⁴³ According to a 2001 survey in Chelyabinsk, readers to this day associate Dostoevsky not just with physical items (axes) and topoi (St Petersburg), but also with a range of "sensations" [oshchushcheniia] and "states" [sostoianiia], including "pain," "sickness," "nerves," and "hysteria," as well as a generalized feeling of "discomfort" [diskomfort].⁴⁴ If the force of that physical reaction is evidently still felt, Dostoevskian "dual-aspect monism" is equally importantly at work in an allegory that serves not to conflate real and ideal, but to hold two different and equally valid realities in place at the same time.

Dostoevskian Realism

Although their intent is not always the same, Dostoevsky's variously left-leaning characters recur to the very terms "allegory" and "allegorical"

with truly remarkable frequency.⁴⁵ This tendency reaches an extreme in *Demons*, where the characters as a whole, both fathers and sons, suffer from a recognizably social-utopian conflation of present words with much-desired future realities. When our chatty narrator insists that his friend Stepan Trofimovich really did pound the walls in frustration, he explains, “This occurred without a trace of allegory, so that once he even broke some plaster from the wall” (10:12; 14), while one of the guests at the ill-fated fête takes a little too much care to explain what would seem a very ordinary figure of speech: “I am speaking al-le-gor-i-cally,” he clarifies, “but I went to the buffet and am glad to have come back in one piece,” (10:388; 506); “These are all nonsensical allegories,” an angry Varvara Petrovna tells Lebyadkin, “These are allegories, and, besides, you choose to speak too floridly” (10:140; 176). Along with an insistence on a particularly flat kind of matter as the only measure of reality, their usage reflects a gnawing concern that the “real” significance of words might lie elsewhere, an anxiety entirely appropriate to a novel where double meanings run rampant. The characters’ often absurd recourse to “allegory,” however, only serves to make a bad situation worse.

While Shatov as a recovering revolutionary is largely innocent of allegorical intentions, he is nonetheless not entirely immune to the practice of figuration, for example when he refers to his serfdom both literal and metaphorical. “Once I was simply born of a lackey, but now I’ve become a lackey myself, just like you,” Shatov says. “Our Russian liberal is first of all a lackey and is only looking for someone’s boots to polish.” The narrator’s immediate turn to “allegory,” however, doesn’t clarify Shatov’s meaning, but only indicates his own or perhaps also our inability to see where that figure might lie: “What boots?,” Anton Lavrentievich asks, “What kind of allegory is that?” (10:111; 138). Fortunately, even as the heroes of *Demons* repeatedly generate not just more confusion, but finally even death in their attempt to reduce the multiplicity of “living life” to a single level of reality, another option remains available to the novel’s readers. Rather than remain mired in the non-coincidence of sign and signified that so afflicts his characters, we can accept scientific instability instead.

Russell Valentino notes what he calls the novel’s “ambivalent orientation towards its own allegorical status,” an ambivalence apparent even at the fête, where words, as it turns out, do have tangible effects; as the now truly mad von Lembke rightly says, “Governesses have been used to set houses on fire ... The fire is in people’s minds, not on the rooftops” (10:538; 516).⁴⁶ With Lewes in mind, however, it is not so much ambivalence, as it is two different kinds of allegories in operation at once. Where his characters repeatedly attempt an allegory of the familiar,

“vulgar” sort, Dostoevsky himself uses allegory to point to multiple “real” realities that are simultaneously also symbolic. This multivalence is most immediately evident in the novels as a whole in the different meanings that Dostoevsky himself attaches to space.

In a perfect illustration of “dual-aspect monism,” the “underground” [podpol'e] that Dostoevsky erects in direct response to Chernyshevsky's “cellar” [podval] renders a philosophical stance in material terms, just as the narrow confines of Raskolnikov's room function both as the material environment that determines his actions and as a representation of the cramped spaces of his own mind. What Raskolnikov needs, as Porfiry Petrovich tells him, is “air, air!,” both the fresh air that the city of St Petersburg lacks in real as in metaphorical terms, and the spiritual way out that is materialized in a choice between two geographical locations, America and Siberia, that again enjoy a symbolic dimension: Siberia is life and America an allegorical image of death made real, as where Chernyshevsky's Lopukhov only pretends to kill himself and emigrates to America, Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov announces his departure for America only to commit suicide (6:351; 460). Lest we think that we know the one way to interpret these already complicated images, the same contrast abruptly softens in *Brothers Karamazov* [Brat'ia Karamazovy, 1881] when Dmitry in his final scene proposes that he escape to America only to return once he's mastered English “as well as any downright Englishman”; in Dostoevsky's last and longest novel, it is Lopukhov again, but America is no longer an image of death alone (15:186).⁴⁷ In *Demons* this same play of clearly defined and yet multiple and even contradictory meanings operates most aggressively at the novel's very end when Stepan Trofimovich attempts to apply the parable of the Gadarene swine to his own Russian reality.

As his Bible-selling companion at his request reads from the Gospel according to Luke, Stepan Trofimovich is struck by what he calls “*une comparaison*” [a comparison]: “It is us, us and them, and Petrusa ... *et les autres avec lui* [and the others with him], and I, perhaps, first, at the head, and we will rush, insane and raging, from the cliff down into the sea, and all be drowned,” he says, “But the sick man will be healed and ‘sit at the feet of Jesus’” (10:499; 655). The “*comparaison*” proves a happy one, not least because it turns out to have shaped our reading all along; as the narrator now takes a moment to remind us, the passage from Luke that Stepan Trofimovich finds so meaningful is the very one that the narrator himself placed at the beginning of the novel. While Stepan Trofimovich and the narrator together seem to have unlocked the allegory that is the novel as a whole, the very circularity of our own evidently over-determined reading renders that

meaning a little suspect; up to the very end with his Gallicisms and his inveterate “quotation,” Stepan Trofimovich also remains the deeply untrustworthy wielder of words that he has been all along. To the dismay of the “perspicacious” reader of the Chernyshevskian type, as the allegorical interpretation of *Demons* as those demons, the ones from Luke, is both offered and withheld, our way forward is neither easy nor open to debate. As the equally unreliable “Petrusha” says twice, “*Avis au lecteur* [Reader take notice]”: our only choice is to read the novel both ways at once (10:279; 359).

The mistake of “vulgar” materialism is the reification of what, on closer look, reveals itself to be a largely ideological “abstraction from objects of the senses”; as Chernyshevsky’s allegory exactly reflects, while the material monists lay claim to a single objective reality, their very refusal to acknowledge the mutual implication of mind and matter makes duality inevitable. Allegory in Dostoevsky, on the other hand, posits multiple meanings in operation at the same time and with the same degree of “objective” reality: exactly like Lewes’s nerves and neuroses and as challenging as it may be for Dostoevsky’s readers, even two diametrically opposed readings serve “as the convex and concave surfaces of the same sphere, distinguishable yet identical.” The oscillation between different expressions of what is nonetheless the same reality that in Dostoevsky and especially in *Demons* approaches a kind of whiplash suggests a particularly demanding form of Romantic irony, which is to say, Dostoevsky’s project shares a great deal with Goethe’s and Coleridge’s. His recourse to the more rigorous form of allegory, however, also makes the case for a particular kind of realism.

Scholars often struggle to fit Dostoevsky into a realism that we define in scientific terms a little narrowly. Mimesis in the nineteenth century always implies a scientific world view, even when that science takes the form of Comte’s “social physics”; as René Wellek explains, what he calls “the objective representation of contemporary social reality” relies on “the orderly world of nineteenth-century science, a world of cause and effect, a world without miracle, without transcendence even if the individual may have preserved a personal religious faith.”⁴⁸ Nineteenth-century realists often make these scientific underpinnings clear, when Balzac frames *The Human Comedy* [La Comédie humaine, 1842] with reference to zoology, for example, or when Émile Zola claims the mantle of Bernard in his “experimental” novel. In its Russian version, realism is explicit in its scientific ambitions not just when Chernyshevsky writes of “artificial albumin” and four cups of coffee, but also in the claims of the so-called Natural School and the equally aptly named genre of the “physiology”; this is a realism defined by its apparent lack of literary artifice in an imitation of

a science that is supposedly one with what it describes. Allegory in what Goethe, Coleridge, and even de Man have taught us to see as its open artificiality would seem an artifact of another way of writing, one that emphasizes “theory” over “fact,” sign over signified, and often it is, even in Chernyshevsky. Lewesian science would argue, however, that a different sort of allegory serves not as an anti-realist device, but as an expression of what Latour calls “a more ‘realistic realism.’”⁴⁹

In an 1868 letter to his friend Apollon Maikov, Dostoevsky himself acknowledged that he held “[c]ompletely different ... notions ... of reality and realism than our realists and critics” (28.2:239; my translation). As Liza Knapp argues, Dostoevsky claimed more than once that the distinctive feature of his realism was his commitment to presenting reality “as *he* experienced it”;⁵⁰ for Molly Brunson, Dostoevsky’s “realism in a higher sense” offers a “transcendent alternative to a more grounded, objective recording of phenomenal reality, one capable of accessing truths far higher, or deeper, than those of the material world.”⁵¹ We don’t need to cut off from the material world, however, to find truths “far higher, or deeper” than Wellek’s “orderly world of nineteenth-century science” would allow. From Lewes’s entirely scientific point of view, after all, the material world manifests itself in multiple ways, including in “fantastic” perceptions and in ways altogether beyond the reach of our particular perceptual apparatus. Even in the twenty-first century, the lessons of this other sort of science don’t come easily, but they restore the figurative possibilities of language as they open us to a “living life” that always operates on multiple levels at once: to follow Dostoevsky’s lead is to embrace allegory not because the material world is impoverished, but because minds and bodies in the world really work that way.

NOTES

- 1 F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, ed. G.M. Fridlender et al. (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1972–90), vol. 10, 199. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text with first the volume, then the page number. This translation is from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, Vintage, 1994), 251. All subsequent references to this translation will appear in the text set off by a semicolon following the *PSS* reference.
- 2 Anna Kaladiouk (Schur) offers a shining example of the work, in her words, to “restore to the science of Dostoevsky’s times some of its intellectual range and complexity,” see A.S. Kaladiouk, “On ‘Sticking to the Fact’ and ‘Understanding Nothing’: Dostoevskii and the Scientific Method,” *The*

- Russian Review* 65, no. 3 (July 2006): 420; see also Alexey Vdovin's and Greta Matzner-Gore's contributions to this volume.
- 3 *Notes from Underground*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 124.
 - 4 Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 71, 79.
 - 5 Richard Menke, "Fiction as Vivisection: G.H. Lewes and George Eliot," *ELH* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 623.
 - 6 George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: First Series, the Foundations of a Creed*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, 1875–1880), 175–6. Italics in original.
 - 7 In the original Russian: "Trudno bylo by predstavit' bolee zhaluyu, bolee poshluiu, bolee bezdraniu i presnuiu allegoriiu." Note that Yuliya Mikhailovna herself describes her "economical little German ball" as "solely an allegory" [samym ekonomicheskim, nemetskim balkom ... edinstvenno dlia allegorii] (10:356; 465).
 - 8 Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 2; see J. Hillis Miller, "The Two Allegories" in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 355–70.
 - 9 René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 325nn54, 55; Fletcher, *Allegory*, 13n24.
 - 10 Fletcher, *Allegory*, 16n29.
 - 11 N.G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975), 62; Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael Katz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 106.
 - 12 Fletcher, *Allegory*, 304.
 - 13 Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 81; Katz, trans., 129–130.
 - 14 Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 92, 97, 100, 122, 233; Katz, trans., 143, 149, 151, 179, 313.
 - 15 Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 274, 258–9; trans. Katz, 358, 340.
 - 16 Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 183; trans. Katz, 252.
 - 17 Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 143; trans. Katz, 204.
 - 18 Friedrich Engels, "Old Preface to Dühring. On Dialectics" in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 25 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 340.
 - 19 Carl Vogt, *Physiologische Briefe für Gebildete aller Stände* (Stuttgart, 1846), 206, <http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10477770-0>; Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1977), 64.
 - 20 D.I. Pisarev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 12-i tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauka, 2001), 155, 162; translations mine.

- 21 Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, 92; Pisarev, vol. 3, 158.
- 22 Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 107; Claude Bernard, *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, trans. Henry Copley Greene (New York: Dover, 1957), 66. Italics in original.
- 23 Bernard, *Introduction*, 44; trans. Greene, 15.
- 24 Bernard, *Introduction*, 138, 174; trans. Greene, 88–9, 120.
- 25 Bernard, *Introduction*, 2; trans. Greene, 5.
- 26 I remain grateful to the students in my Fall 2013 seminar “Dostoevsky and the Age of Positivism,” and especially Matthew Gonzales, for their sharp response to Bernard’s “ghastly kitchen.”
- 27 Murray Krieger, “‘A Waking Dream’: The Symbolic Alternative to Allegory” in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 4.
- 28 Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, 325n55; Fletcher, *Allegory*, 13n24.
- 29 Krieger, “A Waking Dream,” 16.
- 30 Ivan Tolstoy, *James Clerk Maxwell: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 77.
- 31 Aileen Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 6.
- 32 Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6–7.
- 33 George Henry Lewes, *Ranthorpe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), 6.
- 34 Ibid., 7.
- 35 Ibid., 208, 222, 221.
- 36 Ibid., 202–3.
- 37 Ibid., *Problems*, 103–4.
- 38 Ibid., 168. Italics in original.
- 39 Ibid., 113. Italics in original.
- 40 Ibid., 149.
- 41 Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 71. Italics in original.
- 42 These translations are from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1993), 348, 456. All subsequent references to this translation will appear in the text set off by a semicolon following the PSS reference.
- 43 P.N. Tkachev, ‘Bol’nye liudi: ‘Besy,’ roman Fedora Dostoevskogo, v trekh chastiakh,’ in *Kritika 70-kh godov XIX veka*, ed. S.F. Dmitrenko (Moscow: Olimp, 2002), 74. Translation mine.
- 44 M.V. Zagidullina, “Dostoevskii glazami sootchestvennikov,” in *Roman F.M. Dostoevskogo ‘Idiot’: Sovremennoe sostoianie izucheniia*, ed. T.A. Kasatkina (Moscow: Nasledia, 2001), 527. Translations mine.

- 45 See, for example, Lebedev's "allegoricheskii svitok" ["allegorical scroll"] in *The Idiot* (8:168). Translation mine. See also when Versilov in *The Adolescent* [Podrostok, 1875] smashes an icon and shouts, "Ne primi za allegoriiu," only to add, "A vprochem, primi xot' i za allegoriiu; ved' eto nepremenno bylo tak!..." ["Don't take it as an allegory! ... But, anyhow, why not take it as an allegory; it certainly must have been"] (13:409). This translation can be found in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 2003), 508. All subsequent references to this translation will appear in the text set off by a semicolon following the PSS reference.
- 46 Russell Valentino, *Vicissitudes of Genre in the Russian Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 117. Kate Holland has similarly argued that Lebedev's laughable claims in *The Idiot* in no way undermine the significance of his apocalyptic vision, and I am still responding to her "Hurryring, Clanging, Banging and Speeding for the Happiness of Mankind: Railways, Metaphor and Modernity in *The Idiot*" (presentation, Annual Convention of the American Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, Chicago, IL, 9–12 November 2017).
- 47 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 765.
- 48 René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 241. For further reconsideration of Dostoevsky's contributions to the mimetic project, see Sarah J. Young's and Chloë Kitzinger's chapters in this volume.
- 49 Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 15.
- 50 Liza Knapp, "Realism," in *Dostoevsky in Context*, ed. Deborah A. Martinsen and O.E. Maiorova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 235. Italics in original.
- 51 Molly Brunson, *Russian Realisms* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 163.