Transcendent Portrayal in Fiction, & Its Implications

William Patrick Burr

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2019

Committee:

Maya Sonenberg

David Bosworth

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

University of Washington

Abstract

Transcendent Portrayal in Fiction, & Its Implications

William Patrick Burr

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Maya Sonenberg

Creative Writing

This paper draws upon the work of Dostoyevsky, Ikstena, and Hesse to illustrate points regarding the portrayal of transcendent processes in literary fiction.

Everything is relative until in a moment life becomes reflexive. In a story, this is reflected at moments when the thematic is wed with characterization, where all elements are united under the single thematic concern. At such moments the story's main character(s) are indistinguishable from the condition toward which they strive; they have become the embodiment of their pursuit.

The transcendent occurs by the moment: through the body one perceives the world's *otherness;* comes to accept the human condition, others' being physically separate from one's own body; recognizes that the others, too, are capable now of recognizing this (i.e. trusts); reaches pure understanding across bodies. This is less theoretic than it sounds: consider how the strongest of interpersonal relationships are built and developed; consider the very process of writing (more on this in the conclusion).

Such oneness cannot be sustained but at present. It is necessary, then, for the successful story, insofar as its success is defined by expressing these moments of transcendence at which the story *comes together*, to enact such moments. By identifying such moments as they occur in stories written in different styles on diverse subjects and across diverse time periods, an understanding of a) how such moments can be expressed and b) what the expression of transcendence implies regarding writing can be formed.

When everything bears down — when apparent difficulty arrives, when all that exist seems to speak the same impassable truth, whether in despair or joy — one is given the opportunity to bear oneself upon everything. The definition of transcendence by which the paper will operate is the subsumed-and-subsuming, changeless change[1]; it is an aim of this paper to express how insofar as transcendental moments[2] are possible to present through the text of a

---

[1] A matter of pure acceptance of a situation at present, allowing entirety of consciousness as to what that situation — and by association (via acceptance), you/oneself — is.

[2] under this paper's definition (discussed further in Section II)

novel, identifying these moments in novels can bring one closer to an answer to: *Why Write?* The works in greatest focus will be *Siddhartha*, *Notes from the Underground*, and *Soviet Milk*.

II. Transcendence — Brief Theoretic

There exist many fathomings of transcendence. It means to some a 'rising above' the world, to some an 'escape' from untenable condition. To others yet it is merely a change, a change which yields new meaning, a new frame through which to perceive the world.
The second is addressed in detail by Aldous Huxley in the Epilogue to his *The Devils of Loudun*. As Huxley posits, one may also transcend *downwards*; throughout history, he notes, insofar as transcendence took the definition of *escape*, or indeed took on no coherent definition at all, often this escape was[3] facilitated by the ingestion of spirits, the further clouding of one's mind to the point that the initial consumptive self was obliterated and one could see beyond the world.
Yet inasmuch as by transcendence one means to establish a definition which accounts for intelligence[4], it seems that such definitions, predicated on *upwards* and *downwards* and *horizontality* as they are, do not encapsulate the same *transcendence* of which we here speak, as either angle predicates itself upon the casting of the other angle [5]. Krishnamurti, for his part, dispels downward-and-upward transcendence by noting that any philosophy of action aimed at

---

[3] (and is)

[4] implied by Krishnamurti as being that which facilitates "aware[ness] of the destructive nature of the way we live….The act of immediacy in the face of danger is an act of sanity, of intelligence" (53).

[5] i.e., if one is moving upwards, one is ridding oneself of the downwards, and vice versa. This is not situational acceptance, but situational aversion. Even the horizontal predicates itself upon "not being" something else.

escaping from something is necessarily a philosophy which dichotomizes the world in which one lives, thereby perpetuating discord and leaving one in arrears of peace[6].

The definition of transcendence to be used here will account both for the positive definition of transcendence, which leaves one at peace with the external world through recognition of one's connectedness or oneness with that external world (rather than aiming at rising above or sinking below — or indeed stepping sideways, though in recognizing the external world's disparity and simultaneously existing as a moving, thinking being, certainly will one step sideways into new situations, see and ingest and expel new objective things) and for the internal procession and origin of this transcendence. It follows from this that transcendence is either an act of thought or an action itself — and as thought cannot be without something about which to think[7], and as transcendence is not transcendence if it does not occur through the strength/ impetus of the transcending individual him/herself, transcendence must be or be predicated upon personal activity.[8]

In a novel, it seems, what must occur in order for such activity to be portrayed is a perceptual shift, a quantifiable altering of presentation that yields a comparative differentiation in the novel's prior or future mode. Ironic, for as Krishnamurti queries in *The Urgency of Change,* "Is it possible to bring about in ourselves the birth of a new order altogether that is not related to

---

[6] Krishnamurti 18-23

[7] Sartre: "What defines the reflection for the reflecting is always *that to which it is presence*….What is present to me is what is not me" (173).

[8] "It is not possible then for me to have any experience of an object as an object which is not me until I constitute it as an object" (176); "to use Heidegger's expression, the world and outside of that — nothing" (181). All that one perceives as existing is one's world; beyond that is nothing. Insofar as one is wed to one's body (i.e. also insofar as one's body, to one, *exists*), then, and insofar as transcendence is the oneness of this body with perceived other-body (*otherness* here based upon Sartrian negation, the inability to conceive of something as an object until it is complete, in itself separate from myself in its object-ness), and that transcendence is a matter of self-knowledge, it follows that through this body one must move — and who is to move it but oneself?

the past?"[9] Perhaps, then, the transcendence which occurs is only the author's facilitation in the reader a recognition that the past and future are one with the present in the context of the characters the author provides.

Yet the question remains: how is this new order's portrayal achieved? It is worthless to ask how transcendence occurs within a reader through an author's writing, for reader-to-reader this will differ given unique psychological allowances and constraints. What can be measured, then, is how an author, through a directly-portrayed character[10], establishes transcendence in that character. All that here can be assumed of transcendence in any individual reader is the assumption that a particular reader will understand that same transcendence insofar as the author, through the foregrounding of a character to the point that the novel is not experienceable but through the character's lens, to which the reader may cognitively relate, portrays that character's transcendence adequately.

Transcendence, then: whether defined as avoidance of world, as discovery of pure self, of reaching up or down, ultimately is the reflexive recognition of the self at-present as being both an objective part of the whole and as being the whole itself, both the container and the contained, and this objective partness and ultimate wholeness existing at once, i.e. not in opposition. This is

---

[9] "The past is irrelevant to this enquiry, and trivial, because it is irrelevant to the new order…. The past seems to be the only issue because it is the only thing that holds our minds and hearts….But why do we give importance to it? … If you are totally immersed in it…then you will never listen to change" (25).

[10] Beginning with the assumption of chronology rather than nonchronology is important, for it seems both in being and in reading nonchronological work that an assumption of life on Earth is forward-moving chronology, and that a novel which thwarts this as an initial assumption mirrors not the basic human condition useful or necessary in the bare examination of transcendence, but instead mirrors an analytical content or malcontent through which one need wade in order to reach the presentational point at which the novels themselves truly begin. Certainly these selected novels contain the same impetuses and struggles that more experimental novels do, only the exploration of these difficulties has been left for the reader to experience through a characters' direct experiences rather than first via a conscious wrestling with what boundaries define or what constitutes that character.

acknowledged by Krishnamurti, and is implied in the Tao Te Ching[11], Einstein's Relativity[12], and elsewhere. Of matter, then: identifying it, this *pure situational acceptance yielding singularity between apparently divergent or dichotomous things*, in different instances, and qualifying or quantifying that which an author can do to portray — reflect — it.

III. Transcendence Portrayed

In being created by a human, a novel mirrors life, however stunted or distorted that mirroring is given the chosen method of creation. If a novel comes together at aforementioned moments of transcendence, so too, then, does life. Critical, then, is the identifying of thematics within the novel — *how* this *novel presents the mirror, or the route to the mirror* — so to identify how each novel must arrive at such moments.

a. *Siddhartha*

The novel portrays the bildungsromanic rise (fall) of the titular man during the time of the Buddha. It is directly concerned with Siddhartha's pursuit of transcendence; as such the moments of transcendence are those which are specifically described as Siddhartha's defining moments.

Critical to the analysis of transcendence in this novel is recognition of the effects of the third-person. The novel sets an immediate standard on which the reader can bear when on pages 3-4 it describes the distilled philosophy of Atman: "to whom else should one offer sacrifices, to

---

[11] "Thus Something and Nothing produce each other…; Before and after follow each other" (Book One, II)

[12] See clock-&-lightning experiment, *Relativity: A General and Special Theory*, Chapter 8. Time as a conceptual bind rather than reality. Manipulatable thus.

whom else should one pay honor, but to Him, Atman, the Only One?" More critical than the setting of the standard of Atman is that there exists no way of fathoming the story through anything *but* the standard, for it is Siddhartha's lens and Siddhartha's alone to which the reader is privy; the reader must choose: either a) accept that Siddhartha's lens is the one lens; b) reject the primacy of the character Siddhartha, and thus reject the novel[13]. In this Hesse forces the situational acceptance outlined in this paper's operative definition of transcendence: the novel predicates itself upon it. The Atmanic standard is less important than of what the description thereof facilitates realization. Siddhartha, for the reader, is the way.

Due to this, any strain felt by the character is a strain felt by the reader. There exists in the outlining of Atman an uncertainty: for the reader knows where he/she begins, having been presented solid ground via the existence and progression of a character and the third-person statement of the character's current philosophy. The plot must progress, and the Atmanic philosophy as-presented allows for the perception of other-than-itself: change. Inasmuch as the reader must exist through Siddhartha, Siddhartha must exist through what is presented of him. The centricity of the character is unavoidable; Hesse's direct portrayal of this centricity, through a third-person-chronological plot, presents the reader with direct access to empathetic recognition, vicarity through Siddhartha. This is basic, yes, to the novel form; it is worth pointing out how it connects to establishing the necessity of transcendence through the story's particular presentation of its character.

---

[13] i.e. put it down. Though if one were to reject the character but continue reading the novel — presumably by holding the descriptions of others (people, situations, objects) whom Siddhartha contacts as primary — given the novel's conclusion the portrayal of transcendence would be achieved regardless, corroborating the point that the reader's perspective matters not, for transcendence will be portrayed regardless of a reader's acceptance or rejective starting point.

Accompanying the evolution of Siddhartha, which is punctuated by moments of transcendence to be discussed, are sentences which themselves corroborate *Siddhartha*'s straightforwardness. Hesse's sentences ask for perception on the grounds of progressive logic by their clarity rather than asking that the sentences themselves are questioned and that some unique clarity must be derived. The novel means what it means. This logic is clear, direct. On page sixty, for example, Hesse describes Siddhartha's then-state: "For a long time, Siddhartha had lived in the world without belonging to it." The sentence runs by trust and by apparent paradox. The measure of trust here is that the question to be asked is *What holes can be poked* rather than *What string can be strung through the words, and where?* In a sense this merely reaffirms what it is to tell a story; though the point here is that Hesse's words are to be trusted at surface-level. At sentence-level, Hesse's writing embodies the very oneness the novel itself encircles and eventually communicates; the idea of living in the world while not belonging to it can be viewed as a linguistic trick (i.e. untrustworthy) or as a statement with inherent meaning that happens to present as paradoxical. One must perceive the two ideas as coexisting, given their logical coexistence within the same sentence. In this, Hesse communicates both microcosmically and macrocosmically the oneness which serves as our definition of transcendence; one must collapse the dichotomy of the words in order to reach a conception of what the sentence *means*. Moments like this recur; the novel is like a picture of Siddhartha made pointilistically of smaller pictures of Siddhartha.

The first example of transcendence that will be discussed must be prefaced by a mention of the struggle through which Siddhartha goes prior to his discovery and how that struggle is portrayed by Hesse. Siddhartha, in his time with the Samanas and in his time as a businessman, enters into close encounters with the world. He consumes the world, befriends it. As a samana,

he familiarizes with nature: "A dead jackal lay on the sandy shore and Siddhartha's soul slipped into its corpse; he became a dead jackal, lay on the shore, swelled, stank, decayed, was dismembered by hyenas, was picked at by vultures, became a skeleton, became dust, mingled with the atmosphere" (12). As a businessman, in the section titled "Amongst the People" which begins on page 51, he familiarizes with social nature: he gambles, he earns money, he addicts himself. In both cases he lives vicariously through things, consumes things if only to cast them off, push them away. Krishnamurti notes it as critical to recognize whether action is being undertaken as a means of avoidance or as a matter of clarity[14], for as Huxley posits one may also transcend downwards, through intoxification of any means, if avoidance rather than acceptance is the matter. In the scene as a gambler, such downward transcendence occurs: "He wanted to squander again, he wanted to show his contempt for riches again" (64); "He won thousands, he threw thousands away, lost money, lost jewels, lost a country house, won again, lost again" (64). The longer, more-winding sentences communicate moments of purity reliant upon consumptive stimulation rather than balanced order, achieved as it is via intoxication, and thus a purity that wavers, a purity bound by the need to 'refuel' oneself — sickening turns which one desires to end, for one experiences here a loss of control in relation to the reader's experience of the prior rhythm of the novel. This is due both to the content of the sentence[15] and the sentence's syntax. Repetition in the second above quote affects both the vortex of present habit and the speed at which that habit passes and returns. Time is altered; control is surrendered.

Through this struggle comes a calmness, knowledge that the cycle of ingestion and avoidance must be cast. In the section entitled "By the River," beginning on page 70, Siddhartha

---

[14] *The Urgency of Change* 19

[15] Recalling that insofar as one is to experience *Siddhartha*, one must experience it through Siddhartha, and thus that one is bent where he bends.

reaches a point of exhaustion, at which he "knows he [cannot] go back, that the life he had lived for many years [is] past" (70). He wishes "to make an end of this bitter, painful life" (71), and makes to fall into the river and drown. At the moment he accepts his death, he realizes he cannot kill himself, is horrified by how lost he had been. He is reborn: "He did not know where he was nor what had brought him there" (73); "Never had a sleep so refreshed him….Perhaps he had really died….He was remarkably awake" (73). Hesse utilizes the river motif throughout the novel, both through image and through river-like mimicking by the text. At the moments of purest clarity, Siddhartha loses himself and is subsumed by the river-like progression of the text. When those moments of textual river-likeness occur away from the river, such as in the gambling scene, there exists a dearth of reflexivity, and is a sign that Siddhartha has latched himself to something vicariously. When those moments occur in concert with Siddhartha's presence at the river, reflexivity is known: for the river's mirroring by the text brings Siddhartha to peace, insofar as the text is the road into Siddhartha's mind, and brings thus the reader into experiential oneness with the river by which Siddhartha stands.

It is no coincidence that the river itself acts as a mirror in these grandest moments, when the sentences reflect the motion occurring[16]. An example occurs on page 109: "Siddhartha looked

---

[16] Perhaps a good context in which to think of this is that offered by Bourne & Bourne concerning static vs. moving images. At the outset of their book's ninth chapter, the authors compare paintings with films in terms of duration v. immeasurable duration. The introduction of more winding sentences in which ideas are repeated (either by repetition of words or concatenated repetition of ideas in different words) places the novel between the filmic temporal experience and that experienced when looking at a painting. For in that the assumption established by the novel is that time moves forward (unlike a painting), and yet that through the stalling on an idea which itself is meant to be occurring at-present and is thus not stalling (though the subject remains the same, i.e. the moving river in *Siddhartha*) narrative motion is slowed or stalled, the author imbues the work with the simultaneous sense of forward motion (assumed) and staticity (affected). This occurs naturally when the plot turns inward, such as in *Notes from the Underground*, which does not progress without the main character's mental fathoming of the events — yet in a third-person objective novel the contrast between motion and static is the greater, as assumptions of temporal malleability are by initial condition (i.e. the third-person) cast asunder until forced otherwise by authorial doing.

into the river and saw many pictures in the flowing water. He saw his father, lonely, mourning for his son; he saw himself, lonely, also with the bonds of longing for his faraway son; he saw his son, also lonely, the boy eagerly advancing along the burning path of life's desires; each one concentrating on his goal, each one obsessed by his goal, each one suffering." The motion in this scene contrasts that of the gambling scene in its text-and-content reflexivity. The syntax reflects this simultaneous maintenance of self-control and surrender of self; the sentences wind, repeat, extend, yet they are buffered by semicolons, which provide the sentences comparatively firm definition. This occurs also upon Siddhartha's ultimate recognition of Being in the river[17]. In these scenes, one is both entrapped by and salvaged by the perpetuation of words.

The major characters are not given faces, descriptively, until all faces become one. This places the emphasis of meaning on the moments of oneness, reflected both by content (facelessness, actions leading to the moments) and by presentation (longer sentences, multiple verbs and descriptors being used, imbuing the scene with the assumption of more-and-less (more to the point of infiniteness; less in that all variant description remains redundant, despite its infiniteness)): "They all became one with the river" (110). This does not give the character human faces per se, but a face identifiable with the river, which on page forty is described as a "broad sheet of water [glimmering] pink in the light of the morning," a "'beautiful river'"(40), and is even given a voice ("The river laughed" (107)). There is, unfortunately, no way to cite the dearth of prior facial description (Siddhartha's having a beard is mentioned on page 43: "…he had his beard shaved off….") — though on page 107, Siddhartha's portraiture in the context of

---

[17] "All the waves and water hastened, suffering, towards goals, many goals, to the waterfall, to the sea, to the current, to the ocean and all goals were reached and each one was succeeded by another" (110).

the river is shown[18], implying that the river is an identifier of sorts. That the ultimate moment of oneness, where Siddhartha kisses his Govinda on the forehead, occurs next to the river, and that the language and syntax used by Hesse mirrors the river's environs:

"[Govinda] no longer saw the face of his friend Siddhartha. Instead he saw other faces, many faces, a long series, a continuous stream of faces…which were yet all Siddhartha. He saw the face of a fish….Each face was mortal….Yet none of them died, they only changed….And all these forms and faces rested, flowed, reproduced, swam past and merged into each other, and over them there was continually something thin…like a…mask of water — and this mask was Siddhartha's smiling face…" (121-22).

is that the river assumes central importance as both a metaphor and as a functional method. It is the unifier, the mirror, the moment-maker, the motif. Upon his return to the river, Siddhartha is reborn.

b. *Notes from the Underground*

Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* concerns itself with the escapades and rumblings of an unnamed 'underground man'[19]. The novel proceeds via the first-person. It is character-defined in that the novel must be perceived through the character's lens. In this, the reader must trust the lens, however untrustworthy it comes — and certainly it does, from

---

[18] "[Siddhartha] bent over the water in order to hear better. He saw his face reflected in the quietly moving water…."

[19] Here referred to as 'the character.'

beginning (his liver hurts for reasons unknown, yet he will not go to the doctor) to end (the entirety of Section X, which begins with the character defiling his proclaimed love for Liza by presenting her with money after they were intimate together, and ends with the character making proclamations about his vileness, how he has "shirked away [his] life through moral degeneration in [his] corner" (151), proclamations which themselves can be trusted only on the basis that the character remains untrustworthy) — or find something to trust in the story, a way around the untrustworthiness to view the story as a complete, trustworthy image. That is, for the requisite wholeness of transcendence through this novel to be experienced/shown, the moments at which the character transcends his lens, and/or the moments at which the reader can read from above the character's myopic vantage and perceive the character as an actor within the plot rather than the lone means to the plot itself, must be identified.

In *Notes*, any change in the apparent primacy of the character's perspective notifies the reader to an expansion of what is perceptually available, allowing for such greater perception. This occurs mainly in the story's latter section, and comes in two forms: where the narration shifts from first-person screed to near-pure (with some first-person interruptions) dialogue, and where the latter section ceases to chronicle the character's mental activity and begins describing the action occurring.

Pages 103-105 provide an example of the former. The method shifts from a description of the character's mindset ("I realized with the utmost clarity the whole absurdity, as loathsome as a spider…" (103)) to a direct back-and-forth between the character and Liza. During this back-and-forth there exists no room for the character's mental wrangling to color proceedings. The scene would provide a mere question-and-answer session if it were not juxtaposable with the prior mental wrangling and occasional dips into first-person reasoning for the quotes provided

("'Nasty day for a funeral!' I started again, just to break the silence" (105)). The dialogue on page 104, by contrast, has no such interruptions, and allows for a clean perception of the character as a socially functional being. Due to this, the reader may perceive the character as an actor within a scene rather than the monologist of this scene; regardless of how the character is analyzed by the reader, the novel itself becomes more unified in that one can now *see* the character as opposed to living through his lens. The persistence of the character's mental analyses of his and Liza's words, too, ensures that while the reader is provided access to the broader[20] lens, the reader never loses sight of the initial first-person lens, and that the lenses are thus comparable as the scene moves. The character here is variantly an object within the scene and the scene's teller. In pure dialogue, Liza and the character exist on level terms; as such the philosophies they and their words espouse are comparable the same. This allows for a view of the character from the outside. In moving through the first-person lens into a more complete perception, thematic unification occurs, namely manifesting in the heightened ability of the reader to weigh the onus of untrustworthiness and place it upon the character or upon the society he decries.

Critical, too, in transcendence of the perspectival frame, is the scene's setting and the implications it has upon the onus of trustworthiness — for because the novel proceeds through the first-person, the question of trustworthiness arises, and in order for the novel to *come whole*, the reader in some way must be provided access to a debate over the onus of that trustworthiness[21]. The novel's second half, particularly the dialogue-heavy scene with Liza,

---

[20] through dialogue, more distant first-person, or even third-person

[21] or forever be mired in the first-person, incapable of complete recognition

provides this. In the first section, the character is hiding[22], yet in hiding he must be *hiding from* — there is a chasm created between him and society. In the second section, he pokes his head from his hole, as it were, tests his theory as any good "man of character, man of action" would — attempts to wed this chasm. The scene with Liza allows for sight of innocence, straightforwardness through a character who had previously seemed inaccessible, knotted, described by himself as being "unable to become even so much as an insect" (5), and in doing so forces the reader to question where the onus of trustworthiness lies. It speaks subtly that the character *is* capable of being more than the dismal and squalid room in which he resides — that the character *can* be trusted. Yet that the setting itself remains dismal and squalid, and that the character's *honesty* (as perceived by Liza, he is a savior) comes through only upon conversing with someone in such a *dishonest* place, speaks volumes about either the society's or the character's vileness. That this debate over trustworthiness' onus can occur is that the character has been put in a place where the reader can view him comparatively, as opposed to his narration being sooth by default. As such the scope of the novel broadens by bringing the character into participation in the world that to this point he had only analyzed. In the negative sense, the reader is freed from perspective, is able to transcend what was once limiting; in the positive sense, the novel becomes a more complete work — 'comes together' — in that it allows for such questioning of its own primary mode of communication. The novel, as with the character it contains, must question itself if it is to understand itself, transcend the situational.

---

[22] for what reason is unclear, given the character's untrustworthiness. He states on pages 3-4 that "[He] could not become malicious. In fact, [he] could not become anything….[That] an intelligent nineteenth-century man must be, is morally bound to be, an essentially characterless creature; and a man of character, a man of action — an essentially limited creature" — but where is truth in the unreliable man's word?

The mode of presentation in this scene with Liza, where later the character lilts on Love, provides both a positive standard upon which the character operates[23] and is an example of his analytic certitude which, in being spoken rather than written, occurs in comparison to the 'active world' which the character avoids. By the theorization of Love Dostoyevsky provides the material for concrete identification of *what* the character lacks, and *why* he lacks it, in one. That he must theorize is that he is removed. One can trust the character here more than elsewhere, for his lens is turned outward and one may perceive him objectively, recognize his lack not as he informs the reader of it, but as it appears.

The cleaving of the novel into two parts — Part I, "Underground," in which the character operates in seclusion, reflecting upon the world; Part II, "On the Occasion of Wet Snow," in which the character yet operates in seclusion, though it is a seclusion defined by his entry into the world from which he secludes himself — constitutes a reversal of the lens, an ambiguity which must be wed or deconstructed if the transcendent is to be expressed. In Part I the character attempts this, in writing. Yet in thinking he is not acting, not living his truth; merely is he perpetuating his vileness as defined by his differentiation and his insistence on defining himself in terms of society: "They won't let me…I can't be…good!" (145). Part II provides the opportunity for the active wedding of this gap.

So follows the second incident to be discussed relevant to the transcendence of the perspectival frame established by Dostoyevsky. When the character races toward the whorehouse in Part II, his reasoning is so certain, so decided that he need no longer think. In the purity of his action, as depicted by the bareness of events in contrast to the rest of the novel, the character again becomes *something* beyond his analysis of himself: "We started. My head was in a

---

[23] see *Siddhartha* section on Atman for the necessity/value of this

whirl" (97); "'Hurry, driver!' The coachman tugged at the reins." (97); "I shouted to the coachman so savagely that it made him start and crack his whip" (97). Ultimately it is again the contrast between the first half and second half of the novel which bares this — in this scene, though, the physical freneticism, and the character's connection with his surroundings, is clearest. The character has accepted his situation to the point that action, without thought or with minimal thought, can occur. As the scene presents it, he controls the coachman through his certitude, *making* him move; the coachman is an extension of him. Yet that there is an end[24], that this action occurs on the basis of a lack of perpetuation, is that he must either surrender his goal or surrender this moment of oneness with his surroundings. As he does not surrender his goal, the action ceases, and he plunges back into theoretics.

Dostoyevsky is both sly and honest here: there is no real difference between the novel's second half and its first half, but that the character's ideals are turned outward rather than inward. In this Dostoyevsky shows the inherent capacity of the character to wed the intro- and extroverted worlds, if only the character were to recognize this. Outwardly the character speaks of Love; inwardly he rues the purity he cannot realize in tandem with society. The novel sets itself for transcendence based upon its dichotomous representation of the analytic and real-world action. While the character, true to himself, ultimately ends proud, blames his condition and acts on skepticism[25], condemning himself to the split-minded, perspectival world[26] in which he began, the novel itself provides moments of transcendent clarity when the analytic is cast aside & life is presented as-is.

---

[24] revenge upon his 'friends'

[25] "'Wouldn't it be better,'" he muses, "'for her now to carry away the insult with her forever?… Why, only tomorrow I would have defiled her soul and wearied her heart'" (150-51).

[26] Back to the temporal split between himself-and-other —noted by Sartre to be necessarily paradoxical (107), thus in arrears of Krishnamurtian oneness.

c. *Soviet Milk*

Soviet Milk tells the story of a mother and daughter in Soviet-occupied Latvia. It is told in the first-person. The perspective is differentiated, i.e. the story proceeds through the interchanging first-person narrative of mother and daughter; therefore to perceive the plot as a whole the story, or at least the interaction among the characters' narratives, must be the manner of accounting. A choice, then, presents itself which did not in the previous novels: to perceive transcendence in terms of the two characters' unification(s), insofar as the dichotomy between the two is the barrier between them and the novel's wholeness. This novelistic style holds the potential to step against such wholeness if one of the characters' arcs' proves resistant to empathetic unification — why, then, one must begin with the assumption of unity and before seeing it occur.

The mother's narrative is one of pain. She is a dedicated doctor, an intellectual in that she reads [everything], and earns the opportunity to study medicine in Leningrad. However, she flouts Soviet order by assaulting her neighbor's husband (who happened to be a Soviet war hero) after he beat his then-pregnant wife. For this she is booted from her studies and must return to Rīga, where she stagnates at a provincial hospital performing illegal abortions. She becomes an alcoholic, and multiple times attempts suicide. Her story is one of externally-imposed limitations and her reaction to that encaged life.

The daughter's narrative is one of impending freedom; she comes of age at the time of the Soviet collapse, yet her life experience remains colored by the Soviet uniformity which so

haunted her mother. The daughter moves in with her grandparents in Rīga to attend school and to distance herself from her mother's destructive living.

Of note are the moments in which the daughter's arc intersects with the mother's; the moments in which the dual characterization becomes one, where empathetic experience, or at least perception, is made possible by parallelism[27]. One of these moments occurs between pages 151-155, when the daughter, who had enrolled in a Latvian cultural class, comes to visit her mother. The cultural class was disapproved of by the Soviet authorities; its teacher, beloved by the students, was removed from the school, and each of the students was called into the headmaster's office to sign a document stating the teacher's guilt. If they did not sign, their futures would be lost. It is Ikstena's portrayal, through the mother's eyes, of the daughter as "[having] grown thin…[spending] her time in her room or in the kitchen gazing apathetically out of the window" (151), followed by the mother's observation that "something had happened," which sets the scene's empathetic motion. For here the daughter has assumed the motion of the mother; here, the daughter's susceptibility to the very situation which felled her mother comes clear. The two narratives are translatable because at this moment the two characters are commutable.

A second intersection occurs between pgs. 74-80, this time between the mother and the daughter's pet hamster, Bambi. The scene occurs via the daughter's perspective; instead of the mother and the daughter being psychically transferrable here, it is the daughter's observation of

---

[27] From Sartre: "If I conceive of a being entirely closed in on itself, this being in itself will be solely that which it is" (177) // "In the total indistinction of being, there is nothing but a negation which does not even exist but which *has to be*" (179), i.e. when one is oneself the closed-in being, and one recognizes that another is, too, a closed-in being, yet at once the oneness one experiences of oneself (being closed-in) accounts for that other, who is both another and not. This is the gap the perfectly-exchangeable transmutability set in motion by Ikstena, and by any novelist who operates with the aim of empathy through a multi-charactered narrative, weds.

the hamster, who in his encaged state is a clear metaphor for the mother, which provides the daughter, and as a result the reader, insight into the mother's psyche. "My presence meant Bambi's freedom," says the daughter. That Bambi's reaction to the caged life is to eat his newborn children is both sickening and pertinent. The scene functions as a metaphor — though it is a metaphor with multiple congruencies. One could say it parallels the mother's relationship with the daughter, in that the mother's negativity eats the daughter's time and livelihood. One could say it parallels the mother's relationship with her own life: that the newborn hamsters represent opportunity, and that the mother's impetus is self-destruction where positivity is recognized. Ultimately the relationship is one of resent and rebellion; the daughter's statement, on page 76-77: "I despised Bambi. I wished he had died. What had he lacked in his cage? Food, a warm lair, a wife and children: had he ruined it all solely because he wanted to run around in my room? I resolved not to let Bambi out of his cage ever." The implication here is that the daughter recognizes the progression of a destructive benefactor's logic in herself, and that cycles — pain, resentment, iron-grip control — will perpetuate themselves until she can put aside her animus and empathize.

As to the daughter's casting of animus, she does so upon Bambi's death and burial: "Although Bambi didn't deserve flowers, I still picked a tiny bunch" (78). The parallel between Bambi and the mother arrives on page 79, when the mother calls Bambi "'A brave hamster'" after the daughter tells her Bambi "ate his children and afterwards died longing for freedom." The mother tells her daughter that "'By brave [she] meant his determination for freedom,'" and that "'You must forgive the dead'" (79); when the daughter questions why Bambi ate his children, the mother replies that "'Probably he was saving them from being caged'" (79). The moment at which all metaphoric interpretations meet — when the daughter understands the

hamster, understands the mother, understands (loosely) the aforementioned cycle and those trapped within it — is the moment at which empathy arrives, physically, through the daughter's narrative: "[Mother] hugged me tightly. She was trembling all over, and her heart was beating violently. I hugged her back equally tightly. For a moment we stayed there. The aroma of the freshly dug soil mingled with the smell of cigarette smoke….Soon the cherries would blossom" (79-80). Daughter and mother come together here psychically and physically; the dichotomous perspective — the daughter's hopeful life, the mother's stifled one — is wed under the two's mutual recognition.

Where the mother's and daughter's narratives intersect is where character becomes redundant and plot becomes one and the reader recognizes the whole[28]. By presenting the plot through multiple characters, Ikstena necessitates empathy, assuming continuity of perception is to be maintained and transcendence — shown this continuity, a seed of situational acceptance and oneness — breathes.

IV. Transcendent Approach — A Note on Principles of Transcendent Writing

In examining these works, all of which can be said, given the established definition/context, to contain transcendent moments or transcendent capacity, certain traits of transcendent writing come to light. The juxtaposition of sentence length, the syntactic control, the character centricity, and the objectification in *Siddhartha*; the central character's necessary trustworthiness, framing,

---

[28] For more on "seeing the whole," Krishnamurti pg. 45

and leaps from analytics into reality in *Notes from the Underground*[29]; the empathy quotient facilitated by the use of multiple narratives in *Soviet Milk* are these discovered tactics. These are by no means the lone tactics available, but it is a selection which, insofar as the frame and the goal are known, have been shown to yield beneficial results for authors in expressing such moments. Insofar as transcendent moments occur in these novels, the collapsing of erroneous dichotomies, however this occurs, is perceptually and practically vital; this constitutes a functional definition of transcendence inasmuch as one can be made; though of this definition, predicated upon *being rid of things* as it is, one must be wary, for *sans* knowledge of *what is achieved* via this collapsing, this obversion is groundless.

V. Transcendence & *Why Write*

The transcendent can be found across novellic modes and works. One may hold that it is an analytic lens — but even if it is a mere lens it applies variously, and conclusions may be drawn from the thoughts it produces. Writing requires retrospection, for at-present there is nothing but presence; otherness arrives via perception, which requires a perceiver, which implies there is something to perceive.

The author strives to create that which communicates this rising to the limit, once — and once, again. Human life does not exist in a vacuum; one must consume stimulating things insofar as one continues to exist in a physical body. The process is constant. The author, inasmuch as s/he lives, understands this. There is ever a ladder to climb, ever new trust to be forged in the

---

[29] Notably, that from the novel's promise of utopic transcendence, and the moments where such transcendence occurs, can be gleaned: the story's framework and mode of presentation can and should directly corroborate the character's mode of operation therein (in this case, the journal, thought) — the story itself is an artifact, supports its own telling.

world and the challenges and joys it presents. The arising of different active necessities — different ways in which the writer must work in order to portray transcendence in his/her novel, given where the novel has begun, the form or style it utilizes — speaks to this prevalence of newness. Each novel sets a form for itself which it must step through if such moments of transcendence are to be reached. The specific form utilized, given the preceding examples, must be brought into universal moments, where formal concerns are rendered irrelevant. In *Soviet Milk*, it is the dichotomous narrative and its empathetic union; in *Notes from the Underground*, it is the unreliability of the narrator and the constant depressive-frenetic analysis in which the narrator is frozen due to his own overthought, and the action which salvages him; in *Siddhartha*, it is the story itself, as its direct thematic concern is transcendence and the bildungsromanic climax is thus the transcendent moment itself.

Perhaps the founts of the three novels discussed here, the particular breed of each individual story, arise from the newness presented by the different lives each author lived. This is speculative, and as with any analysis will remain so, but certainly each of the three novels are in a strong sense autofictional. Ikstena's, at least, has been noted as autofictional[30]. Regardless, within each story newness arrives, and the manner in which the main character(s) — and by association the novel, insofar as the novel is experienced vicariously by the reader through its character(s) — transcend their established perspectival limitation is the manner in which the novel expresses transcendence, actualizes itself.

This has implications on the writing process and the editing process. If a piece of writing is to come into one, it must bookend itself, or remain a fragmented collectivity. Erroneous dichotomies are removed by the allowing of things — characters, events — to exist within a

---

[30] World Literature Today, 2018

united frame. This bookending — the bringing of pieces into a perceptual whole — depends on the expression of the transcendent process in the text, which depends on the writer's expression of the transcendent process, however knowledge of that process manifests in any particular writer's mind. Writing is a casting off of experience — for an example, take Dostoyevsky's character's journal. Writing itself is not transcendent, but in the strain of transcendence's aftermath, writing presents itself as an answer. The expression of said experiences requires consciousness of the methods of writing and editing transcendently. In writing, often loose ends present. In the tidying of these ends, the once-disparate body is shaped. This allows the story to be fathomed as a whole, for in the story's self-nullification which occurs at such above-described transcendent moments, the story can be nothing but a mirror — to itself, to its reader. This is ecstasy; this is the bridging of interpersonal gaps; this is the overcoming of thoughtful anxiety; this is the river.

A story begins unspotted, is spotted by the anxieties born of the world it establishes for itself. Through these anxieties the story progresses, until in a moment, peace is had. The great story is epiphanic, comes together at the moment it must. All things lead to such moments. The aim is the unification of definition: all is relative, until it is not.

Bourne, Craig & Bourne, Emily Caddick. *Time in Fiction*. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground*. Bantam Books, 1974. Trans. Mirra Ginsburg.

Einstein, Albert. *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. Meuthen & Co. Ltd, 1920. Trans. Robert W. Lawson.

Hesse, Hermann. *Siddhartha*. MJF Books, 1951. Trans. Hilda Rosner.

Huxley, Aldous. *Devils of Loudun*, epilog. Harper & Brothers, 1953.

Ikstena, Nora. *Soviet Milk*. Peirene Press, 2018. Trans. Margita Gailitis.

Krishnamurti, J. *The Urgency of Change*. Perennial Library, 1977.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being & Nothingness*. Philosophical Library, 1956. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes.

Tzu, Lao. *Tao Te Ching*. Penguin Books, 1963. Trans. D.C. Lau.

Venner, Catherine. "'Soviet Milk' by Nora Ikstena." World Literature Today, 2018. https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2018/may/soviet-milk-nora-ikstena.