

BEDSOLE, MICHAEL R., M.A. “[H]ere was one room; there another”: Tracing Relations between Self and Other in Woolf and Bakhtin. (2006)  
Directed by Dr. Keith Cushman. 40 pp.

This first paper examines Virginia Woolf’s understanding of the relationship between self and other as expressed in *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Because Woolf only indirectly articulates her ideas regarding the interconnections between individuals, this paper juxtaposes Woolf with the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to better illustrate her ideas, as her conceptualizations prove antithetical to Bakhtin’s. While Bakhtin maintains that individuals do not exist as solitary monads, but only in dialogic relation to each other, Woolf intimates otherwise. Asserting that individuals remain incomprehensible to one another, stressing the solitary nature of individual experience, and emphasizing the narratives people generate which complicate the ways in which they engage others, Woolf suggests that individuals remain fundamentally estranged from one another. In short, Woolf sees only an isolating incommunicability of consciousness between individuals. Ultimately, Woolf’s understanding of the relation between self and other is predicated on her view that selves possess an inviolable, elusive core which exists prior to the self’s social instantiation.

BEDSOLE, MICHAEL R., M.A. "So, I called myself Pip": Voice, Authority, and the Monological Self in *Great Expectations*. (2006)  
Directed by Dr. Annette Van. 39 pp.

This second paper explores the ways in which *Great Expectations* challenges Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the relationship between individuals, emphasizing that Bakhtin ultimately overlooks the power struggles characterizing their interactions. Whereas Bakhtin privileges dialogical discourse over monological, assuming that individuals engage one another largely in good faith, *Great Expectations* reveals a world within which individuals aggressively superimpose their own perspectives over others. In particular, as *Great Expectations* is Pip's tale told by Pip himself, so the novel reveals the inescapable centrality of Pip's voice as he is empowered to represent both himself and others. This paper argues that Pip, in representing himself in his own story, does not *dialogue* with the other characters in the narrative; rather, he *reacts* to them, engaging them largely in relation to his own singular desires. In short, positing a model of the self much less dialogical than agonistic, *Great Expectations* suggests that selves attempt to author themselves not in open dialogical response to others, but through monological evasions and negations of them.

“[H]ERE WAS ONE ROOM; THERE ANOTHER”: TRACING  
RELATIONS BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER IN  
WOOLF AND BAKHTIN  
AND  
“SO, I CALLED MYSELF PIP”: VOICE, AUTHORITY, AND  
THE MONOLOGICAL SELF IN *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

by

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A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Greensboro  
2006

Approved by

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“[H]ERE WAS ONE ROOM; THERE ANOTHER”: TRACING RELATIONS  
BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER IN WOOLF AND BAKHTIN

In her “A Dialogical Introduction to Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway,” Debra Williams-Gualandi suggests that Woolf’s novel may be unproblematically analyzed according to Bakhtin’s dialogic model. For Williams-Gualandi, “Bakhtin’s tools of analysis provide a way to discuss Woolf’s sensitive portrayal of the way individuals perceive themselves in relation to their experience of the world” (279). Moreover, she stresses that Woolf’s work illustrates Bakhtin’s understanding of the heteroglossic nature of language and discourse: “The dynamic and flexible nature of the novel [*Mrs. Dalloway*] derives from the sensitive novelist’s ability to reflect in discourse the beliefs and structures that exist in society at any given time” (279).<sup>1</sup> That is, Woolf’s characters’ speech reveals the complex social values and relationships permeating those characters’ lives.

But while Williams-Gualandi may be right that Woolf “implicitly offers the reader an investigation into how historical and sociological events and institutions are interpreted into language utterances” (279), nevertheless, in order to posit a dialogical Woolf, she must suppress much of Bakhtin. For Bakhtin does not limit his conceptualization of discourse to an examination of heteroglossic utterances, but expands upon this theory to argue how consciousness itself is constituted through responsive dialogue with other consciousnesses (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 345). More than simply

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<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of Bakhtin, David Richter succinctly defines heteroglossia as “the notion that the meaning of language is socially determined, that utterances reflect social values and depend for their meaning on their relation to other utterances” (528).

exploring “the seams of the boundaries between utterances” (Bakhtin, *Speech* 119), Bakhtin stresses that “consciousness is in essence multiple” (“Toward” 288), that a “person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary” with another (“Toward” 287). In contrast, privileging precisely the individual’s “internal sovereign territory,” the modernist novelist Woolf posits characters whose consciousnesses express a profound singleness, thereby undermining Bakhtin’s notion that selves exist exclusively on their boundaries, dialogically responding to others. Consequently, Williams-Gualandi’s suggestion that Woolf’s work illuminates Bakhtinian dialogism evades key conceptual differences between Woolf and Bakhtin regarding their theorizations on the self, for Woolf’s understanding of the self proves incompatible with Bakhtin’s.

Nevertheless, juxtaposing Woolf and Bakhtin does aid in understanding Woolf, for as Bakhtin’s conceptualization of the self proves oppositional to Woolf, so it also helps clarify Woolf’s own ideas. Of course, while Bakhtin is a theorist, Woolf is not, and her intuitions regarding the self and its relation to others emerge only indirectly in her fiction and fragmentally in her essays on fiction. But this is precisely why Bakhtin proves useful in an analysis of Woolf, for through contrast, ideas more or less implicit in Woolf’s writings become explicit. As Bakhtin stresses an exclusively relational understanding of human selfhood and experience, arguing that individuals engage one another with their entire being, constituting themselves through dialogical exchange, so Woolf’s work suggests the opposite, indicating that individuals remain hidden from and unknowable to one another, and that to each individual there remains something private

which cannot be conveyed. Bakhtin “envisaged all of life as an ongoing, unfinalizable dialogue, which takes place at every moment of daily existence” (Morson and Emerson 59); but where Bakhtin sees dialogue, Woolf sees an isolating incommunicability of consciousness.

By means of a study of *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, two texts that express Woolf's thinking, this paper will explore Woolf's portrayal of the relationship between self and other in contradistinction to Bakhtinian theory, arguing that Woolf perceives an infinite gulf between individuals that determines the way they interact with one another. In short, Woolf's view that individuals remain unknowable to one another, her emphasis on the solitary nature of bodily experience, and her suggestion that individuals generate narratives which obstruct dialogue and distort the image of others, imply a model of interpersonal relations in which individuals remain fundamentally estranged from one another, where no dialogical encounter proves possible. For Woolf, “here was one room; there another” (*Dalloway* 127). Ultimately, Woolf challenges Bakhtin's conceptualization of what a self *is*, suggesting instead that an inviolable, ungraspable core exists prior to the self's social instantiation, which resists any encounter with another.

Both Woolf and Bakhtin question the notion of unified consciousness as posited in the Western, masculine, Enlightenment tradition, and both writers suggest a more fluid conceptualization of the self, though each does so for different reasons. As a Marxist critic, Bakhtin formulates dialogism in oppositional response to those traditions which presuppose consciousness as a self-unified and stable phenomenon. As Bakhtin sees it, any “faith in the self-sufficiency of a single consciousness” is a false faith generated by



capitalism's atomizing (il)logic, as capitalism "create[s] the conditions for a special type of inescapably solitary consciousness" ("Toward" 288). For Bakhtin, rather, "the very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*" (Holquist 18). Bakhtin observes, "I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself" ("Toward" 287). In other words, psyches should not be "perceived as 'things'" or understood as unitary monads (Bakhtin, *Problems* 9), but should be seen as existing entirely in relation to other selves with whom they perpetually engage. Fundamentally, Bakhtin maintains that "[t]o be means to communicate" with another and that only in "revealing" oneself for another can one "become [one]self" ("Toward" 287). And, as selves only exist in relation to other selves, and as dialogue between selves is unending, so the self is never in itself finalized. Indeed, "[a]s long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 59). Thus Bakhtin suggests that selves do not exist in and of themselves, as unified monads; rather, selves exist wholly as ongoing "threshold" events on the boundaries of other selves ("Toward" 287).

Woolf's writings convey a strong sense of her own conceptualization of the relationship between self and other. Woolf sees the self not as a "threshold" event, relationally engaged with others, but rather as something deeper, more elusive, and more solitary at its root. In "A Letter to a Young Poet," Woolf ponders, "What does one mean by 'one-self'? . . . It is a self that sits alone in the room at night with the blinds drawn" (269). For Woolf, the self manifests itself not in dialogue, but when withdrawn, divided apart from others. Such an image is drawn out more dramatically in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as

Clarissa, watching the old lady in the window across from her, muses on her solitude, “Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop. . . . Somehow one respected that—that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it . . . the privacy of the soul” (126). Who the old woman *is*, her interiority as exists for herself alone, remains private, unknowable to others, and ultimately incommunicable. For Clarissa, and implicitly for Woolf, the old lady embodies the exclusive otherness of the other, an otherness dialogue cannot negotiate, and “that’s the mystery” (127). As Bakhtin stresses the unceasing and ever unfolding dialogical encounter between selves, so Woolf emphasizes the distance between individuals, their inability to participate in such encounters, isolated as they are within their own “private universe[s]” of experience (“Letter” 269). In short, against Bakhtin, Woolf sees the self as singular, removed from others, a private phenomenon.

Woolf’s understanding of the self’s alienation from others can be seen in part as predicated on Woolf’s understanding of consciousness. Though contra Bakhtin, Woolf sees self as essentially singular, as existing in itself and not in relation with another, like Bakhtin, Woolf acknowledges that individuals are not unified monads. In *A Room of One’s Own*, contemplating both the mind’s powers of perception and “sexual duality” (Childs 167), Woolf writes, “What does one mean by ‘the unity of the mind,’ I pondered, for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. . . . Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives” (96). As the mind’s singularity is splintered by the myriad states of consciousness it is capable of experiencing, and as

none of these distinctive states expresses the infinite possibilities of the whole, so the whole escapes encapsulation by any one state. For Bakhtin, one cannot conceive of the self as a self-unified entity because selves exist only relationally. But for Woolf, disunity is not a product of individuals' interrelationships, but remains intrinsic to the self itself, as consciousness resists any "single state of being." But by constantly "altering" themselves, "bringing the world into different perspectives," individuals, Woolf suggests, likewise defy any singular instantiation of themselves for others; for internally divided, individuals cannot help but be divided from one another.

Such an understanding of the self is reflected throughout Woolf's fiction and her writing on fiction. In her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf writes of Mrs. Brown: "You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what" ("Mr. Bennett" 212). Woolf suggests here that attempts to represent character, to capture another's "single state of being," always struggle against the irreducible complexity of personality and voice.<sup>2</sup> To appropriate Bakhtin's language, Mrs. Brown, as any individual, remains "unfinalizable," as she always escapes any final word on herself. However, whereas Bakhtin maintains that selves resist finalization as they engage in unending negotiations across boundaries with others, where selves never cease responding to other selves, Woolf maintains that characters resist finalization because something about an individual always evades another's comprehension. In short,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Porter Abbott, Woolf's thinking on character is not without contradiction: "On the one hand, Woolf sets not only her art but her own sense of personhood against the occluding operations of character; on the other hand, she engaged throughout her life in a daily pursuit of character in the pages of her diary" (397). In his essay, Abbott attempts to resolve this apparent contradiction.

selves elude other selves, resisting embodiment for the other, remaining always elsewhere. As Woolf writes in "Modern Fiction," "Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" (287). And of course, what "move[s] off" also moves away from others, resisting contact, and trivializing dialogue. Consequently, there is no generative encounter on the boundary as Bakhtin affirms, during which selves "freely and reciprocally" reveal themselves (Bakhtin, *Problems* 59). For Woolf, in direct contradiction to Bakhtin, the elusiveness of selves implies an incommensurability between selves, for as selves resist presence for one another, so they convey a solitude negating dialogical exchange.

Woolf's project in *Jacob's Room* illustrates her concern with how selves thus remain essentially unknowable to each other, victims of an insurmountable distance spread between them that they cannot bridge. To emphasize just how selves elude one another, the novel juxtaposes characters' reflections on Jacob. For, as the disparities between these multiple perceptions of Jacob become apparent, and as it becomes clear that Jacob resists others' attempts to "finalize" him, so one realizes how unknowable and foreign individuals truly remain to each other. For example, early in the novel, Clara, Julia Eliot, Timothy Durrant, Mr. Sopwith, Betty Flanders, Captain Barfoot all briefly express their own separate ideas of Jacob, yet none of them captures or sums up Jacob. Clara finds Jacob "so unworldly"; Julia Eliot feels that Jacob, "to get on in the world," needs "to find his tongue"; Mrs. Flanders sees her son's "clumsiness," and so on (71). Later on, Sandra Wentworth Williams observes that Jacob is like Moliere's Alceste, a

severe, easily deceived, “small boy” (169); Florinda considers Jacob, “like one of those statues” in the British Museum (80); and Bonamy feels that the “trouble [with Jacob] was this romantic vein in him” and a “stupidity” (140). In the midst of exploring these characters’ thoughts on Jacob, the narrator observes: “It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown” (71). Illustrative of the elusiveness of all individuals, Jacob remains an always receding ungraspable phantom, an “unseizable force” whom others can never know (156).

Thus, no matter what the text conveys of Jacob, Jacob “escapes categorization” (Kiely 210), hovering on the edges, never fully materializing for his companions or the reader. As Briggs notes, “Jacob . . . remains mysterious, opaque, as other people always are” (93). Though Bakhtin maintains that individuals reveal themselves to the other, Jacob does not reveal himself to anyone. And as Bakhtin stresses the interpenetration of selves, Woolf suggests only that individuals “Try to penetrate” (93). Indeed, the narrator of *Jacob’s Room* asks: “Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage . . . while life dwindles?” (93). And though Jacob leaves behind concrete traces of himself (letters, the wicker chair, his shoes), these remainders do little more than ironically reinforce the distance separating Jacob from others. Avrom Fleishman comments, “there is always something left over which marks the self as unique. These residues of identity are most clearly observed in the paraphernalia of living, the concrete objects which come to represent the traits or interests of the individual who selects and uses them” (52). Yet these “residues of identity” are not identity itself, but only so much jetsam doing little to

connect individuals with each other. Thus Woolf asserts that one can never know another, nor approach the other. So contending, Woolf undercuts one of Bakhtin's primary arguments, that selves dialogically engage the other by "revealing" themselves to the other ("Toward" 287). Woolf implies that selves remain concealed, never quite substantiating themselves for another, always "mov[ing] off, or on."

Reinforcing the claims of *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway* likewise illustrates the estrangement between self and other. And in the same way that *Jacob's Room* demonstrates Jacob's elusiveness via the juxtaposition of numerous voices commenting on him, so too *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates Clarissa's elusiveness. For example, at Clarissa's party Peter Walsh sits discussing Clarissa with Sally Seton, comparing their respective impressions of her. Sally notes that "Clarissa was at heart a snob" (190), and that "Clarissa was hard on people" (191). But at the same time Sally notes "how generous to her friends Clarissa was!" and how "pure-hearted" she was (191). Clarissa escapes Sally's attempts to represent her to Peter, who himself experiences ambivalent feelings concerning Clarissa: "But I do not know . . . what I feel" (191). Near the end of this scene, Sally also observes that she really knows nothing about Clarissa or Richard, but "only jumped to conclusions, as one does, for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day?" (192). And even though the novel ends with Clarissa's dramatic reentrance to her party, with Peter Walsh declaratively announcing, "It is Clarissa" (194), Clarissa's presence here only highlights her absence the moment before, as Clarissa had been privately contemplating Septimus' suicide and the secret "thing" Septimus "had preserved" by means of his suicide (184). The novel does not suggest the distance

between Peter and Clarissa or Sally and Clarissa has lessened in any way as Clarissa reenters the room, but rather stresses Clarissa's ungraspable otherness as neither Peter nor Sally can comprehend the private moment she has experienced. As Ruotolo notes, "Clarissa will not solidify" (117). Thus, Clarissa's appearance in the last line of the novel ironically underscores Peter and Sally's inability to grasp her, as the objects Jacob left behind had ironically emphasized his own elusiveness.

Peter and Sally's unsuccessful attempt to pin down Clarissa recapitulates an effort the entire novel has repeatedly illustrated. For others in the text likewise attempt to define Clarissa: Kilman, for instance, views her as degenerately wealthy; Lady Burton understands her as someone who has impeded her husband's success (106); and Richard, though he loves Clarissa, sees her as rather frivolous. But as the poet John Ashbery observes, "words are only speculation" (69), and Clarissa exceeds these multiple "speculations" on herself. Indeed, in contrast, Clarissa affirms that "[s]he would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that" (8). "She would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (9). Implicitly, Clarissa acknowledges that in characterizing others, one inevitably, in a sense, falsifies them, for individuals remain far too elusive to permit any adequate accounting of themselves.

*Mrs. Dalloway*, however, goes further than *Jacob's Room* in that it explores the way selves remain distanced and unknown to one another while simultaneously presenting a seemingly concrete and stable social self apparently engaged with others. Having returned home from her morning walk, full of introspections, Clarissa gazes into her mirror alone in her room. At this moment, she draws herself into focus, into the

semblance of a unified self, while at the same time exposing such an impression as an illusion. Looking into her mirror, “collecting the whole of her at one point . . . seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself,” Clarissa thinks:

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face a point. That was her self—pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point . . . [she] had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions. (37)

Clarissa instantiates herself here, though she acknowledges how the self’s complex diversity becomes lost in the moment of instantiation: she “had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her.” As with Jacob, what Clarissa *is* exceeds both what she presents of herself and what others expect of her. And despite her seeming concreteness as she looks at herself thinking, “That was herself—pointed; dart-like; definite,” that definiteness proves illusory, as the text suggests that beneath such superficial unity Clarissa consists of many disunited “parts.” Perhaps most importantly though, Clarissa indicates that these “parts” of her are drawn together via an encounter with another, as “[t]hat was her self [only] when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together.” But what others draw into being is not an ongoing, developing, dialogically negotiated consciousness, but a role, a mask fitted for the occasion. Clarissa does not negotiate otherness as Bakhtin would have it; rather, she



performs versions of herself when called onto by social convention. But who Clarissa *is* beneath these roles remains diffuse and “disarticulat[ed]” (Porritt 323), an unreachable shore.

Woolf’s emphasis on the distance dividing individuals as well as her technique of juxtaposing many variously situated voices to indicate the insufficiency of any individual’s understanding of another result in a proliferation of distinctive voices in her texts. The manifestation of this polyphony of voices in Woolf’s novels coincides with Bakhtin’s own emphasis on the “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (*Problems* 6). Bakhtin’s privileging of polyphony reflects his assumption that these voices sound together in dialogue with one another; as “polyphony presupposes the possibility and asserts the value of meaningful dialogue” (Morson 233-34). Since Woolf’s novels express such a polyphonic chorus of voices, as voices intermingle and interact, one might think such polyphony could not help but indicate at some level in Woolf’s novels an affirmation of Bakhtinian dialogism. For as Woolf has her characters all interwoven into one another’s lives, so it becomes possible to see how each influences the other. As J. Hillis Miller suggests in regard to *Mrs. Dalloway*, “No man or woman is limited to himself or herself, but each is joined to others by means of this tree, diffused like a mist among all the people and places he or she has encountered” (174).

For instance, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa, Richard, Peter, Sally, and many others are bound together by the memory of shared pasts. The Bourton excursions proved immeasurably influential on each of these characters in their youth, though in different

ways. Indeed, acknowledging that Clarissa “had influenced him more than any person he had ever known” (153), Peter remarks to Sally, “His relations with Clarissa [at Bourton] had not been simple. It had spoilt his life” (192).<sup>3</sup> Old animosities that should have faded years ago still affect people’s actions, as when, at Clarissa’s party, Sally sees Hugh, who had tried to seduce her and then denied it to others, and yet says nothing to him (189). And Clarissa, of course, remains haunted by her memories of Sally. Similarly, in *Jacob’s Room*, each of the characters is linked together via their relationship with Jacob himself. Jacob links Bonamy to Mrs. Flanders to Clara to Sandra and so forth in a vast web radiating out from himself. Though many of these characters never meet, their lives remain intricately and subtly interconnected as Jacob moves back and forth between them.

Nevertheless, despite the interweavings connecting characters, and despite each novels’ implicit acknowledgment of the influences individuals have on one another, these individuals still remain distanced from one another, for Woolf does not interconnect characters dialogically, but existentially. Individuals share the temporal coincidence of mutual coexistence, but this does not necessitate dialogical exchange or contact with another; indeed, it accentuates the opposite. For example, Woolf writes in a passage from *Jacob’s Room*:

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<sup>3</sup> This passage reveals Woolf’s practice of free-indirect discourse, a method coinciding with what Bakhtin refers to as double-voicedness. Bakhtin defines double-voicedness as heteroglossic discourse serving “two speakers at the same time and express[ing] simultaneously two different intentions: the direct attention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (“Discourse” 324). Williams-Gualandi explores this at length in her essay.

Mr. Spalding going to the city looked at Mr. Charles Budgeon bound for Shepherd's Bush. The proximity of the omnibuses gave the outside passengers an opportunity to stare into each other's faces. Yet few took advantage of it. Each had his own business to think about. Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart; and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding, or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all—save 'a man with a red moustache,' 'a young man in grey smoking a pipe.' (64-65)

Individuals remain closed off from one another, unable to “reveal” themselves to the other, connected only by their shared physical space. No dialogical engagement of voices exists here, no meeting of selves on the boundaries; for these individuals, while socially coexisting, going to and from work, nevertheless always remain at an undiminished distance from one another that dialogue cannot bridge. One discovers, of course, that Jacob was among the anonymous many on the bus. By connecting Jacob to Mr. Spalding and Mr. Charles Budgeon, the novel suggests that, like Jacob, all individuals exist in anonymity, even as they move and interact in the midst of a multitude of other human beings. As if to clinch the point, Jacob gets off the bus here and loses himself in the mass of people in and around St. Paul's Cathedral. Thus, though Woolf posits links or interweavings between the polyphonic voices in her texts, she also articulates the distance between individuals, indeed suggesting that such a dividing gulf is an unavoidable existential property of being human.

In addition to suggesting that selves lack the psychic contact necessary for Bakhtinian dialogue, that individuals remain isolated from one another because they can never truly know the other, Woolf also suggests that selves remain isolated from one another due to the solitary nature of one's bodily experiences and perceptions, a notion at

variance with Bakhtinian assumptions regarding the body. As discussed above, Woolf understands the self as disunited, refusing any “single state of being” for itself, since “[c]learly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives.” But as the case of Septimus Warren Smith reveals, the body itself underpins the mind’s multiple “perspectives,” as the mind is dependent upon the “[m]uscles, nerves, intestines, blood-vessels, all that makes the coil and spring of our being” (*Waves* 193). For Bakhtin, “To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds” (“Toward” 293). But for Woolf, the body impedes dialogue, as the body binds the self to the body’s own limited sensual perceptions, generating a non-negotiable perspective unique to the individual. As Bernard laments in *The Waves*, “we were all different. The wax—the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us. . . . We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies” (178-79). Thus, what the self proves capable of experiencing and understanding depends upon the body’s capacities as it is biologically constituted. And, though one may presume individuals nonetheless perceive the world similarly enough to adequately communicate their experiences of it to others, Woolf complicates such an assumption via her treatment of Septimus Warren Smith, whose illness “insulates him from all human relationships” (Rosenthal 91).

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Septimus finds himself constantly overwhelmed by his senses, perceiving the world via his damaged nerves, finding himself both over-sensitized and

under-sensitized to his surroundings. As his body inundates him with information and sensation, Septimus experiences the natural world with intense vibrancy, “perceiving familiar objects as if for the first time” (Ruotolo 103). For Septimus, “leaves were alive; trees were alive”; indeed, Septimus feels the leaves “connected by millions of fibres with his own body” (22). In Regent’s Park, overhearing a nearby nursemaid deciphering the smoke letters of the skywriting airplane, Septimus cannot help but physically internalize her voice: “Septimus heard her say ‘Kay Arr’ close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke” (22). Septimus apprehends his world materially, translating experience into physical sensation. As the narrator remarks, Septimus’ “body was macerated until only the nerve fibers were left” (68).

However, such acute sensitivity also works to sever Septimus from others, as human relations prove too much for him. Indeed, since the war, Septimus “could not feel” towards others what one supposes he should (86). Alive to the natural world of his senses, he is correspondingly numbed to the complex social world of human interactions. His wife, Rezia, he refers to as “it” (93) or as the “unseen” (25). In Regent’s Park with Rezia, Septimus feels he must get “Away from people—they must get away from people, he said” (25). Indeed, in response to Holmes’ approach, Septimus flings himself from the window, committing suicide, exclaiming, “I’ll give it you!” (149). And though his “mind transmutes everything, connects the most disparate sounds and pictures” (Blackstone 80), Septimus cannot share these visions with others. His damaged nerves isolate him from

others, marking a border across which nothing may pass. What selves *are*, Woolf implies, is mediated through the self's own body far more than is dialogically mediated through another. For the body's materiality closes the self off from another, tracing out an impermeable boundary overshadowing dialogical relations. As Kenneth Burke points out, "the body's pleasures and pains are exclusively its own pleasures and pains" (130).

While Septimus' illness certainly illustrates how the sensual apparatus of the body provides the self with incommunicable experiences, thus isolating the self from others, this situation proves no less true for those ostensibly healthy. Clarissa herself experiences moments wherein her consciousness so fuses with the sense perceptions of her body, that her self essentially ceases to exist, and all that remains is bodily perception. And as Woolf suggests that in these moments "the boundaries of conscious selfhood dissolve into [only an] awareness of basic physical existence" (Littleton 38), transcending social context, so she reinforces the absolutely incommunicable and solitary aspect of these experiences, reiterating again the boundaries that divide individuals rather than dialogism's generative margins. For instance, reflecting on her years, Clarissa thinks:

She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa . . . plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing table, and all the bottles afresh. (36-37)

Clarissa seeks to arrest time, to dissolve herself into the physicality of the moment in order to feel the moment that much more. She seeks to so bind herself to the moment, to "plunge" into it, that the "I" of the aging, socially defined Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway

dissolves into the sensation of this exact instant of bodily existence. But, as this moment marks an experience exclusive to Clarissa's own body, an experience at the level of the body in which the everyday-self evanesces, so the experience remains incommunicable and necessarily solitary. Indeed, Naremore points out that the experience of "'reality' here is something apart from the social order of experience, removed from the dialectic of active personal relationships, and perhaps even inaccessible by means of language" (131). To dissolve oneself into the moment, to "plunge" beneath the social to the phenomenological, necessarily implies a retreat from language, as language remains complexly social. Thus, as individuals encounter the world through the singular filter of their own senses, the body itself circumscribes the self's interactions with others, often, as with Septimus, foreclosing any possibility of dialogue, or, as with Clarissa, transcending it.

In contrast, Bakhtin does not prioritize the body; for Bakhtin does not understand the body as filtering or delineating experience for the self, rather, the self filters the body's perceptions through the socially constituted linguistic systems which contextualize the individual. Glossing V. N. Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*,<sup>4</sup> Eagleton observes that "the domain of signs and the realm of ideology are coextensive: consciousness can arise only in the material embodiment of signifiers, and since these signifiers are in themselves material, they are not just 'reflections' of reality but an integral part of it" (194). Bakhtin likewise asserts that "consciousness comes

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<sup>4</sup> Many dispute Voloshinov's authorship of this text, arguing instead for Bakhtin himself. Morson and Emerson note the controversy around the question: "It is now commonplace for critics to cite Voloshinov's and Medvedev's works as Bakhtin's . . . but in fact the authorship of these texts is far from a settled question" (102). Regardless, Voloshinov was a member of Bakhtin's circle, and thus shares a similar view on the philosophy of language.

second,” as the dialogical self instantiates itself exclusively via the shared sociality of language and discourse (“Toward” 290). For Bakhtin, others’ discourse works “to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior” (“Discourse” 342). What Septimus or Clarissa experience through the body’s singular senses loses significance as the self’s awareness of such moments can only be meaningfully translated to itself through socially preexisting linguistic structures.

Ban Wang points out that “[w]hen private consciousness is seen as constructed in this way, the identity of self becomes an issue that has lost its underlying assumption of an original, innate essence. It is the social structure, ideology, language, in short, the symbolic order that constitutes the self or rather the subjectivity of these characters” (180). Indeed, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, various characters certainly appear constructed according to the discourses within which they are enmeshed. Lady Bruton’s interest in emigration betrays her entanglement in imperialist ideology (Wang 181); Clarissa’s parties expose her bourgeois consciousness; and Kilman’s religious zealotry reveals her immersion in fundamentalist Christian evangelism. In *Jacob’s Room* Mrs. Durrant’s interaction with Mrs. Pascoe uncovers the hierarchical and power-saturated relationship between classes (“Mrs. Pascoe listened submissively” [55]); likewise, Bonamy and Jacob’s treatment of Mrs. Papworth reinscribes the ideological chasm dividing the classes (“They never noticed her” [102]); while the novel’s portrayal of Clara marks the gendered scripting of 1920’s bourgeois London. For Bakhtin, these individuals would necessarily experience the world solely through their socially prescribed, ideological roles, through the discourses structuring their subjectivities, and not through their bodies.



Nevertheless, for Woolf, there remains something exclusively personal to an individual's bodily perceptions of the world which escapes ideological reduction. Louise Poresky helpfully suggests that Woolf posits two selves for each individual, a subterranean Self and a social self, for "[t]he Self, that core or center of the human psyche that Woolf's characters seek, differs from the self, one's superficial identity" (15). Self cannot be contained by self, as Self exceeds self and is the ground upon which the social self is laid. For though Woolf certainly acknowledges a social component to selfhood, as individuals both respond to others' influences and perform according to their social roles, such sociality is secondary, an accretion upon the existential thusness of the body and the body's immediate apprehension of the world. Thus, in opposition to Bakhtin's assumptions regarding the socially constituted, dialogic conceptualization of the self, Woolf's novels, to appropriate Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phrase, express a "phenomenology of perception." That is, as consciousness expresses itself only as consciousness of something, and as perception always grounds itself reflexively in the sensory organs of an individual's own, singular body, so there exists a component to the psyche which remains exclusively enclosed within that particular psyche. Individual awareness arises as the individual encounters the world through her or his own unique sensory apparatus, similar in kind to others, but distinct in its biological instantiation: "I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body" (Woolf, *Waves* 93).

However, as much as Woolf privileges the elusive and phenomenological self, she nevertheless thrusts her characters into interaction and confrontation with others. For though Woolf suggests individuals remain unknowable to each other, and further

intimates that bodily materiality isolates individuals, nevertheless, her novels explore the ways individuals encounter and respond to one another. Indeed, Woolf's different understanding of how selves socially engage other selves is the place where she most challenges Bakhtinian dialogism. For Bakhtin, individuals acknowledge the voice of the other while responding to it with their own. As Z. D. Gurevitch observes, "[e]very attempt to communicate entails acknowledgment (however implicit) of the other" ("Other" 1180). For Woolf, though, interactions between individuals are much more problematic than Bakhtin allows, as Woolf suggests individuals do not necessarily dialogue as one consciousness in full recognition of another. Rather, individuals, as they interact socially with one another, not only perceive the other through the filter of their own bodily senses, but also generate narrative constructions which screen in the self and distort the other. Such activity reduces dialogue to monologue, revealing yet another barrier between self and other.

In his study *Consciousness Explained*, the cognitive theorist Daniel Dennett suggests that "brains grow self-representations" (430), and that "streams of narrative issue forth" from a fictive center we call the self (418). Elsewhere he comments, "We are all virtuoso novelists. . . . We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography" ("Self" 114). Such observations are in no way alien to literary theory, for, as Roland Barthes observed years ago, narrative "transforms life into destiny, a memory into a useful act, duration into an oriented and meaningful time" (39). And Paul Ricoeur asserts that "fiction, particularly narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of the understanding of the self" (435). But Dennett, like Woolf,

foregrounds the body's singularity in experiencing, filtering, and ordering the world, suggesting that the body assumes a more aggressive, more monological, role in navigating its environment than appears in models such as Bakhtin's, where selves dialogically respond to others openly, fully, and typically in good faith. Dennett maintains that narrative serves as the brain's chief instrument in confronting its environment, as narrative both orders experience and gives rise to a sense of self:

Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others—and ourselves—about who we are. . . . Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source. (*Consciousness* 418)

Thus, Dennett understands narrative as a strategy for survival. Human beings possess an impulse, a drive to order the world which compels selves to construct narratives of themselves. Such narratives, though, arise spontaneously within the individual, and are not dependent upon a dialogical relationship with another. Consequently, this impulse works to close off the possibility for dialogue Bakhtin insists upon, as selves gravitate back upon themselves, isolated from others by their own fiction-making capacities.

Finding resonance with such a model of selfhood in Woolf proves not too difficult; indeed Porter Abbott suggests that Woolf's writings, and especially her fiction, reflect Woolf's own efforts towards establishing a narrative of self. For Woolf, Abbott claims, "writing is autogenesis" (399), as Woolf both invents and confirms her idea of herself through her writings. Abbott quotes from Woolf's diary: "I am I; & I must follow that furrow, not copy another. That is the only justification for my writing & living"

(398). Woolf here asserts the self-narrative within which she will play her part, and which lends her life meaning and structure. Woolf's "autogenesis" reveals a process many of her characters engage in, a process in which individuals coalesce around their own "center[s] of narrative gravity" (*Consciousness* 418), bringing meaning to their worlds through the narrative they impose upon it. In fact, as Bernard asserts in *The Waves*, "in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I *must* tell you a story—and there are so many, and so many—stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like children we tell each other stories" (176, emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> Even Clarissa's need for her parties illustrates this point, for her parties are not only "an offering," as she phrases it herself (122), but an attempt at "self-definition" (Littleton 36), and thus a component in her own narrative of self as presented to others. Thus, individuals invent the stories of themselves they present others, and though "none of them are true," these stories both define the self and convert experience into meaning.

However, such fabrications impact the relation between self and other, as individuals do not recognize the other as they *are*, but see only the narratives individuals weave about themselves. Indeed, more significantly, following another "tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition," individuals do not merely generate stories of themselves, but also project those narratives onto others, consequently distorting the other. Woolf's lyric sequence in *Mrs. Dalloway* on the "visions" of the "solitary traveler" provides a model for the way individuals both perceive reality according to their own

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Dennett observes, "of all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model the agent has of itself" (*Consciousness* 427).

unique narratives, as well as the way individuals project their narrative interpretations of the world onto others. In a sense, these narratives also are visions, more structured perhaps, but visions nonetheless. As individuals “issue forth” self-narratives, so, for the solitary traveler, visions “ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveler and taking away from him the sense of the earth” (57). The solitary traveler remains at the mercy of her or his own visions, as visions mask the “actual thing,” potentially cutting one off from others. The danger, as the narrator notes, is that “[n]othing exists outside us except a state of mind” (57). The text, though, does not deny the otherness of the other, only the individual’s ability to perceive the other independent of the individual’s own “visions,” or “streams of narrative,” as Dennett phrases it. Such a relationship with the other works to suppress any potential for dialogical exchange, for not only do individuals wrap themselves within visions of themselves, but they enwrap the other as well. Consequently, two levels of psychic distortion separate one from another, countering the optimism of Bakhtin’s claims.

For example, Peter’s pursuit of the young woman through the streets of London illustrates the distorting “visions” of the solitary traveler, as Peter encounters a woman from whom he desires no dialogical response. Walking London after he has left Clarissa’s, Peter spies a “young woman” who “shed[s] veil after veil” for him “until she became the very woman he had always had in mind” (52). As Peter follows the unnamed woman, he creates a narrative enmeshing her within his own desires and needs. And though this unnamed woman momentarily infuses Peter’s life with excitement and

meaning, as Peter seeks connection, intimacy, a return-to-youth, as he seeks someone who will know “his private name” (53), nevertheless, Peter merely projects his fantasies onto this young woman, distorting her for his pleasure. Peter is aware of his actions, but feels “one must invent” (53), that individuals have no choice but to fabricate visions of themselves and visions of others, and that these visions are necessarily singular to the individual. Peter thinks to himself as he loses sight of the “girl”:

Well, I’ve had my fun . . . And it was smashed to atoms—his fun, for it was half made up, as he knew very well; invented, this escapade with the girl; made up, as one makes up the better part of life, he thought—making oneself up; making her up; creating an exquisite amusement, and something more. But odd it was, and quite true; all this one could never share—it smashed to atoms. (54)

Narrative, Peter confesses, emerges from the individual as a solitary and willful act. And individuals find pleasure in such acts, as these narratives bring significance to the individual’s engagement with life. But, though the passage suggests that individuals possess the capacity to be cognizant of how they script others, such scripting nevertheless does violence to the person scripted. Dialogism emphasizes the “social imbrication of voice and response” (Nealon 131), where the individual “explicitly or tacitly acknowledges the language of the Other” (Richter 528). Monologism, however, “denies the existence and validity of the Other, assuming an auditor to whom one speaks without needing to listen” (Richter 528). Certainly, as Peter projects his vision onto this “girl,” doing violence to her, he monologically denies her “validity,” and in a sense speaks to her “without needing to listen.” Consequently, Woolf’s portrayal of Peter’s experience with this woman refutes dialogism’s central emphasis on response, suggesting instead

that individuals are much more interested in their own visions than in the voice of the other.

Though Peter may express some capacity to comprehend how his “visions” construct the other he sees, Peter proves the exception. Generally, individuals generate an idea of the other which they fully conflate with the other while remaining ignorant of their actions. *Jacob’s Room* provides numerous illustrations of such monological constructions. For example, *Jacob’s Room* first introduces Jacob as a young man through the eyes of Mrs. Norman. As Jacob enters the train-carriage, Mrs. Norman observes, judges, and quickly assembles in her mind an idea of Jacob based solely on his dress and demeanor. Mrs. Norman initially sees the “powerfully built” Jacob as a threat to her physical safety: “She would throw the scent-bottle with her right hand . . . and tug the communication cord with her left” (30). But this conceptualization of Jacob passes as she begins to observe him more closely. “Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby), she once more reached his face. She dwelt upon his mouth. The lips were shut. The eyes bent down, since he was reading. All was firm, yet youthful, indifferent, unconscious” (30). Indeed, the more she watches Jacob, the more she associates him with “her own boy” (31). Thus, Mrs. Norman draws a portrait of Jacob, but the portrait reflects herself more than Jacob, as Mrs. Norman only sees Jacob through the lens of her construction of him. The narrator observes, “Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things—they see themselves” (30-31).

Additionally, like Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Papworth creates her own version of Jacob. Overhearing Jacob and Bonamy tussling, as she washes dishes in the other room, she misnames Jacob Flanders, “Sanders.” Mrs. Papworth feels that “Sanders was a fine young fellow,” and “felt motherly towards them [Sanders and Bonamy]” (102). But who is this “Sanders” Mrs. Papworth has, in a sense, created? Whom does she feel motherly towards? As with Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Papworth fabricates an image of Jacob; though unlike Peter, neither Mrs. Norman nor Mrs. Papworth realizes that she invents the other she encounters. Moreover, in both instances, Jacob remains silent, aloof. He does not respond to Mrs. Norman on the train, nor does he acknowledge Mrs. Papworth. No dialogical movement occurs on the boundary between self and other; the old women envision and create their own versions of Jacob, and Jacob ignores them.

Yet what happens when “visions” come into conflict, as they inevitably will? For Woolf’s antithetical relation to Bakhtinian dialogism emerges most clearly when her texts illustrate individuals whose narrative of self and vision of the other clash, and where neither individual proves capable of responding to the other. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Bradshaw’s interaction with Septimus reveals how self-blinded individuals can be to one another and the tragedy that ensues when individuals refuse to acknowledge the voice of the other. In her essay on the “dialogic connection,” Gurevitch asserts that, “In facing, one confronts the total otherness of the Other, the impossibility to reduce the other to myself” (“Dialogic” 192). And yet Bradshaw proceeds directly “to reduce the other to [him]self,” as Bradshaw works to impose his own will onto others. Bradshaw sees others only through the lens of his own discourse, and though desirous “for dominion, for



power” (101), constructs a narrative of himself in which he justifies his actions in the name of “love, duty, [and] self sacrifice” (100). Even his wife “had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking . . . of her will into his” (100). Although Bradshaw is the physician called in to treat Septimus, he has no interest in listening to him. Bradshaw presumes Septimus’ illness is caused by Septimus’ need for a “sense of proportion” (96), and that Septimus can be cured by going into one of the doctor’s “homes” where Bradshaw “will teach” him “to rest” (97). Of course, the sense of proportion Septimus lacks is Bradshaw’s own—“his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw’s if they were women” (99). Bradshaw refuses to recognize Septimus’ voice, refuses to respond to Septimus, denying him the “equal rights of consciousness” (Bakhtin, “Toward” 285). Scathingly, the narrator observes that Bradshaw “swooped; he devoured. He shut people up” (102). Bradshaw not only projects onto others, as Peter, Mrs. Norman, or Mrs. Papworth do, but seeks to dissolve them entirely into himself.

As Bradshaw remains closed to the voice of the other, so too, however, does Septimus, though for different reasons. As discussed above, Septimus’ madness isolates him from others, as his constructions of the world, his “visions,” isolate him within his mind. But Septimus’ closure, in part, is a defense against the monological violence of men like Bradshaw. Though Septimus has done nothing wrong, he feels he has “committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature” (96). And yet when Septimus does commit suicide, he does it “in order to preserve his own existential unity” (Hawthorne 44). Rather than submit to “visions” of others, Septimus

chooses to die to maintain his own visions and sense of inviolable self. Septimus “did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want?” (149). Thus, Bradshaw’s self-narrative clashes with Septimus’ own vision of himself with tragic results.

The relationship between Clarissa and Doris Kilman likewise reveals the incessant construction-making that individuals engage in which subverts sympathetic dialogue between selves. Resentful of those who remind her of her insecurities, Kilman defensively constructs her own image of Clarissa, believing Clarissa a shallow, bourgeois snob, who flits away her life engaged in meaningless activities. For Kilman, Clarissa “was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit” (128). Indeed, Kilman perceives Clarissa as embodying the decadent privileged classes in general: Clarissa “came from the most worthless class of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture. They had expensive things everywhere; pictures, carpets, lots of servants” (123). But of course, as the text offers readers the nuanced complexity of Clarissa’s interiority, so readers realize that Kilman’s mental representation of Clarissa is not truth but perspective. For the depths of Kilman’s disdain for Clarissa matches the depths of Kilman’s own self-loathing: “why should she have to suffer when other women, like Clarissa Dalloway, escaped?” (129). When Kilman looks on Clarissa, she does not see Clarissa, but a torturer.

But Clarissa likewise misreads Kilman, as Clarissa invents a version of Kilman which distorts her. As Elizabeth Primamore notes, “Woolf does not depict Kilman as a frightful creature; instead the idea of Kilman as a monster or monster-like is in the mind

of Clarissa Dalloway” (127). Jealous of Kilman’s relationship with Elizabeth, Clarissa thinks, “This is a Christian—this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her! She in touch with invisible presences! Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace, she know the meaning of life!” (125). Indeed, for Clarissa, Kilman proves as much a threat to her sense of self as Clarissa proves to Kilman’s, as Clarissa resents Kilman’s self-righteous “superiority,” perceiving Kilman as “one of those specters who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants” (12). And though Clarissa admits that hatred “was for ideas, not people” (126), nevertheless, Clarissa, mirroring Septimus’ reaction to Bradshaw, thinks of how the “odious Kilman would destroy [her sense of self]” (127). Sadly, neither Clarissa nor Kilman possesses the capacity to sympathetically acknowledge the other; neither sees the other, rather, each generates the image of the other with which they then interact, each inventing the object of their own scorn.

Thus, individuals remain inextricably enmeshed in a constant stream of self-generated and self-generating story, which, while serving to help define a meaningful sense of self for individuals, nonetheless contaminates individuals’ perception of others. Indeed, such mutually excluding narratives as one sees between Clarissa, Doris, Septimus, and Bradshaw, even if extreme examples, demonstrate that for Woolf, dialogue often reduces to monologue, contradicting Bakhtin’s own stress on the dialogic responsiveness of individuals. Where Bakhtin privileges dialogue, fundamentally stressing “the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness, (“Toward” 287), Woolf insinuates otherwise, emphasizing that selves are screened from other selves, as

the “visions” of each “ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of” the other. Gurevitch asserts that when individuals “look at each Other face-to-face” they “redeem themselves from their own thingness, and make a dialogic connection. What is born at this moment is recognition” (“Dialogic” 185). However, Woolf suggests that when one individual looks at another, she or he does not “recognize” the other as Gurevitch claims occurs during the “dialogic connection”; rather, individuals see only the stories they weave upon the other: “Nobody sees any one as he is. . . . they see themselves” (*Jacob’s Room* 30-31).

In his study of Bakhtin, Michael Holquist observes: “It cannot be stressed enough that for him [Bakhtin] ‘self’ is dialogic, a *relation*” (19). As Bakhtin conceives of the self as emerging only out of its relation with another, so, for Bakhtin, the self can never be understood as solitary or as existing in isolation from another. Recall Bakhtin’s assertion that “A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*” (287). As Bakhtin maintains that selves exist only on the shared boundaries with other selves, and as an individual’s interiority arises only through dialogical negotiations with the discourses of other selves, so, for Bakhtin, individuals possess no authentic interiority exclusive to themselves. What the self *is*, for Bakhtin, remains exclusively social. And though Bakhtin clearly decenters the self, stressing that selves are not solitary Cartesian monads, he also implies that selves are not the internally fractured consciousnesses that Woolf understands them to be. Bakhtin maintains that individuals possess enough internal unity to allow them the capacity to greet others fully and openly:

“I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another” (“Toward” 287). Nothing is held back, all that a self *is* is offered up to the other.

But Woolf’s conceptualization of the self, though not as developed as is Bakhtin’s, proves at least as complex. By suggesting that consciousness consists of a countless multitude of “states of being,” and that selfhood remains far more diffuse and “dilated” than Bakhtin contends (Whitworth 160), Woolf intimates that selves do not consist of a singular “social” self constituted solely on the boundaries it shares with others, but rather consist of an infinite stratification of social selves grafted upon an unknowable, elusive core. Moreover, emphasizing the insurmountable isolation which defines relations between individuals, whether the result of the solitary nature of perception, or the narratives people use to structure their individual experience, Woolf suggests that this core self is much more constitutive of an individual’s private identity than Bakhtin’s theory allows. For Woolf, what a self *is* necessarily precedes the social, despite being affected by it. Indeed, privileging individuals’ inaccessible interiorities over their social personas, Woolf stresses the preservation of private interiorities as the thing most necessary for individual health and wholeness. As Poresky observes, “This center, or Selfhood . . . becomes round, whole, and entire only when [individuals] can pursue it in solitude” (263). To reiterate Clarissa’s thoughts on the old woman, “that’s the miracle, that’s the mystery; that old lady,” alone, separate, yet dignified, “solemn,” and complete in her singular otherness (127, 126). Ultimately, Woolf suggests, people are all “solitary travelers” whose “privacy of the soul” must be intrinsically valued (*Dalloway* 57, 126-

27). And though solitude can oppress, overwhelming individuals with a sense of their own isolating otherness, solitude is not necessarily a lamentable state to be understood solely in terms of socializing models such as Bakhtin's. On the contrary, as Bernard Blackstone observes, "the solitary mind in its communion with things, with pure life and beauty, creates a world of significance: the moment of intuition is achieved, the flash of understanding in which time stands still and there is perfect happiness" (250).

As discussed above, Bakhtin affirms that "*To be means to communicate. . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself*" ("Toward" 287). Woolf, however, offers an alternative vision. As selves elude one another, remaining always mysterious and unknown, so Woolf reinforces the idea of an unbridgeable distance separating individuals. No matter what the novel tells the reader about Jacob, for instance, Jacob remains an "unyielding surface" (Newman 33), as he retreats from the boundary where self and other dialogically coexist: "the essential thing, has moved off." Furthermore, Woolf resists dialogism's emphasis on the sociality of selves as she suggests that individuals encounter the world exclusively through the materiality of their own singular bodies. Bodily perceptions, she intimates, prove much more fundamental than an individual's relationship to another. Woolf would perhaps agree with Hume, who notes, "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception" (300). Indeed, as Woolf suggests that individuals' perceptions of others is filtered through the body, so she also implies that

such perceptions are contaminated by narrative constructions, in which an individual cannot see the other because the individual sees only herself. Thus, instead of dialogue, too often only monologue remains. Ultimately though, Woolf's juxtaposition with Bakhtin reveals a better understanding of her intuition of what a self *is*. For her belief that selves remain isolated from one another requires a different conceptualization of the self than Bakhtin's relational understanding, where selves engage other selves "wholly" with their entire being ("Toward" 293). For Woolf, the "solitary traveler" must be understood as grounded in the existential mystery of being itself, and not necessarily in its relation to another. By thus emphasizing the absolute otherness of individuals, Woolf in fact amplifies their voices, affirming individuals' inviolable "privacy of the soul."

Julia Briggs notes Woolf's preoccupation with "what makes up our consciousness when we are alone and when we are with others" ("Novel" 72). Of course, this was Bakhtin's concern as well. But Woolf and Bakhtin's respective understandings of the self and the self's relation to others could not be more opposed, even though they wrote relatively contemporaneous to one another. As a Soviet critic, Bakhtin, perhaps not surprisingly, advocates a theory of the self based exclusively on individuals' "social imbrication" (Nealon 131). And Woolf, writing in England, preoccupied with modernist aesthetic and thematic concerns regarding form and representation, suggests an understanding of the self that emphasizes individuals' interpersonal alienation. Yet significantly, in the end both Woolf and Bakhtin similarly struggle to explain the way individuals interact and engage with one another. But where Bakhtin formulates an optimistic dialogic theory of self and other which privileges understanding between

people, Woolf pursues her “lifetime concern with the barriers placed on our complete understanding of others” (McCracken 63). Paradoxically though, as much as Woolf emphasizes the distance dividing people, she also quietly expresses a hope that individuals might share some connection with one another, a hope echoing Bakhtin’s own optimism. As Naremore observes, “all of Mrs. Woolf’s major characters . . . long for an ‘embrace,’ a merging of the self with someone or something outside” (124).

This shared hopefulness, explicit in Bakhtin, implicit in Woolf, ironically illustrates a final difference between the two, a difference which most succinctly illuminates Woolf’s understanding of the relationship between self and other. Near the beginning of *Jacob’s Room*, when Jacob is still a boy, his brother Archer searches vainly for him on the beach, calling out “Ja—cob! Ja—cob!” The narrator observes, “The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks—so it sounded” (8-9). So, Woolf would suggest, all individuals proceed forth. But what is most striking about this passage is not its reiteration of humankind’s solitary state, but its emphasis on the call made out to the other. For Woolf, “[t]o be” means not “to communicate,” as Bakhtin would have it, but to *try* to communicate, to strive to connect with another while nonetheless acknowledging that the other escapes the call. Though Woolf affirms the “supreme mystery” that “here was one room; there another” (*Dalloway* 127), nevertheless, as she notes in *Jacob’s Room*, individuals never cease trying “to penetrate” through to the other (93). Using letters and telephones to “symbolize the human effort to connect” (Rosenthal 84), Woolf affirms, “Yet letters are venerable; and the telephone valiant, for the journey



is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps—who knows?—we might talk by the way” (*Jacob’s Room* 93).

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“SO, I CALLED MYSELF PIP”: VOICE, AUTHORITY, AND  
THE MONOLOGICAL SELF IN *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

In his article “Anti-Oedipalizing *Great Expectations*: Masochism, Subjectivity, Capitalism,” Douglas Steward asserts that “Pip’s psyche, . . . from his earliest memory, is of a passive nature. . . . Pip does not declare an identity of himself” (34). For Steward, Pip’s subjectivity is structured “in terms of objectification and subjection” (37), as Pip is acted upon by others, becoming only what these others make of him. Steward’s explication of Pip thus posits a relatively powerless Pip, a Pip whose relation to others is characterized by his subjection to their psychosocial authority over him. However, in his analysis, Steward makes no note of Pip’s control over the text, even though *Great Expectations* is Pip’s tale told by Pip himself. As the animating voice behind his own narrative, Pip cannot be understood as a passive entity, for the power he wields in his capacity to represent himself and others trumps any notion of his passivity. In other words, as Pip’s narrative is a narrative engendered by Pip’s own voice, no reading that does not account for the privileged position of Pip’s voice can be said to adequately explain Pip’s relation to the other voices in his narrative. Pip’s relation to others must be viewed in essentially political terms, as his voice constitutes a marker of his power over and above their voices in his narrative.

In his study on voice in fiction, Alan Singer notes that for the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, “the concept of voice is indistinguishable from the concept of dialogue”

(174), as dialogue involves the relational interplay of voices and their utterances. For Bakhtin, voices are not isolated monads, but dialogical counterparts, as they commingle in good conscience and in full consciousness with others, and where to see an other is to see an other with whom one can relate. As Michael Holquist notes, “It is a cardinal assumption of dialogism that every human subject is not only highly conscious, but that his or her cognitive space is coordinated by the same I/other distinctions that organize my own” (*Dialogism* 33). What Steward overlooks, voice, is exactly what Bakhtin privileges; but conversely, as with Steward, Bakhtin’s notion of voice does not acknowledge the power of the speaking, narrating voice to distort the voices of others. As such, *Great Expectations* is positioned to expose limitations in Bakhtin’s theorizations. For, although Dickens’ novel appears full of diverse and distinctive voices engaged in mutual dialogical interchange, in the end, by illustrating the authoritative centrality of Pip’s voice, the novel suggests that relations between individuals are troubled by power struggles, wherein voices contest over who will possess authoritative primacy. In short, this paper will explore the role of voice and narrative authority in *Great Expectations* in light of Bakhtinian theory, arguing that Pip’s *active* role as narrator of his own story, as he both represents others and responds to them, complicates not only the Bakhtinian descriptive monological/dialogical narrative dichotomy, but also troubles Bakhtin’s exclusively dialogic (I/other) conceptualization of how selves are constituted. In its place, *Great Expectations* posits an interrelated model of narrative and selfhood based on a monological understanding of the self’s relation to others.

Bakhtin privileges dialogical discourse over monological, as dialogical discourse “explicitly or tacitly acknowledges the language of the Other, the controlling presence of a social context” (Richter 528). In this model, multiple, distinctive, interactive voices emerge from the text, decentering any singular, centralizing narrative voice, even that of the author. In contrast, monological discourse “denies the existence and validity of the Other, assuming an auditor to whom one speaks without needing to listen” (Richter 528). Such discourse is marked by an omnipresent “mastervoice” which “unifie[s] the world in a singular interpretive center” (Miller 25). Monological discourse thus seeks to repress polyphony, that no other voices might emerge to de-center the dominant discourse. Whether fictional narratives are ostensibly dialogical or monological depends, obviously, on the text’s strategies of representation, for the text’s construction exposes its implicit assumptions regarding how individuals respond to each other. Indeed, whether a text appears monological or dialogical is related to the conceptualization of selfhood it expounds. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin asserts that “consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it” (345). For Bakhtin, the individual, as a speaking individual, is necessarily a dialogical product of her or his negotiations with others, as each person responds incessantly to the discourse of others, internalizing others’ utterances while concurrently sharing her or his own. Though Bakhtin acknowledges the influence of “authoritative discourse” in contradistinction to “internally persuasive discourse” (“Discourse” 342), nevertheless, he appears to assume that such dialogical interchange is untroubled by the possibility that



individuals may engage in “bad faith” dialogue, where the struggle for one’s own authority in the expression of some Nietzschean will-to-power corrupts the exchange.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip does not *dialogue* with the other characters in the narrative in a way that dialogically “acknowledges the language of the Other”; rather, he *reacts* to them as objects onto whom he can inscribe his own story. For Pip, as we will see, works to author others in his story as much as he works to author himself, and negates those who might destabilize his own textual centrality. And though it might be argued that Pip *is* dialogically constructed as he acts on and responds to the influences of others, as his voice *does* negotiate amongst other voices, nevertheless, these experiences are characterized not by Pip’s acknowledgment of others per se, that key component of dialogism, but rather by his implicit and incessant monological subordination of others to his own position, as his own voice comes to dominate the text. Indeed, Pip’s relation to the other voices in his narrative is linked directly with Pip’s conceptualization of his own voice and its textually central position. For Pip does not only exercise his narrative authority to represent others, but most fundamentally, himself, revealing an initial understanding of selfhood which will inform his engagement with others, and which is directly at odds with Bakhtin’s notions.

Gail Houston notes that as soon as *Great Expectations* commences, the reader is confronted “with this question of who ‘made’ Pip” (17), and the narrator Pip, having no other explanations, immediately suggests himself: “So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip” (3). As the reader learns, Pip is an orphan, estranged from his own origins, and must autogenously invent for himself a narrative of his own identity, granting himself

the power to construct his own bildungsroman. But, as no narrative represents an objective position, especially autobiographical self-narrative, so Pip's presumption to tell his own story is immediately complicated by its own initial tautologies: Who tells the story of Pip? Pip does. Who is Pip? He is the one who tells the story of Pip. In a mirroring suggestive of Lacan's theories concerning the genesis of the ego, the narrating Pip perceives an image of himself in the past and construes it to intimate a sense of unity in the narrator's present. In other words, Pip superimposes his idea of the past on his past, presenting it monologically from his own singular perspective in the present. Pip does not merely recount his past, but imaginatively (re)constructs it, infusing it with a unity of form not necessarily there originally. Pip's self-naming is thus his inaugural monological gesture, wherein he claims *authoritatively* that he is master of his own representation and, by that token, master of himself.

Consequently, as Pip expresses "his belief in his own freedom to name" (Morris 944), and asserts that "Pip is made by Pip in the telling" (Gold qtd. in Morris 944), so Pip implicitly indicates what the nature of his relationship to others will be: an agonistic subordination of their voices to his own. For instance, in the cemetery, observing the graves of his family, Pip constructs his nascent self-narrative from their silent tombstones. Pip's monological stance is immediately iterated, as Pip, addressing the tombstones, asserts his narrative authority, fabricating an identity out of these unresponsive markers of absent others. Indeed, Pip declaratively remarks of his deceased younger brothers that they "gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle," having been born, Pip imagines, "with their hands in their trousers-

pockets” (3). Pip implicitly privileges himself over his brothers, for he has not given up: Pip is the one who survives; his hands are not passively hidden in his pants pockets, but actively engaged in inventing his life as he writes his bildungsroman.<sup>6</sup> And though the narrating Pip observes that the young Pip “unreasonably” fantasizes what his family was like, regardless, the narrator reflects that it is here where he initially senses “*the identity of things*” (3, emphasis added), where he senses the distinctiveness of his own voice and the world as revealed by that voice. Peter Brooks rightly notes that Pip here engages in “the making of a fiction unaware of its status as fictionmaking” (517). This is precisely the point, for Pip naturalizes his sense of his own origins by asserting the primacy of his voice. In direct contradiction to Steward, for whom, as stated above, “Pip does not declare an identity of himself” (37), Pip proactively asserts an identity from the start. Thus, Pip scripts himself a self-unifying subject facing the vastness of a world *not-Pip*, a world he will attempt to will into shape in his narrative, though not without difficulty. Pip’s story begins here, seemingly *ex nihilo*, as he asserts his textual authority, an authority which implies both the power to mold himself and to mold others.

Writing of narrative power, Caryl Emerson notes, “the writer of novels has an implicated voice. He can enter and manipulate, fuse or distribute his voice among characters. Or he can—and this requires an extra measure of commitment to freedom—grant autonomy to his characters” (259). Fully implicated in his own narrative, Pip expresses his authoritative power over others via his representations of them, denying his

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<sup>6</sup> Pip exposes the bourgeois ideology underlying his world-view, implicitly affirming a universe that supposedly rewards hard work, where individuals can surmount oppressive socioeconomic structures if only they figuratively remove their hands from their pockets. Pip’s view of the world itself is thus monological, where selves, envisioned as monads, self-author themselves.

characters “autonomy” as he manipulates their images and their voices. Indeed, as Pip will demonstrate, the I/other dialogue, when embedded in representations controlled by only one party, is never untroubled by questions of power. This is evident from the moment Pip introduces the reader to Mrs. Joe and Joe, as he represents each as inferior to himself, indicating and asserting the primacy of his voice over theirs. Pip infantilizes Joe and represents Mrs. Joe as nothing more than a “shrew” (114), refusing her even her own name (a particularly egregious slight, for disallowing her her own name erodes any trace of a representation independent of Pip’s own). Catherine Waters notes that Pip’s “portrait of Mrs. Joe betrays the internalised guilt of the adult narrator” (152), and indeed, so does his portrait of Joe, as Pip intimates his rather ambivalent shame over having desired for himself great expectations. But, beyond Waters’ comment, Pip’s portrayal of both Mrs. Joe and Joe illustrates Pip’s own fundamental concern over who has authority in Pip’s story of becoming. Because Mrs. Joe in particular exercises the power of raising Pip “by hand” (7), directly threatening to overshadow Pip’s voice with her own, so Pip works doubly to contain her, subordinating her voice through his representation of her.

Pip’s representation of Mrs. Joe largely centers on his humorous, seemingly innocuous portrait of her personality. But Pip figuratively isolates Mrs. Joe via his satirical caricature of her, as Mrs. Joe, described as “tall and bony, and almost always . . . [wearing] a coarse apron . . . and having a square impregnable bib in front . . . stuck full of pins and needles” (8), suggests the image of an individual who “repels any movement towards an embrace” (Waters 153). In this manner, Pip marks Mrs. Joe as unapproachable, intimating that there will be no sympathetic recognition of her otherness,

as he confines her voice to his caricature of her. To appropriate language from *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Pip pens, sentences, and frames Mrs. Joe, containing her within his own filtered representation of her (Gilbert and Gubar 13). Moreover, Pip defuses the prime indicator of Mrs. Joe's potential textual power—her apparent cruelty—when he playfully writes, “Knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand” (8). Beating Pip, she also beats Joe. Again, the caricature is humorous, and the image that might have been conveyed of a powerful, authoritative personality is undercut. But so, however, is Mrs. Joe's humanity, for her voice is consequently negated by this humor, subsumed into Pip's narrative.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, Pip is not interested in painting Mrs. Joe as she is, but only as he would have her be, which suggests a disingenuous quality to Pip's hyperbolic representation of her. Significantly, as Waters notes, “The imaginative relish with which Mrs. Joe's atrocities are recorded, and the comic delight with which her pretensions are displayed for ridicule, have the effect of throwing the moral discourse of the adult narrator into question” (153). Pip does not recollect the actual Mrs. Joe from his childhood, but, in a morally ambiguous act, (re)constructs her character to suit his own vision, distorting her image for his own discourse. Absent Pip's “imaginative relish,” what would Mrs. Joe look like? How much does Pip exaggerate her personality? How might her own self-representation be different? In the end, perhaps these are futile

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, by refusing Mrs. Joe representation in a realist mode, by confining her merely to a cartoon version of herself, Pip not only dehumanizes her, but, by juxtaposition, encourages readers' sympathy and identification solely with Pip himself.

questions, for, as Rodolphe Gasche remarks, autobiography, “as a discourse of attempted synthesis of the ontological identity of the self,” necessarily is “a discourse of authority . . . a discourse where the *other* is transformed into a barbarian” (573).<sup>8</sup> The representation of Mrs. Joe’s violence is thus matched by the inescapable violence of Pip’s representation. One senses here Pip’s struggle for control over the text via his control of another’s voice, as such control marks a seeming mastery over his own sense-of-self. In his short study on Bakhtin and Levinas, Jeffrey Nealon observes that dialogism possesses a “distinctly ethical character,” and that “if social space is understood as a rich dialogue of voices rather than a fight for recognition and domination, then the other is not necessarily a menacing or hostile force” (131). But Pip does not understand “social space . . . as a rich dialogue,” as Nealon affirms. Rather, Pip sees social space as precisely “a fight for recognition and domination,” where the other is a “menacing or hostile force” who must be subsequently subdued. Thus, by controlling Mrs. Joe via his representation of her, by marking her as mere caricature not to be taken seriously, Pip undercuts dialogism’s emphasis on negotiating voices, and substitutes instead a hierarchical vision where voices overshadow and overpower other voices.

Furthermore, as Pip uses humor to regulate Mrs. Joe’s representation, Pip also uses humor to contain Joe, as when Pip and Joe engage in their bread eating “competition” and Pip shocks Joe by apparently eating all his bread in one go (11). For though Joe treats Pip with respect and a sense of equality, Pip humorously caricatures Joe as passively childlike and simple. Indeed, Pip acknowledges that, “I always treated him

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<sup>8</sup> Although of course fiction, *Great Expectations* reproduces many of the conventions of autobiography, thus opening itself up to the same critiques as autobiography.

as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal” (9). But what is menacing about Joe is not a brutal or forceful personality threatening to overwhelm Pip, but rather Joe’s kind and patient demeanor, which unceasingly stimulates a monitoring guilt in Pip, as if Joe were some projection of Pip’s superego. Perhaps more significantly, Joe denotes Pip’s own socioeconomic status, a status which Pip, after encountering Estella, “becomes ashamed of . . . [but] cannot escape” (Davies 95). As *Great Expectations*, in its most direct reading, concerns the adolescent Pip’s desires to escape his socioeconomic origins, so Pip’s need to negate those who mark his socioeconomic origins becomes manifest. In short, using humor to diminish Joe, to suggest that he is a dullard, Pip re-proclaims his own authority. Joe must be infantilized that Pip might conceal his own anxieties.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Pip’s humorous characterization of Joe reflects more on Pip than on Joe, suggesting that Joe’s representation, like Mrs. Joe’s, is not reliable, as Pip scripts Joe’s character according to his own designs. One particular passage however, concerning the fight between Joe and Orlick, betrays not only the way Pip filters Joe’s image, but also how hard Pip must work to control that image. Guided by the narrative voice, the reader’s expectations and assumptions concerning Joe tend to correspond to Pip’s depiction of Joe as thoroughly childlike. Although Joe is a blacksmith, the reader does not generally envision Joe as a large, powerful, mature adult. However, Joe’s physical strength and prowess are surprisingly evinced when he pummels Orlick. Indeed, after the fight, noticing that Mrs. Joe has fainted, “Joe unlocked the door and picked up [Pip’s] sister . . .

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<sup>9</sup> Waters observes that even the “sentimentality of Pip’s apostrophes [concerning Joe] betrays the idealising imagination of the narrator, suggesting that more is being said here about *his* anxieties and obsessions than about the ‘reality’ of Joe’s position” (154).

[and] carried [her] into the house” (115). Though only for an instant, Joe takes charge, while Pip melts into the background. How is it Joe has behaved in such a manner as apparently defies Pip’s general portraiture of Joe? As with Mrs. Joe, one asks what else about Joe is hidden or repressed in Pip’s representation that might have been revealed under different circumstances. James Davies notes “the complexities of [Pip’s] unreliability” as an objective narrating voice (94). Such a surprising passage confirms Davies’ observation while also intimating the power inherent (though sometimes latent) in the representing voice.

In representing these personalities, Pip must literally represent the speaking voices of others. But as author of his text, Pip in fact invents these utterances attributed to others, and just how much of others’ voices are actually lodged in the words Pip assigns to them cannot be known. Bakhtin would have Pip’s voice move in mutual dialogic exchange with others’ voices, since for Bakhtin authors must negotiate through the polyglot world of “internally persuasive discourses” to establish their own autonomous discourse (“Discourse” 348). Authors’ voices must commingle with others’, and do so apparently in good faith. A Bakhtinian reading might also lead one to assume that Pip’s scripting other characters’ voices could be said to be dialogical, double-voiced discourse.<sup>10</sup> But though such double-voicedness is often found in “comic, ironic or parodic discourse” (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 324), nevertheless, Pip’s action is not merely to parody other voices in his narrative, or hybridize his voice with their own, but to regulate

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<sup>10</sup> That is, heteroglossic discourse serving “two speakers at the same time and express[ing] simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 324).



them, or even negate them, that his own voice might maintain its textual centrality. So Pip, concerned as he is over his own textual authority, troubles this I/other metalinguistic relationship Bakhtin establishes.

For example, how is Joe's speaking voice wrapped up in Pip's representation of it? Significantly, whereas Joe's speech, Joe's voice, is represented via a vernacular expressive of his social status, Pip's voice, even when he is a child in the tale, is always the bourgeois voice of an adult authority figure. Never does Pip's voice betray his own true socioeconomic status or maturity level. Joe's voice is thus implicitly undercut, as Pip construes Joe's language to denote Pip's own position, consequently containing Joe by confining Joe's voice to a limited range of articulations. For instance, near the beginning of the novel, Pip intimates their disparity, as the boy Pip attempts to teach the adult Joe:

“How do you spell Gargery, Joe?” I asked him, with a modest patronage.  
“I don't spell it at all,” said Joe.  
“But supposing you did?”  
“It can't be supposed,” said Joe. “Tho' I'm oncommon fond of reading, too.”  
“Are you, Joe?”  
“On-common. Give me,” said Joe, “a good book, or a good newspaper, and sit me down afor a good fire, and I ask no better. Lord!” he continued, . . . “when you do come to a J and a O, and says you, ‘Here, at last, is a J-O, Joe,’ how interesting reading is!”  
I derived from this, that Joe's education, like Steam, was yet in its infancy. (45-46)

Though humorous, Joe's diction and syntax here mark the sociopolitical difference Pip imagines exists between them, a difference which elevates Pip at Joe's expense. Where on the surface Pip appears to be engaged in open exchange with a fully acknowledged Joe, whose language does seem at first indicative of polyphony as his voice appears

distinctively itself, in fact Pip perpetually subverts Joe's voice in his representation of that voice, betraying the false dialogism characterizing their relationship. As Pip attempts to represent Joe's voice, he illustrates what Bakhtin discusses as the "problem of the *image of a language*" ("Discourse" 337). Bakhtin suggests that the image of a language, as hybrid of two voices (the author-narrator's and the character's), "is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness," though presumably untroubled by questions of power and the potential disingenuousness or outright deceptiveness of one party or another (359). But Pip does not perceive Joe's language as a marker of Joe's otherness, but as a means for containing and diminishing him, for their linguistic disparity marks a disparity of power. Rather than permitting the inter-illumination of voices, Pip's representation of Joe's utterances serves to deny Joe's voice. Thus, yet again, Pip's representational strategies work to negate the voices of others that Pip's own voice might maintain its authoritative centrality.

Marx famously asserts that "As individuals [materially] express their life, so they are," but Pip, remarkably, seems to contend, *as I portray people, so they are* (37). Narrative authority grants one the power to write others into being in such a way as to ensure one's own centrality. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, "precisely because a writer 'fathers' his text, his literary creations . . . are his possession, his property. Having defined them in language and thus generated them, he owns them, controls them, and encloses them on the printed page" (12). This suggests that narrative authority necessarily complicates the nature of the dialogical self/other relationship, often resulting in the silencing of the other. Moreover, according to Daniel Dennett, "Our

fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is . . . telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others—and ourselves—about who we are” (418). Because individuals are generally not interested in being actors in others’ narratives, they contest with each other over narrative primacy. If, as Kenneth Burke suggests, “verbal act[s]” function as “symbolic action” (*Philosophy* 8), then Pip’s narrative can be construed as Pip’s own attempt, through the rhetoric of his narrative representations, to willfully assert his own meaning upon the world surrounding him, for “wherever there is ‘meaning,’ there is ‘persuasion’” (Burke, *Rhetoric* 172).<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin’s dialogical model has difficulty accommodating the rhetorical maneuvering individuals engage in to ensure the categorical elevation of their perspectives over others’. For if “language is always already rhetorical” (Crusius 101), then there exists a hierarchical struggle between voices, and not merely a dialogical one, or at least the idealized dialogical model present for Bakhtin.

It is not only Pip’s rhetoric-driven representations of the other that demonstrates his desire for centrality within the narrative and undermines aspects of Bakhtinian dialogism. Exploring Pip’s “bad faith,” Christopher Morris rather scathingly observes: “Pip’s relation with all characters is self-serving, even when he claims to be acting altruistically, and in his narration he occasionally covers this seemingly irreducible egotism with a veneer of disingenuous contrition” (941). Bakhtin is often accused of a certain naivety regarding the dialogical relations between speaking persons,<sup>12</sup> as he

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<sup>11</sup> Contrast with Bakhtin, for whom the “relation to *meaning* is always dialogic” (*Speech* 121).

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Crusius, for instance, cites the excessive “idealism” in Bakhtin’s system (196); Aaron Fogel complicates Bakhtin by stressing the problem of “coerced speech,” observing that “most real dialogue is

assumes dialogue occurs across relatively open, permeable boundaries, where individuals see each other and themselves in the other, with neither vantage hindered by masks. But Pip exposes a weakness in dialogism here in that Pip often demonstrates “self-serving” insincerity or even deceptiveness in his dealings with others; in other words, he dons masks. And this insincerity, of course, becomes another means of imposing authority over the narrative and over others as Pip manipulates people’s responses to him.

For instance, in addition to marginalizing Mrs. Joe’s voice via his representation of her character, Pip also controls Mrs. Joe by explicitly lying to her. When Pip first returns from Miss Havisham’s, he invents an elaborate narrative to evade Mrs. Joe’s and Pumblechook’s questions. Though Pip claims he lies only out of fear of being misunderstood or of having Miss Havisham misunderstood, he immediately undercuts this self-justification by suggesting the real reason for his lying centers on his frustration and indignation at his sister’s and Pumblechook’s attempts to force him to talk. Pip complains of his sister that “I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length” (65). Pip compounds this comment with a reflection on Pumblechook: “The worst of it was that that bullying old Pumblechook, preyed upon by a devouring curiosity to be informed of all I had seen and heard, came gaping over . . . at tea-time” (66). Resenting their apparent power to control his voice, to appropriate his voice for their pleasure, Pip bends the truth to his will, seeking to negate their power by subverting that power with

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variously constrained and forced” (174); and Michael Bernstein notes “how abstract and idealized Bakhtin’s notion of a full dialogue really is” (200).

lies. For Pip, the importance of the epistemological truth-status of his statements or the importance of “good faith” dialogue with others is thus less significant than his own textual authority. Ultimately, as Barry Westburg notes, “lying involves knowing oneself as an object for others” (131), and, conversely, treating others as objects. Thus, Pip, by lying, evades dialogical exchange in order to establish monological authority, employing his voice to control and undercut others. It must be added, however, that Pip does feel a degree of guilt over his manipulation of Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, but “only as regarded [Joe]—not in the least as regarded the other two. Towards Joe, and Joe only, I considered myself a young monster” (69). Pip confesses to Joe to ease his conscience. But although Joe wisely reminds Pip “that lies is lies” (71), nonetheless, Pip persists in his deception, thereby undermining his own confession.

Pip’s disingenuousness is not limited to the overt and obvious instance of a lie, but manifests itself in quieter, more subtle ways, as he also suppresses others merely by ignoring them, minimizing voices by evading them. In particular and in contrast to his representation of Mrs. Joe and Joe, Pip seemingly engages Bidy in a manner more suggestive of genuine exchange, controlling her voice less, thereby allowing Bidy to emerge as a more authentic self. However, this too is ultimately misleading as an instance of dialogism, for Pip still does not acknowledge Bidy’s voice. Rather, Pip uses Bidy to indulge his own voice, while ignoring hers; he does not see Bidy as Bidy, but as an object onto whom he can project himself. He does not listen to her or acknowledge her otherness; and when she speaks discomfiting truths to him, Pip works to undercut her comments, suggesting she is motivated by “a bad side of human nature” (149). For

example, when Bidy and Pip converse shortly after she moves into his house, Pip confesses to her his psychosexual obsession with Estella, and, though the narrator Pip acknowledges “Biddy was the wisest of girls” (129), nevertheless, Pip’s and Bidy’s conversation here is not dialogical. Recall David Richter’s gloss on Bakhtin’s terminology discussed earlier, in which Richter writes that dialogical discourse “explicitly or tacitly acknowledges the language of the Other,” while monological discourse “denies the existence and validity of the Other, assuming an auditor to whom one speaks without needing to listen.” With Bidy, Pip “assumes an auditor to whom [he] speaks without needing to listen.” Pip tells Bidy what he feels and what he wants, but never realizes how narcissistic his conversation with Bidy appears: “I am not at all happy as I am.” He wishes “to be a gentleman” (127). The conversation revolves around Pip, around his happiness or lack thereof; and Bidy’s voice is dampened, as the representation centers predominantly on Pip’s egocentric consciousness. Though Pip does not negate Bidy in the same way he negates others, nevertheless, Bidy helps illustrate Pip’s utter self-absorption, his inability to “acknowledge the language of the Other,” and how, even when he is not actively seeking to negate others by manipulating their images, he nonetheless either usurps or masks their voices through other means.

Complicating this reading, however, it must be noted that the narrating Pip, as he establishes the relationship between the young Pip and Bidy, casts himself in an ironic light, intimating the immaturity of his younger self, and in a sense undermining his own voice. However, such a moment only reiterates how the narrating Pip scripts himself, invents himself, controls not only the representation of others, but his self-representation

too. For in the interaction between Pip and Biddy, one senses Pip's representational strategies, as he allows readers to perceive his own selfish treatment of Biddy to better illustrate the curve of his development over the course of the story. Unlike the young Pip, the reader senses Biddy's unrequited desires, though they are muffled. Indeed, it becomes painfully apparent how deaf Pip remains to her. And though, as with Joe, Pip feels towards Biddy a degree of guilt ("it occurred to me that perhaps I had not been sufficiently grateful to Biddy" [127]), still his reaction is to talk to Biddy about his feelings, not hers. Consequently, as Pip's emotional maturity remains the dominating concern of the passage, Biddy is flattened, present finally only to reflect on Pip, her voice permitted presence only so far as it contributes to Pip's own self-narrative. Thus, Biddy suffers twice over, silenced once by the young Pip as he ignores her voice, silenced a second time by the author Pip, as he, in essence, gives Biddy voice only to the extent that it amplifies Pip's own.

Perhaps the most striking instance of the novel's subversion of dialogism involves Pip's relationship with the villain Orlick, for here the gulf between self and other reaches its maximum. There exists only "bad faith" dialogue between Pip and Orlick, as their relationship is characterized by an absolutely unbridgeable distrust. However, inasmuch as Pip's relationship with Orlick illuminates the narrative's assault on dialogism, so too Orlick provides an interesting challenge to the idea of Pip's absolute monological authority in the text. With Orlick, Pip's agonistic relationship proves much less nuanced than with Mrs. Joe, Joe, or Biddy. Pip has long resented Orlick, both because he "always slouched" (112), and because Orlick eyes Biddy, whom Pip, though treating her

dismissively, nonetheless feels possessive towards. While Orlick, brutal, cruel, base, and murderous, certainly proves an unsavory figure, nonetheless, all that readers know about Orlick is what Pip represents, and what he represents is a man constantly negated and undermined by Pip himself. Indeed, Pip “[keeps] an eye on Orlick” (132), preventing him from pursuing Bidley, though not so much for Bidley’s benefit as for Pip’s own, as Pip treats Orlick’s advances “as if . . . [they] were an outrage on myself” (132). Moreover, Pip goes out of his way to get Orlick fired from Miss Havisham’s, and would have liked to have gotten him fired from Joe’s forge, except Orlick had “struck root in Joe’s establishment” (132). But Orlick senses his subordinated position to Pip. When readers first encounter Orlick, who is only a few years Pip’s elder, Orlick expresses his frustration. He says to Joe, who is about to give Pip a half-day off, ““Now, master! Sure you’re not a going to favour only one of us. If young Pip has a half-holiday, do as much for Old Orlick”” (113). In short, again and again Pip subverts Orlick, bounding him, negating his voice. But Orlick, unlike other characters discussed, appears aware of Pip’s activities, watching him, waiting for an opportunity to reverse the situation.

So, although Pip repeatedly silences Orlick, denying him “existence and validity,” the text seemingly gives Orlick a voice, for Orlick’s resistance to Pip provides a textual site where Pip’s voice appears challenged. Indeed, the question of Orlick proves most complicated in that Orlick’s continued opposition to Pip in Pip’s narrative reveals tensions latent in Pip’s attempt to will the world into the shape he desires. This becomes most pronounced when Orlick captures Pip, permitting Orlick, in a sense, to hijack Pip’s narrative and to challenge Pip’s own powers of representation. As noted, all the reader



has known to this point is what Pip has drawn of Orlick. Here one gets Orlick's refutation, as Orlick "subjects [Pip] to a 'trial' in which the ancient crimes of Pip against Orlick are recited" (Westburg 139): "You cost me . . . [Miss Havisham's] place. You did. Speak!" (424). Significantly, however, even during Orlick's moment of ascendancy, Pip's voice is invoked, as Orlick demands Pip speak, something Pip never requested of Orlick. Orlick continues, "How dared you come betwixt me and a young woman I liked?" (424). And when Pip proceeds to justify himself, Orlick dismisses Pip's claims: "You're a liar" (424).

Pip's narrative perspective is incompatible with Orlick's; and though perhaps at some level, Pip realizes he "is indeed not a person with totally clean hands" (Westburg 139), nevertheless, Orlick must be punished for the potential destabilizing effect of his perspective. Despite Orlick's claims, there can be only one authoritative narrative in the end. Consequently, speaking of Orlick's "bad name" to undercut Orlick's accusations against Pip, Pip declares, "You gave it to yourself; you gained it for yourself. I could have done you no harm, if you had done yourself none" (424). Pip thus reasserts his own position, monologically negating Orlick as an isolated product of Orlick's own criminal tendencies. While Orlick's resistance to Pip's authority is undeniable, Pip manages to translate his struggle against Orlick into the recognizable scenario of hero versus villain, thereby defusing Orlick's narrative threat, as Pip is able to dismiss Orlick's claims against him as merely those of a soured rival. Ultimately, as Pip subverts Mrs. Joe's, Joe's, and Biddy's voice, so he also subverts Orlick's. Whereas for dialogism, it is only "in recognizing an Other as a self (and the self as an Other) [that] dialogue is born"

(Gurevitch 182), for Pip, dialogue suggests the threatening possibility of his own de-centering, which he parries via his negating of these others.

The problem posed by Orlick's threat to Pip's authority, however, raises a larger question concerning Pip's power over the text. How absolute is it? What are its limitations, and how does this reflect on Bakhtin's theorizations? If Pip has the power to represent others according to his own vision, if he can in some sense effect control over others via disingenuous responses to them, what does it mean then that *Great Expectations* seems to sabotage, in the end, Pip's own monological claims to narrative authority, suggesting instead that Pip possesses little control over his text in many substantive ways? For instance, Pip's benefaction is not as he desired, he does not marry Biddy, Estella also rejects him, and, for eleven years, he is banished from his own narrative to Cairo. In fact, the last third of the book demonstrates how deluded the young Pip's expectations for himself were in the first two-thirds. If Pip ultimately finds himself so circumscribed by the "factual" events of *Great Expectations*, does the text itself somehow escape Pip or expose Pip's monological assertion of singular authority and centrality as a fraud or as an elaborate defense mechanism? In a sense, yes, as the young Pip's desires are seemingly all undercut by the brute facts of reality confronting him; for as John Kucich observes, "Pip's central discovery is that his project of gaining autonomy has only forged him new chains" (155-56). Indeed, the novel's melancholy ending reinforces this idea, as it implicitly critiques Pip's book-long efforts at maintaining narrative authority, intimating that Pip cannot will the world into the shape he desires. He can only react to it.

Furthermore, one might argue that monological discourse, discourse in which an individual claims for her or himself an authoritative position, emerges only in response to the anxiety of knowing that one's stance is always precarious, always open. As Pip himself repeatedly illustrates, monological selves are driven to invent the ground they stand upon, to invent their origins, all the while fearful that an other will undermine their constructions for that other's own.<sup>13</sup> Again and again we've seen Pip grappling with others for authority, seemingly out of an anxiety regarding the origins of his own voice: he scripts his family from their own mute tombstones; he caricatures Mrs. Joe and Joe and minimizes Biddy and Orlick. In fact, it is possible to read his inaugural experience with Magwitch as the initiating movement in what could be perceived as Pip's book-long anxiety over control of the text. Pip's abetting Magwitch marks Pip with a "secret burden," a "guilty knowledge," fills him with the dread of "great punishment," planting in him an anxiety that he is playing a role in someone else's text, that he may not possess the authoritative voice he desires to (13). And, of course, reinforcing this anxiety, others' voices truly seem to break through in some places in the text. If this is so, perhaps the text intimates the validity of a dialogism of one kind or another, just not necessarily Bakhtinian dialogism.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the novel appears to circumscribe Pip's authority, it also re-inscribes it by abetting Pip in the negation of others' voices: Mrs. Joe is brutally assaulted and consequently disabled; Pumblechook is robbed and beaten; Drummle beats Estella; and Miss Havisham, forced to her knees before Pip, shortly thereafter

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<sup>13</sup> Dennett notes, "of all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model the agent has of itself" (427).

“spontaneously combusts,” as Houston puts it (22). Indeed, Miss Havisham provides a unique instance where the text hints at dialogical possibilities only to undercut them. Late in the novel, when Pip goes to Miss Havisham for the last time, she finally and fully acknowledges what she has done to both Pip and Estella. As Pip is talking to her, she “dropped on her knees at my feet; with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to heaven from her mother’s side” (398). She seems at last to see Pip as a person and not as an object upon which to write her revenge. Her awakening, which had begun when Estella had confessed to Pip she would wed Drummle, is here completed. But immediately after this awakening, the text appears to punish her: “I saw [Miss Havisham] running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high” (402). Though Miss Havisham survives, Pip never sees her again; thus the text subverts the dialogical encounter just as it offers a glimpse of it. In short, mirroring Pip’s own efforts, the text seems to silence many of those who threaten Pip’s voice. At the least, the text equivocally supports Pip, proffering a reality against which he sets himself and into which he interjects his narrative in an effort to master that reality, a clearly monological task. But at best, the text itself construes reality in a way that creates the impression that it supports Pip’s monological struggle for authority over his tale as he exercises his power to represent others.

Thus any gap between Pip’s voice and the novel itself blurs, for though at times it may seem to undercut Pip’s claims, exposing the limitations of Pip’s authority and the extent of his anxieties, *Great Expectations* ultimately cannot be said to subvert Pip’s

monological stance, as the text centers on the power and authority of Pip's own singular voice. After all, as discussed earlier, *Great Expectations* is Pip's story of himself, infused with and animated by his voice. And "[v]oice," as Singer states, is "the dominant metaphor for the totalizing power of novelistic form, . . . the genre's locus of subjectivity" (173). But Singer's observation would seem to contradict Bakhtin, suggesting that "novelistic form" is always already monological, as the novel, or at least the realist novel, is typically organized around a single voice and perspective.<sup>14</sup> Especially for a homodiegetic bildungsroman like *Great Expectations*, this suggests the impossibility of escaping monologism for any polyphonic dialogism, as indeed, Pip's voice imposes its perspective incessantly on the text. In a sense, Pip illustrates Catherine Belsey's "*hierarchy of voices*," wherein one dominant voice imposes itself on others, drowning them out in an effort to secure "the 'truth' of the story" (64). For Pip, there exists no "ratio of perspectives" wherein voices perceive and negotiate with each other as characterizes dialogism (Singer 174). Rather, Pip, as narrator, radically privileges his own perspective, subordinating other voices to his own, denying them dialogic recognition.

In asserting his own absolute textual authority, in fact, using that authority at times to satirize himself, the narrating Pip intimates that he is ultimately untouchable and beyond the influence of others, as his voice becomes the sole locus of meaning. Amy Sadrin imagines the situation in this way:

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<sup>14</sup> Even a text as apparently decentered as Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* nevertheless betrays a surprising monologism. Although the text offers a series of seemingly independent narrative voices, in the end, they all service Hartright's text, thereby reducing their dialogical potentiality, as the voice of Hartright proves omnipresent even in the internally framed narratives from which it is ostensibly absent.

Having now reached maturer years [sic] and given up impossible dreams, [Pip] can afford to recollect emotions in tranquility, look at his younger self [and others] with amused and sympathetic superiority and take pleasure in misleading all the other fools who are ready to follow in his steps. (118)

As dialogism requires “an impassioned play of voices” (Nealon 131), and as Pip scripts himself above such play, Pip ultimately suggests he is finalized—a profoundly non-dialogic position, for dialogism emphasizes the “unfinalizability” of voice and selfhood.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as voice serves as the novel’s “locus of subjectivity,” and since Pip’s voice appears the organizing presence behind the words, so the implication seems to be that behind the narrative looms a static, singular consciousness, a puppeteer of sorts. Is this aspect of Pip’s tale merely a function of the formalistic pressures of first-person narration, a monological illusion generated by the impossibility of telling a story without revealing (or rather constructing) a perspective or voice?<sup>16</sup> Or, is the puppeteer notion of Pip the accurate reflection of Pip’s conscious insistence on his own active self-creation and thus more or less localized to his particular narrative? The irresolvable tension between these two questions reveals serious fissures in Bakhtin’s formulations. For, via Pip’s ubiquitously present voice, *Great Expectations* challenges the “multi-linguaged consciousness” Bakhtin maintains is “realized in the novel” (“Epic” 11), and posits instead some Blakean Nobodaddy who “hide[s] [him]self in clouds / From every

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson affirm that “Bakhtin envisaged all of life as an ongoing, unfinalizable dialogue, which takes place at every moment of daily existence” (59).

<sup>16</sup> Dennett reminds us that “streams of narrative issue forth as *if* from a single source . . . their effect on any audience is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent whose words they are, about whom they are: in short, to posit a center of *narrative gravity*” (418).

searching Eye” (Blake lines 3-4), crafting narratives, inventing selves, but with no answerability to the other required.

Paradoxically, despite the text’s implicit suggestion that the narrating Pip is beyond others’ influence, *Great Expectations* as a whole does illustrate, as Bakhtin writes of Dostoevsky, that “[w]hat . . . characters *say* constitutes an arena of never-ending struggle with others’ words, in all realms of life and creative ideology” (“Discourse” 349). And, in concurrence with Bakhtin’s notions of the self’s construction, the young Pip’s “ideological development is . . . an intense struggle within . . . for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (“Discourse” 346). It becomes evident, as Pip feels the need to contain, control, negate, or silence the voices of those around him, that voices exert some pressure upon Pip, and Pip a pressure upon other voices. He *is* influenced by the discourses of others as he endeavors to affirm an identity via his self-narrative. Indeed, *Great Expectations* reiterates over and over the influences individuals have on other individuals, on contributing to the ongoing development of others’ consciousnesses, on orienting and molding their lives: Jagers molds Molly, Miss Havisham Estella, Pip Herbert Pocket, and Magwitch, ostensibly, Pip.

Nevertheless, though tacitly acknowledging the effects characters have on other characters, the novel disputes Bakhtin’s corollary claim that “The ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (“Discourse” 341), for characters repeatedly reveal their inability to resist others’ “ideological point of view” by “selectively assimilating” only part of it. In each

aforementioned relationship, one party exerts an inordinate amount of power over the other. One party scripts the other, appropriating the other's voice into the voice of her or his own particular story, thereby mirroring Pip's own textual behavior. Z. D. Gurevitch writes, "the principle underlying the framework of dialogue is the production of a 'dialogic' connection between two (or more) individual selves based on the idea of recognition. . . . one is obliged to turn to the other as an Other, and call the other into presence within the dialogic connection" (181). In the end, neither Pip nor the other characters turn "to the other as an Other, and call the other into presence within the dialogic connection." Rather, they turn to the other to monologically script her or him into their own stories, stories then re-enfolded into Pip's narrative of himself.

Thus, Dickens' novel offers a conceptualization of the self based more on individuals' "distortions of the other" by means of their contaminating influence (Justman 79), than an open dialogism where individuals actively recognize the voices they negotiate with and consciously "selectively assimilate" discourse. Contra Bakhtin then, *Great Expectations* suggests that selfhood is not constructed in the properly dialogical sense, where the "dialogic connection, means [first] to acknowledge and [then to] contact oneself with the vital presence of an other self" (Gurevitch 183), where questions of power are more or less repressed. Rather, Pip's narrative posits a model of the self much less dialogical than monological, suggesting that selves attempt to author themselves through attempts to appropriate the voice of an other for oneself. In *Great Expectations*, characters simply do not negotiate in the manner Bakhtin would assume for them.



For example, Pip, as he does with so many other characters, subordinates Herbert Pocket's voice to his own. But he does not do this via negating caricature, as with Mrs. Joe or Joe, nor does he do it via evasion or suppression, as with Biddy. Rather, Pip contains Herbert by bringing Herbert under his subversive influence, eclipsing him merely by befriending him. Pip's sway over Herbert becomes particularly apparent once Pip's dissipation begins. As Pip's resources become strained due to his "lavish habits" (272), Herbert's fortunes mirror Pip's, for Herbert cannot resist Pip's influence over him and thus he sinks into debt. Significantly, Pip admits,

concerning the influence of my position on others . . . I perceived—though dimly enough perhaps—that it was not beneficial to anybody, and, above all, that it was not beneficial to Herbert. My lavish habits led his easy nature into expenses that he could not afford, corrupted the simplicity of his life, and disturbed his peace with anxieties and regrets. (272)

Pip realizes his power over Herbert, no matter how "dimly"; and though by acknowledging this, Pip in some way acknowledges Herbert as an other, nonetheless, it proves a hollow acknowledgement, for Pip's pervasive influence over Herbert does not cease. Indeed, when Pip anonymously arranges an income for Herbert, he merely exchanges one method of influence for another; his compulsion to regulate Herbert's voice, however, remains the same. When Pip's influence over Herbert does recede, namely, when Herbert marries, takes the position in Cairo, and is later joined by Pip himself, Pip elides the narrative, spending just a few short pages to cover his eleven years in Egypt; for Pip cannot represent a narrative in which he is clearly not ascendant. However, as Pip was responsible for Herbert's rising in the world, so Pip still implicitly

lays claim to Herbert's own story as an extension of his own. Herbert in Cairo is still a Herbert who has been over-determined by Pip. In his "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," Bakhtin writes, "To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no sovereign internal territory . . . he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*" (287). But *Great Expectations* ultimately inverts this model of dialogical influence, suggesting that individuals do not exist for another, and "through the other" for themselves, but rather exist only for themselves, appropriating others according to their desires, as Pip appropriates Herbert. In this manner, the novel further exposes limitations to Bakhtinian dialogism, as it posits a more agonistic model of interpersonal relations, a model of power dynamics, wherein monological selves directly and indirectly seek to subordinate others, as they presume to self-narrate themselves into being.

It is not only Pip's own relationship with others in the text which reveals, if you will, this non-dialogic dialogism, or negative dialogics; as noted above, the relationships between other characters reiterate this agonistic pattern independently of Pip. In particular, as Pip obscures Herbert's voice by distorting it, masking it with his own, so Miss Havisham likewise obscures Estella. Miss Havisham, who never perceives Estella as an authentic other entitled to her autonomy, molds her to her will, using the influence of her position as Estella's guardian to deliberately warp her. As Estella matures, she realizes what has been done, though cannot escape what Miss Havisham has made her. This is illustrated in the only argument Pip represents occurring between the two. Most significantly, here *Great Expectations* reveals its conceptualization of the self's

construction most clearly. Estella says to a shocked Miss Havisham, “I am what you have made me” (304), and expanding on that statement, she adds moments later, “I must be taken as I have been made” (306). Estella, in contrast to Pip, does not create herself, but rather is Havisham’s product, a thing of revenge “to be bartered in the marriage market” (Houston 15). For Bakhtin, “we *must*, we *all* must, create ourselves, for the self is not given (*dan*) to any one of us” (Holquist, *Dialogism* 29): selves self-author themselves as they dialogically interact with an other. *Great Expectations*, implicitly acknowledging dialogism’s anti-essentialist notion that “the self is not given to any one of us,” nonetheless complicates this assertion, for selves, while attempting to narrate themselves into existence (as Pip does), are also passive products of another’s monological construction or narration. Estella is who she is because Miss Havisham willed it. Estella, thus over-determined by Havisham’s negative influence, learns likewise to influence and manipulate those around her, and consequently to monologically “den[y] the existence and validity of the Other.” A vicious tautology emerges in *Great Expectations*, in which individuals manipulate others only to be manipulated themselves. The notion of selfhood itself becomes exclusively combative and dialectical, as individuals structure themselves against others, not with them.

Although Estella and Miss Havisham’s relationship implicitly reiterates Pip’s relationships with other characters, ironically, one cannot overlook Estella and Miss Havisham’s apparent effect on Pip himself. For, despite Pip’s considerable textual power, Pip does not conceal their influence over him, or at least his belief in it, as Pip represents their voices, disrupting and unhealthy, slowly saturating his consciousness. Reflecting on

the old House, for Pip a synecdochic extension of Miss Havisham and Estella, Pip asks, “What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed” (96). Indeed, Estella’s initial judgment of Pip as a “coarse common boy” (93) is an assault on Pip’s original self-conceptualization, his self-naming. In other words, Estella negates Pip, and does so along class lines, scripting Pip as inferior, just as Pip scripts so many others. As such, Pip feels an injustice has been committed, and Estella becomes truly an intimidating other he must struggle against, as he reacts to his fear of her voice usurping his own centrality.

Thus, Pip becomes consumed with Estella. This is not Bakhtinian dialogism, but a mode of interpersonal influence outside the Bakhtinian model; indeed, it threatens the underlying assumptions of the Bakhtinian model. Pip represents Estella as over-determining his consciousness and thereby inhibiting him from “awaken[ing] to [any] independent ideological life,” that fundamental tenant of Bakhtin’s conceptualization of the self’s dialogical construction (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 345). Dialogism requires an interplay of voices, mutual introjections of one voice into another, and thus one consciousness into another, with the result of an individual’s awakening to her or his own autonomous consciousness. But Pip represents this process as abortive, for some voices possess the power to coerce the consciousnesses of others, overshadowing them to the extent that they become only echoes of another’s stronger voice. As Aaron Fogel notes in his critique of dialogism, the “necessary disproportion between speakers” foils dialogism

(181). Pip represents his own narrative, then, as the result of Estella's appropriation of his voice. In a very telling passage Pip writes of Estella:

You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. . . . You have been in every prospect I have ever seen. . . . You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real . . . than your presence and influence have been to me. (364)

As Miss Havisham has monologically distorted Estella's consciousness, so Pip claims Estella has distorted his, for she becomes "part" of his very "existence." But, as Maurice Friedman quotes Martin Buber affirming, "Wherever one lets the other exist only as part of oneself, 'dialogue becomes a fiction, the mysterious intercourse between two human worlds only a game'" (354-55).

Yet this brings us back to the singular power Pip wields as the teller of his own tale. By asserting that Estella so absolutely contaminates his consciousness, Pip paradoxically suggests that Estella "has no 'self'; she has only a role" in his own narrative (Waters 159). As Waters notes, "in assigning her the agency for his predicament, Pip . . . uses Estella to ground his own identity, to signify his own moral development" (Waters 160). In other words, though overtly asserting she scripts him, all the while Pip is passively scripting her for use in his own narrative of self. Since Estella "can only be represented by Pip," her voice serves only as a surrogate for his own (Waters 160). Thus, Pip reduces Estella to not much more than the catalyzing agent of his

own stated and unstated desires.<sup>17</sup> Pip does not see Estella, but only his own desire for what she suggests he lacks. Like Mrs. Joe and others, Estella becomes an image he reacts to which he himself has constructed. Consequently, Pip responds to Estella not as an authentic other, but as an indicator of his own social difference and “inferiority,” which he must overcome to maintain the sense of narrative authority he has established from the very beginning of his story.

So, whereas Pip directly negates other characters in the narrative, actively subordinating their voices to his, Pip indirectly negates Estella. As Houston notes, ultimately, “neither Pip nor the reader has any conception of what Estella’s desires or hungers might be, only that she has been ‘bent and broken’ into ‘better shape’ in order to fulfill Pip’s desires” (23). Thus, Pip’s relations with Estella challenge Bakhtinian dialogism twice over. Firstly, Pip represents Estella as over-determining his own consciousness as she unceasingly shadows his every thought. But more remarkably, Pip’s representation of Estella’s power over him proves finally an exercise in his own power over her. *Great Expectations*, in the end, is Pip’s narrative of himself as he envisions himself, and all representations are literally bent towards that end.

Speaking of Bakhtin and Derrida, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan reminds one that “both [thinkers] know that the I that tells itself does not exist,” and each asks the question, “How can one become what one is?” (266). For Pip in *Great Expectations*, textual self-authoring is quite literally the existential act of self-authoring. Pip wants to tell the tale of his own becoming, construct his own bildungsroman according to his

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Bert Hornback observes, “when [Pip] meets Miss Havisham, he is immediately seduced by the idea of wealth”; Estella merely “completes the seduction” (30, 31).

vision of his youth; thus Pip becomes the “I” who tells himself he exists. But, as we have seen, Pip scripts himself by subverting the narrative voices of others, by (mis)representing them, rhetorically establishing his own voice as the central, authoritative voice in his narrative. Pip seeks to assert to others, however consciously or unconsciously, “You are what I have made you”: Mrs. Joe is a shrew, Joe is a simpleton, Biddy, as her name suggests, is a bothersome hen, Orlick is a brute, etc. Each person in the text exists largely as extensions of Pip, voices in his tale of becoming meant to illustrate his development at the expense of their own. Indeed, when Pip is not misconstruing others, his “bad faith” nevertheless subverts the potential for dialogical encounters, further contributing to the false dialogism which troubles Bakhtin’s monological/dialogical dichotomy. In minimizing the voices of others, Pip illustrates his closure, his inability to hear any voice but his own. Holquist points out that “[t]he obsessive question at the heart of Bakhtin’s thought is always ‘Who is talking?’” (“Answering” 307). In *Great Expectations*, Pip is always talking or mediating the talk of others. Thus, in a sense, *Great Expectations* is Pip’s echo chamber. His voice reverberates unceasingly throughout the text, and every other voice becomes a rebounded version of his own. Ironically, inasmuch as Pip inflects the others in his narrative through his own voice, confining them to his own perspective, so Pip confines himself, limiting his voice to its own reflexive action.

Recall from earlier Holquist’s assertion that “It is a cardinal assumption of dialogism that every human subject is not only highly conscious, but that his or her cognitive space is coordinated by the same I/other distinctions that organize my own”

(*Dialogism* 33). If such is dialogism's "cardinal assumption," then *Great Expectations* greatly troubles any purely dialogic conceptualization of the interpersonal construction of selfhood. The novel suggests, via Pip's monological narrative, that individuals are largely conscious only of themselves, and that they do not process their interactions with others in terms compatible with any mutually understood "I/other" distinction. Rather, individuals monologically contest with each other in a struggle not only to make space for their own voices, but to seize the voice of the other for their own. Thus, while undermining Bakhtin's dialogical conceptualization of selfhood, Pip's narrative suggests its own model of dialogics based on the power dynamics at play between monological selves. For these selves portray a world of human interactions where there is little negotiation between voices, only perpetual friction between individuals vying to rhetorically establish their own vision of the world and their place in it.

Paradoxically, however, in portraying a world in which selves appear closed to the alterity of other selves, in which polyphony is suppressed, and in which individuals ostensibly write themselves into being, Pip's story betrays the anxieties of consciousnesses that sense that they are neither the identities they invent for themselves, nor the narratives in which they place themselves. As hard as they work to impose narrative order on a world irreducibly open and unknown, so someone else works to counter it. Pip's monological performance, then, reveals not only limitations to Bakhtin's theorizations, but carries within itself hints of its own. Indeed, the performance suggests, despite Pip's declarations to the contrary, that the "I that tells itself [truly] does not exist."



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