Making Conversation:

The Poetics of Voice in Modernist Fiction

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the function of dialogue within modernist fiction, and argues that it can be seen to assume a substantially expanded and diversified role in early twentieth-century narrative texts. While existing accounts of fictional speech stress its capacity to develop character or advance plot, I contend that modernist authors began using speech differently than it had historically been used in the novel: less for characterizing and plot-advancing purposes, than for rhetorical and poetic ones. My primary case studies include a cross-section of British and American modernist texts – including Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, James Joyce's "The Dead," Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* – as well as examples from post-War Italian narrative, which reflect the influence of Anglophone modernism. Through close, comparative analyses of how fictional voice is deployed in these texts, and by drawing on a range of literary and narrative theory (by Mikhail Bakhtin, Franco Moretti, and Sharon Cameron among others) I demonstrate that these writers frequently "make" conversation less to express character, than to communicate ideas or affects that *exceed* character. In particular, I disclose the tendency for discourse within these fictional environments to belong to more than one speaker – or conversely, to none. By challenging the attributive logic used to make sense of represented speech, these texts encourage us to refocus our

critical attention away from discrete utterances, and toward the larger system of utterances that emerges in a given work. In this way, I argue, modernist fiction seems to demand (and reward) a new mode of reading and interpreting fictional dialogue: one which takes into account *how* characters say, as well as what they say, and which treats dialogue's form as at least as rich a source of meaning as its content.

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Introduction
Toward a Modernist Poetics of Voice

> The speaking person and his discourse is…what makes a novel a novel, the thing responsible for the uniqueness of the genre.[1]

Fictional dialogue has long been the ugly stepchild of literary studies, chronically neglected as an area of critical inquiry. "To the degree that readers of the novel have listened for the sound of the narrator's voice," Dan Coleman argues, "they have turned a deaf ear to all other kinds of talk that make novels, novels" (52). It is a complaint frequently heard among commentators. Despite readers' documented investment in dialogue [2] and its undisputed "centrality to the novel," character speech remains, as many critics have noted, "a largely neglected topic" and a "largely unquestioned element in fiction" (Mepham, ND 411, Middleton 33). And a survey of the existing literature corroborates this assessment. As Bronwen Thomas observes, in the recently published *Fictional Dialogue* – one of the first full-length studies in the field – the subject of what Bakhtin calls the "speaking person" has generated comparatively little interest or research among scholars. "While considerable critical attention has been paid to the representation of speech and thought in narrative," she observes, "the emphasis of late has swung much more in favor of thought than speech" (Thomas, FD 1).

This dissertation, then, aims to supplement existing accounts of fictional speech. More specifically, my goal is to put forward a theory of dialogue as it is deployed in modernist fiction, one which differentiates dialogue's role in early 20th-century texts from the uses to which it had historically and most frequently been put within the novel. If

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[1] *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981, p. 333. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

[2] While much work remains to be done on the question of dialogue reception, critics have often taken for granted novel readers' exceptional interest in the "dialogue portions of fiction," noting anecdotally that "it is the *speech* of…characters…that is most often remembered" (Page 1). See Chapman for more on the "readerly approach to dialogue" in the Victorian novel, especially Chapter 11.

current studies have tended to subordinate dialogue – treating it primarily as a vehicle for characterization or plot development[3] – I would like to suggest that within certain modernist texts, it can be seen to assume a range of poetic and rhetorical, rather than primarily instrumental, functions. My case studies comprise a range of canonically modernist British and American texts – including *The Ambassadors*, *The Sun Also Rises*, "The Dead," *The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Waves* – as well as two postwar Italian novels, *Conversazione in Sicilia* and *La luna e i falò*, heavily influenced by Anglophone modernism. Rather than use speech primarily to express character, the authors of these texts, I argue, will "make" conversation to communicate ideas or affects that *exceed* character – that might be shared by many subjects, or not attributable to any single one. Particularly revealing, as I demonstrate through close, comparative analyses of each work, is the tendency for utterances within them to "belong" to more than one speaker, or seemingly, to none. By challenging the attributive logic used to interpret character speech, these texts encourage readers to focus not just on discrete instances of discourse, but on the larger discursive architecture that emerges in a given narrative. How, and how often, do characters speak? Are their exchanges long or short, symmetric or lopsided? Is there more monologue in the novel, or more dialogue? By suggesting that there may be as much to be gleaned from *how* characters say, as what they say, I put forward an alternative method of reading and interpreting dialogue, which reflects the range of its signifying capabilities within narrative. In the process, I hope to begin developing a language for "delineating the intricate dynamics of spoken forms" in

[3] *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* summarizes the position of many critics when it notes that "dialogue fulfills the important narrative functions of characterization and advancing the plot" (105).

fiction, the kind of terminology which Michael Macovski, for one, claims critical discourse is currently lacking (9).[4]

I. "A Badge of Identity"

Because my dissertation will challenge some of the central claims about the role of character voice in fiction, I want to begin by highlighting some of the ways in which dialogue has been theorized to date. Among the most influential accounts has been Norman Page's *Speech in the English Novel*, which examines the "nature of fictional speech, its role as one of the elements of the novel, and its relationship to the other elements and to the speech of real life" within 18th and 19th-century British fiction (1). His comments on dialogue's "role" in the novel are particularly suggestive. Though he enumerates several of its primary functions – "to further plot, to develop character, to describe settings or atmosphere, to present a moral argument or discussion" – he argues that "the most important…and certainly the most productive of interest and variety" is undoubtedly the first: "the presentation and development of character" (55). To this end, Page devotes much of his book to identifying and elaborating the ways in which authors have used speech to "develop" character, to distinguish them either as individuals (through the use of idiolect) or as members of a group (through the use of dialect).

In advancing this argument, Page in many ways distills what has been and remains the standard assumption about fictional speech: that it exists to express character, that it is (or should be) uniquely indexical or reflective of distinct speakers. Indeed, one finds this idea – that voice should serve as a "badge of identity" and a "means of

[4] Macovski claims there is currently no vocabulary for "considering what might be called a phenomenology of conversation as a literary figure or technique" (9).

enriching the reader's awareness of a given character's individuality" – repeated regularly and almost reflexively through critical commentary (Page 9). Raymond Chapman's *Forms of Speech in the Victorian Novel*, which along with Page's book, remains one of the most authoritative sources on the subject, [5] similarly foregrounds dialogue's characterizing dimension, "its power to reveal character" (Chapman 1). Confirming the critical consensus on the subject is the above-cited entry in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, whose editors can confidently assert that dialogue "fulfills the important narrative functions of characterization and advancing the plot" (105). Even in the broader field of literary theory, it would be hard to overestimate how much of the discussion about figural voice has been predicated upon the idea that direct – and even indirect – speech is necessarily linked to and revealing of an individual speaker. From Bakhtin's notion of the "character zone," which affords characters in the novel "areas of linguistic influence," to Hugh Kenner's formulation of the "Uncle Charles Principle," which posits that fictional subjects (including Stephen Dedalus's eponymous uncle) can be distinguished from the narrator by their diction and manner of speech, language is seen as a guaranteed marker of identity (Kershner 19).

The idea has had at least as much purchase in practice as in theory, and is reflected in everything from modes of punctuation – which evolved to more closely bind speech to speaker[6] – to composition. Writers' handbooks, as Peter Middleton has demonstrated, commonly advise that "speech always, always, always reflects a

[5] As the titles hint, Chapman's book both parallels Page's study and at times, strangely echoes it. Especially odd is Chapman's decision to begin his study in an identical manner to Page's: by using the same citation from *Alice in Wonderland* ("And what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?") to attest to dialogue's importance. Even odder is that he fails to acknowledge this overlap.

[6] For more on the historical development of quotation practices, see Jonathan Rée, Mark Lambert, and Marjorie Garber. See also Lennard Davis, especially the fifth chapter.

character's background and…inner reality," and suggest that "for revealing character, there is no substitute for the voices of your characters themselves" (qtd Middleton 34); the implied message, Middleton notes, is that "[t]o represent yourself, all you need to do is speak" (34). And the presumption of an insoluble bond between oneself and one's speech has been as central to reading novels, as to writing them. For both readers and critics, Stephen Ross notes in his studies of voice in Faulkner's novels, it has historically been imperative that "voice…be an index of personal identity" (Ross, *Voice* 302). Indeed, as Roland Barthes suggests, it has also been, at least at certain points in the genre's history, similarly crucial to the novel itself, or at least the "classic" text, which is "always haunted by the appropriation of speech" (*S/Z* 41). In short, so endemic has this idea of "characterization through speech" been to the novel – both its readers ands writers – that Page suggests it is "not altogether a matter of convention" (98, 17). (And in fact, the notion that speech expresses subjects is as rooted in linguistic and psychoanalytic, as literary theory: in Saussure's belief in a unique *parole* opposed to a systemic *langue*, or Lacan's identification of the voice as one of the *objets (a)*, which constitute "the 'stuff,' or rather than lining…of the very subject that one takes to be the subject of consciousness" (315).) Whether one treats speech's relationship to subjectivity as natural or 'conventional,' then, there is no disputing its centrality to conceiving voice in the novel.

The problem is that true as this assessment might be of dialogue in the 18th and 19th-century novel, the focus of both Page and Chapman's studies, it is noticeably *less* true – or less universally true – of the 20th-century one. Indeed, at the risk of invoking the often overworked opposition between realism and modernism, I will argue that

speech in modernist texts frequently serves less to individuate characters than to *de*-individuate them, to challenge the autonomy of character. On the one hand, there is the fact, already alluded to, that speech comes to be linked to more than one speaker; thus, for instance, the tendency for characters in James, or Hemingway, or Faulkner's novels to "share" or recycle what would seem to be distinct words or phrases. At the same time, there is also a discernible lessening of individuating characteristics within the novels' represented speech, even in – or especially in – those largely comprised of it. (Conrad's *Lord Jim,* for instance, is a case in point.) If the late 19th-century novel reflects a heightened fascination with regional dialects,[7] the 20th-century one is noticeably less invested in reproducing such linguistic variety. This is not to suggest that modernist narrative never registers locutionary difference: one can think of Faulkner reproducing the phonetic idiosyncrasies of his speakers (writing "hit," for "it") or Joyce, whose texts are famous for their renderings of highly idiomatic and regionally-inflected talk. Inversely, I do not want to overstate the degree of individuation that realist authors, despite their vaunted talents for characterization, actually achieved through speech alone. Apart from Dickens or Twain, perhaps, few writers actually ensure that every character speaks distinctly; in most cases, it is quotation marks and speech tags – rather than diction or phraseology – that do the work of differentiation. What is striking, however, is the marked absence in many modernist texts of the *pretense* of differentiation, of even *pretending* to personalize character speech. As concerned as many realist authors seem to have been with language differences, by contrast, the writers I will consider here are far

[7] According to scholars, popular interest in regional speech patterns and differences peaked in the late 19th century; for more on the "craze for dialect literature" in the U.S., see Gavin Jones, Chapter 1. See also Chapman's first chapter for more on the growth of dialect representation in Victorian-era British fiction.

more interested in what is presented variously as the promise – or the threat – of linguistic sameness.[8]

A more accurate account of dialogue in the novel, then, would reflect the substantially divergent role that speech plays in texts like these, which are not principally concerned with naturalistic and life-like reproduction of language. It seems particularly significant, in this light, that both Page and Chapman's studies stop just short of the 20th century, as if in recognition of the qualitative differences that can be discerned in dialogue of that period. Supporting the theory that dialogue did undergo a substantive shift during the modernist period are other commentators who have similarly recognized the early 20th-century as a transitional moment in the history of dialogue use. Thomas, for one, notes that it was during this time that "novelists…experiment with dialogue in a more overtly self-conscious way, making this a key period in the development of the technique" (CCN 81). Such 'experiments' took various forms, of course – from Hemingway's telegraphic, even *stichomythic* conversations, to Faulkner's breathlessly overlong monologues – but what they share, perhaps, is a demonstrated willingness to make demands upon readers.[9] Not only do such texts feature new modalities of speech, however; they also reflect new attitudes toward it. John Mepham, for instance, has intriguingly proposed that the activity of talking is accorded to new primacy in 20th-century Anglophone fiction, as a direct result of the emergence of psychoanalysis and the "invention of the therapeutic speech situation" (*Psychoanalysis* 105).

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[8] Though it lies outside the scope of my study, it would be interesting to consider this literary shift in relation to contemporary cultural and technological developments, such as the invention of Esperanto or the emergence of cinema, which was frequently touted as a kind of 'universal' language.

[9] See, for instance, Ryan Bishop, who argues that Joyce's *Dubliners* inaugurated conversations that, while perhaps more "natural," also placed increasing demands on readers, by featuring "interruptions, incomplete sentences, and utterances that fade into the silence whence they emerged, all qualities not frequently found in texts before Joyce" (Bishop 65).

Taking a longer view of the novel, Barthes goes so far as to make the treatment of quoted speech a fundamental criterion of a text's "classic" or "modern" status. In the latter, Barthes implies, voice may no longer serve a characterizing function, and in fact, may not be linked to specific characters at all:

> In modern texts, the voices are so treated that any reference is impossible: the discourse, or better, the language speaks: nothing more. By contrast, in the classic text, the majority of the utterances are assigned an origin, we can identify their parentage, who is speaking: either a consciousness (of a character, of the author) or a culture (the anonymous is still an origin, a voice: the voice we find, for example, in the gnomic code); however, it may happen that in the classic text, always haunted by the appropriation of speech, the voice gets lost, as though it had leaked out through a hole in the discourse. (41)

Framed in the terms of Barthes' analysis, then, one could say that Chapman and Page base their theories on the "classic" or *readerly* text. And in so doing, they may inadvertently restrict dialogue's function, by grounding their analyses in a set of assumptions about which they are both forthcoming and not entirely transparent – for instance, that "the novel is primarily concerned with recording individual experiences," and therefore, with "the creation of characters with recognizably individual elements" (Page 99). This disclosure is especially significant, given that, as Monika Fludernik reminds us, discerning "functions" is itself an interpretive act, since it "posit[s] a place for an observable item within a constructed system within which such an item then acquires a *function*" (343). In this light, the focus on the 'characterizing' role of dialogue may reveal a critical blind-spot, an attachment to an interpretive "system" in which all of a text's diverse narrative resources (dialogue included) are devoted to the creation of plausible individuals. Despite the admitted limitations of their studies, then, their failure to acknowledge how often, within the history of the novel, "other than mimetic ambitions

have also had a part to play," such accounts may deter readers from considering the other ways in which speech might operate in narrative fiction (Mepham, ND 411).[10]

To suggest that voices in the novel do not originate with a single speaker is of course to invoke Bakhtin's conception of novelistic discourse, which is never just the product of a single "speaking person," but rather, inescapably "interindividual" (SG 121). And my project is certainly indebted to his theories, particularly the concepts of dialogism and polyphony for which he is best known. But I will also be drawing on some of the lesser known (and at first glance, counterintuitive) aspects of his work. For instance, while Bakhtin clearly addresses the ways in which individual speakers inflect and influence the discourses they use, often overlooked is his equal-but-opposite emphasis on the ways in which they *don't*. Particularly in his later, unfinished essays in *Speech Genres*, Bakhtin underscores the fact that the *parole* is necessarily shaped by the constraints of the *langue*, in the guise of "speech genres," or larger discursive forms, that circumscribe and predetermine the utterances of any individual speaker. Despite his reputation among critics as a "genius of pluralism" and an advocate for the novel's "democratic rather than demagogic" priorities,[11] then, it is important to recall that for Bakhtin there was never such a thing as entirely free speech (Fogel 16, Davis 166):

> the single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a *completely free combination* of forms of language, as is supposed, for example, by Saussure (and by many other linguists after him), who juxtaposed the utterance, as a purely individual act, to the system of language that is purely social and mandatory for the individuum. (SG 81)

[10] Mepham borrows the phrase "mimetic ambitions" from M.B. Parkes; see *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Scolar Press, 1992), p. 92. But he notes that "poetic, aesthetic and symbolic ambitions have also been at work" in the novel (Mepham ND 411).

[11] Davis in particular seems at times to reduce Bakhtin to his most simplistic elements, noting that "Bakhtin has his own agenda, and his aim is to include the diversity of human life and human speech in the novel – since he sees the novel as inherently democratic and not demagogic" (166).

The problem, Bakhtin suggests, is that Saussure "ignores the fact that in addition to forms of language there are also *forms of combinations* of these forms, that is, he ignores speech genres" (SG 81). And the implication, one could say, following this line of argument, is that speech is not simply "interindividual," but also to some extent trans- or even *extra*-individual. Thus, while Dorothy Hale suggests that theorists have extrapolated from Bakhtin a sense that represented speech was indicative of "characterological autonomy," Bakhtin himself is also careful to underscore the constraints upon – the *non*-autonomy of – the individual speaker (Hale 93).[12]

Offering an even more explicit challenge to characterological autonomy in the novel is Sharon Cameron, whose recent study, *Impersonality*, examines modes of characterization in modernist narrative. Particularly exemplary, she notes, if not typically 'modernist,' is *Billy Budd*, in which

> character opens to what lies outside of it – an openness manifested by the fact that character does not seem to be an autonomous or independent entity (constituted by 'something personal – confined to itself') but characters, rather, share traits we might have thought exclusively the property of one or the other. (Cameron 81)

Substantiating this claim through a close reading of Melville's novella, in which she demonstrates that the peaceable Billy comes to swap "traits" with the violent Claggart, she goes on to conclude that "[i]t is not clear what…individuation would mean when a character is dispossessed of the attribute that most distinguishes him, which is converted to its antithesis" (181). Though Cameron is speaking of "attributes," and not idioms, the texts I'll be considering often witness something analogous to the kind of ontological "sharing" she describes: a tendency for characters not just to "share traits," but by a

[12] See Dorothy Hale, who suggests that Wayne Booth, for one, would take from Bakhtin the idea that "characterological identity is most authentically represented as self-expressive speech: the 'freedom [of characters] to say what they will, in their own way'" (93).

similar logic, to share *voices*. While individuation may remain an unshakeable aspiration of the genre, it is also, as we will see, a somewhat diminished one within the modernist novel. The texts I consider all, to varying extents, point the way toward conceiving of character as something other than fully differentiated, autonomous, and enclosed. In my third chapter, for instance, I demonstrate that Woolf's *The Waves* seems simultaneous to aspire to individuation and undermine it as a narrative procedure.[13] Cameron identifies a similar double gesture – of proferrment and denial – in *Billy Budd,* noting that the "characters who seem constructed to represent individuals and types based on distinction" are the same ones who "reveal such individual distinctions to be negated" (182).

What Cameron underscores, then, is not only that, as Bakhtin suggests, our individuality as speakers is always already compromised; but that the modernist novel would come increasingly to both reflect and reject this reality. It is a capacity that Marshall Berman, for one, has seen as particularly characteristic of modernism, noting that the works it produced all qualify as "at once expressions of and protests against the process of modernization" (235). While Cameron discerns this contradictory tendency primarily within the novel's presentation of character, my dissertation attempts to document it through the representation of speech. It is in this light, then, that we can begin to understand the preponderance of early 20th-century literary subjects – from Gabriel Conroy, to Shreve McCannon, to Lambert Strether – who become, by turns, possessed of another voice, and dispossessed of their own. Not only is such vocal "dispossession" a common phenomenon in modernist fiction; it also, as I discuss in my

[13] For more on this kind of contradictory movement, see H. Porter Abbott. "Character and Modernism: Reading Woolf Writing Woolf." *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 393-405.

second chapter, emerges as a central trope within it. And even, as a concern of the pre-modernist one. If I follow Cameron's example in claiming Melville as a forerunner of modernist innovation, we could easily see the narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" – unnerved, as he is, by the contamination of his own and his clerks' language by "this word 'prefer'" – as the primary and perhaps Ur-incarnation of dispossession anxiety, the fear of verbal non-distinction (20).

II. Real Talk

Given the failure of most current literary histories of dialogue to reflect the shifts that took place in the 20th-century novel, literary-linguistic and stylistic analyses – which often focus on modernist texts – might seem to be more relevant to my project. It is an approach that has been embraced by a number of scholars, who have drawn on the terms and techniques of discourse and conversation analysis, subfields of linguistics that emerged during the 1960s, and applied them to instances of fictional discourse.[14] Some of the most suggestive work in this mode has been done by Michael J. Toolan, who during the last twenty years has generated persuasive analyses of the dynamics of fictional conversation, as well as a compelling defense of "literary linguistics" or "linguistic criticism" as a methodology. (Indeed, he usefully reminds us – in response to Stanley Fish's attack on stylistics – that any method is subject to the charges of interpretive "fallibility" and bias (*Stylistics* 23).) Underlying his methodology – and that of literary linguistics, more generally – is the conviction that "the theories and principles developed

[14] For representative examples of this approach, see Bishop (1991), Toolan (1985, 1987, 1990), Burton (1980), and Herman (1994). See also Herman (2006), which applies an "interdisciplinary approach" to reading "scenes of talk" in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, so as to "develop a contextualist and functionalist approach to fictional dialogues" (2006).

by linguists and conversational analysts for the systematic study of discourse and natural conversation may be illuminatingly applied to the stylistic and structural study of a fictional conversation within a literary text" (1987 393). Buttressing this claim is the long and robust tradition of "extend[ing] to literary discourse ideas about language and communication" derived from linguistics, sociolinguistics, and speech act theory, embodied by a range of work, from Mary Louise Pratt and Deirdre Burton, to J. Hillis Miller (Herman *Gricean* 219). Though there has also been, of course, substantial criticism of such approach, and the embrace of a "communication model" of literary language, more generally.[15]

While the comparisons enabled by this sort of a linguistic approach may be suggestive, however, they may also be misleading. Most broadly problematic, perhaps, is the fact that such a method perpetuates a false parallelism between fictional and natural conversation, the sense that fictional dialogue remains at least vestigially linked to the real. Linguistic terminology may help critics to *describe* locutionary phenomena – indeed, I will occasionally draw on linguistic terms, such as Bronislaw Malinowski's "phatic communion" – but the risk is that they also *proscribe*, however implicitly, the speech of fictional subjects who are in no way subject to the constraints of, say, Malinowki's theories, or Grice's "cooperative principle," or to any other rule governing conversational efficiency. David Herman goes further in pointing out that one of the primary drawbacks of a linguistically-oriented approach is that it implies there is such a thing as *natural* conversation in the first place, one that is not inevitably the product of

[15] The most comprehensive critique comes from Ann Banfield; see *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982).

culturally and historically determined "canons for conversational coherence" (Herman *Gricean*, 219).[16]

To their credit, many practitioners of the linguistic approach have also been among its most astute critics. Indeed, Toolan himself identifies one of the more damning criticisms of this method: it might help you to name a known textual phenomenon, but not necessarily to identify new ones. Thus, he concedes, "literary linguistics may be a procedure for confirming interpretations for reconstructing meanings, rather than a method of constructing meanings" (25). Toolan's reading of the "dinner party scene" in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1986) provides a good case in point. On the one hand, it makes apt and interesting use of concepts like turn-taking and the conversational unit of the "move." But do we need such an analysis to tell us, as Thomas summarizes his case, that there is "growing tension among those present," or that " 'topic suppression' is an important structuring element in the talk"? (Thomas, MT 660).

But perhaps the most devastating critique of this method, as well as the one most salient to my project, comes from narratologists like Brian McHale, who have historically been suspicious of the approach (Thomas FD 5). It is of course true, McHale concedes, "conversation in novels may indeed reflect the 'rules' of spontaneous real-world conversation," as critics from Toolan to, more recently, Thomas and David Herman, have suggested (439). But as he points out,

> at a finer-grained level, speech in the novel appears utterly unlike real-world speech. Novelistic speech is always highly schematized and stylized, depending for its effects on very limited selections of speech-features, many of them derived *not from actual speakers' behavior but from literary conventions, linguistic stereotypes, and folk-linguistic attitudes*. (McHale 439, italics mine)

[16] Lennard Davis goes even further in suggesting novelistic conversation actually produced our practice of it, so that "first came the literary conversation and then came the striving for real conversation" (163).

McHale's insight exposes the essential misconception which has both motivated and in a sense, justified the application of linguistic techniques to the analysis of represented speech: that such representations are modeled on 'real-world' talk. Yet as McHale suggests, the template for novelistic conversation has always been more conventional than natural, more "literary" than "actual." Stirling Haig, in his work on dialogue in Flaubert's novels, offers a similar argument, noting that "[p]roperly speaking, there is no oral style in literature at all, but an imitation, an oral convention" and that "this imitation is not of 'reality'; most often it is that of a *written* tradition" (2). The implication, then, is that it is "written" or "literary" models, rather than "oral" ones, that we should be using to evaluate dialogue. Thus, for instance, in my third chapter, I am concerned less with measuring the highly implausible utterances of *The Waves* and *Absalom, Absalom!* against real speech – a non-starter, after all – than with assessing them in light of literary and historical norms of speech presentation: what Mepham has called, for the sake of convenience, the "Standard Form" as opposed to "Modernist Form" of dialogue (Mepham, ND 413-14).[17]

This line of argument has provocative implications, given how much of the commentary on fictional dialogue has been dogged – and in some cases, derailed – by discussions of its verisimilitude.[18] Indeed, it is surprising how many critics seem unable to analyze novelistic speech other than in terms of its degree of naturalism and true-to-

[17] In the case of "Standard" dialogue, Mepham notes, "quoted (direct) speech is clearly marked off from other textual matter by quotation marks," "each new speech begins on a new line and is indented as a new paragraph so that it is very easy for the eye to pick up the information wherever there is a change of speaker," and "the manner of speaking is conveyed by narrative comment and also by typographical means" (ND 412). The "Modern" form, by contrast, is not narratively or typographically distinguished in the same way and, more importantly, emphasizes the "internal stream of consciousness" instead of an "external view of the speech performance" (414). See p. 412-414 for further elaboration of this distinction.
[18] As the *Routledge Enclyclopedia* summarizes, "[c]ritical debates center on the extent to which novelistic dialogue is, or should be, mimetic of naturally occurring speech" (105). Chapman notes similarly the pervasiveness of the "debate about verisimilitude in fictional speech" within the critical literature (241).

life-ness. Even those intent on debunking the parallel often end up somehow ensnared in the discussion, once again attacking the straw man of real speech. Page, for instance, describes a transcription of actual conversation in order to demonstrate how far from real – how "tidied up" – fictionalized renderings of it actually are (7-8). What seems strange is the presumption that readers should require such demonstrations. Why is it that so many critics seem to feel compelled to revisit what each presents as a relatively settled and self-evident argument?

One possibility is that the preponderance of critical protestation is itself symptomatic of the persistence of readerly belief in the "realness" of dialogue, despite the evidence of the contrary. The problem, as Monika Fludernik has framed it, is that readers continue to invest direct speech with a "specious authenticity," a transparency it does not possess (29). This mistaken sense of its "authenticity," in turn, is the product of a larger "linguistic hallucination," in which readers willingly participate: a kind of sustained suspension of disbelief, which is only deactivated when the work fails to hold up its end of the hallucinatory bargain (Fludernik 1993, 453).[19] Both Fludernik and Meir Sternberg have forcefully discredited such beliefs, what Sternberg calls the "direct speech fallacy" or "reproductionist fallacy" (POV 84, *Proteus* 152). The problem with such 'fallacious' or 'specious' beliefs, however, is less philosophical than practical: specifically, it has to do with their interpretive consequences, and with their authorization of the idea that dialogue is the product of minimal (or no) authorial effort. As Thomas has cogently

[19] Peter Middleton catalogues some of the assumptions or "pre-thoretical knowledge" readers bring to the interpretation of novelistic speech, primary among which are that "the words are a reliably verbatim presentation of what is supposed to have been uttered; the mode of speech representation accurately abstracts what matters from the messier vicissitudes of a presumed actual speech; the back and forward exchange interlocks sufficiently to produce an interpretable and shifting logic of the interpersonal relations…and, at the most general level, this is what sociality is like" (32).

summarized, so long as "dialogue is approached as naturalistic" the "complexities of the interface between dialogue and the framing work of the narrator are overlooked" (MT 661).

Many scholars have testified to this tendency for the author or narrator's "work" to go unacknowledged or overlooked. Ross, for instance, echoes Thomas when he points out that dialogue remains the site of the novelist's most invisible interventions:

> The assumptions underlying the portrayal of speech are among the strongest, and thus the least questioned, that authors and readers share. So crucial is imagined speech to our sense of a fictional world that we seldom ask how it comes to be. Readers tend to treat quoted speech as a special kind of discourse that authors do not represent or imitate so much as lifted directly from 'life' into fiction. (Ross *Inexhaustible* 68)

Page and Haig report similarly dismissive "treatment" among readers, noting the generalized resistance to the idea that the author is "present" in quoted speech (Page 3).[20] The question is whether professional readers, too, may have inadvertently reinforced the sense of dialogue as verbatim transcription rather than wrought convention.

Brian Richardson, for one, does hold critics (and specifically, narratologists) to blame for promoting this illusion. At issue, he argues, is that "traditional narrative theory" has been "typically based on the mimesis of actual speech situations" (*Unnatural* 5). As a result, little work on poetics is derived from anything else – though that might be changing. Recently, he notes, "a small number of theorists working with postmodern texts are now beginning to describe a different, counter-poetics, one based on creative transformation rather than attempts at verisimilar representation; centered, that is, on *poeisis* instead of mimesis" (*Commentary* 701). Many of the works I consider here, while not necessarily

[20] They represent the consensus view of dialogue as a 'vacated' site within fiction – as the moment when "an author is theoretically absent" and in which the "author's presence appears (and it is again, of course, no more than an appearance) to be least obtrusive" (Haig vii, Page 3).

"antimimetic" in the manner Richardson intends, are nonetheless "unruly," and certainly do aim to render figural voices with an eye to reproducing "actual speech" (701).[21] Yet theorists and readers of narrative alike, Richardson implies, continue to treat such texts as if they do.

That dialogue has historically failed to excite critical interest or scrutiny, then, may be the result of a more categorical and deeply submerged assumption that it is not truly the product of authorial effort or design. Particularly symptomatic of this assumption is the fact that, as David Lodge points out – and as any anecdotal experience of reading criticism will confirm – it is rare to find scholars quoting dialogue within their analyses. "When…we take what is deemed to be a representative passage from a novel," he observes, "we invariably choose a passage of narrative that is either authorial or focalized through a character with whom the implied author is in sympathy" (76).[22] (On a personal note, I can confirm how strange it was, while preparing a manuscript for publication, to see so many excerpts of character speech enclosed within "double quotations"; it demonstrates how rarely quoted speech gets re-quoted within academic prose.)

The problem, to return to Richardson's terms, is that fictional conversation has come to be seen as a work of mimesis rather than *poesis* – as something imitated, but not *made*. It seems particularly telling in this light, then, that much of thinking on represented speech derives from the "handbook notions of natural, spontaneous conversation" to which Middleton referred, since it reveals a tendency to think of such representations as a

[21] Though Richardson is writing of narrating more than 'speaking' voices, I would endorse his call for critics to "move away from rigid typologies and Chinese box-type models of embodied speakers and toward an alternate figuration that stresses the permeability, instability, and playful mobility of the voices in nonmimetic fictions" *(Unnatural* xii).
[22] I am indebted to Coleman's article for directing me toward this point (52).

question of practice, not theory; if you do it right, there should be no need to comment on *how* it is done (Fogel 260n). One of my primary objectives in this dissertation, then, is to draw renewed attention to dialogue's non-spontaneity, its highly made and *poetic* status. And in the process, to disrupt the illusion of authorial "absence" that may have licensed its previous disregard. As Patrick O'Donnell, for instance, has usefully done: "if (following Bakhtin) novels orchestrate voices, then authors must face, as a narratological problem, how that which is heard but not seen (voice) will be framed, staged, and produced in narrative discourse – how it will be written down" (6). Given the amount of work on free indirect discourse, one could suggest that critical interest in voice has been directly related to its perceived degree of mediation – the extent to which it seems "framed, staged, and produced," and thus visibly reflects authorial or narrative intervention. By contrast, ostensibly direct and 'unmediated' discourse might appear too transparent to merit further analysis.

The notion that dialogue's mediated-ness should have to be underscored is ironic, given that in the classical tradition, it was direct rather than indirect speech that originally incited the most suspicion, as Fludernik points out. If the *Republic*, for instance, favors diegetic over mimetic modes of presentation, and "privileges the narrator's rendering of speech events," his evaluation has since undergone a complete reversal: now, it is mimesis that occupies the "privileged position," and diegesis that is viewed as "intrinsically unreliable," thanks to its "equation…with mediation *tout court*" (Fludernik 30, 28). Fludernik attributes this transvaluation to "misreadings" of Plato's diegesis/mimesis distinction (30). While quoted speech, for Plato, was "characterized by a duality of discourse" – the author and the character's – contemporary readers are more

likely to describe indirect (or free indirect) discourse in that way, thanks in part to the more recently theorized distinction between narrator and author, one that Plato, as Fludernik reminds us, did not recognize. It is now mimetic speech that we (choose to) experience as enunciated "in a single voice," and diegetic speech that we treat as 'doubled' (Fludernik 30). In this sense, could say that for Plato, dialogue was *too* mediated; for us, not enough.

Paradoxically, then, it may be the reflexive *privileging* of represented speech – readers' perception of its singular and uncomplicated status – that may have precipitated its critical neglect. And this perception, in turn, might be shaped by an even more unquestioned set of culturally and historically contingent assumptions about the nature and goal of this 'representation.' While contemporary critics have tended to emphasize authors' ability to "directly" reproduce or imitate the words of another, Fludernik again reminds us how recent an innovation that is, and that for Plato, the goal was less the reproduction of particular words, than the words' spoken or oral quality. "If direct discourse imitates anything," she explains of Plato's position, "it is the (raw) manner of expression which one expects from real speech – there is certainly no implication of an imitation of *actual* words or sentences" (30). It was the ability to convey the 'rawness' or immediacy of spoken language – rather than the language itself – that was the aim of mimesis: the goal, to import into a written text something closer to what Barthes calls the "grain of the voice," or Mladen Dolar, the "material element recalcitrant to meaning" (Dolar 15). This legacy is visible, she argues, in the divergent connotations that have accrued to direct discourse, on the one hand – which has "com[e] to signify (or imply) empathy, specificity, realism, stylistic distinctness or reproductiveness" – and indirect

discourse, which by contrast "tends to be read as distant, non-specific, non-realistic, stylized, and paraphrased" (31). In other words, novel readers may unconsciously preserve the kind of phonocentric bias that for Derrida has been endemic to Western culture, wherein "the spoken dialogue pretends to be the authentic, originating essence of self" and "the narrative writing…signals itself as secondary to such force, while all the time making it possible" (Middleton 47). In failing to question the 'authenticity' of a novel's "spoken dialogue" of the novel, while simultaneously approaching its "narrative writing" with suspicion, critics may inadvertently be reproducing what, in Derrida's conception, has been a longstanding hierarchy.

In this sense, the greatest disincentive to theoretical work on character voice might be not the "widespread bias" against it, but rather, the implicit bias *in its favor* (Coleman 52). Indeed, it is possible to speculate that one of the reasons there does not yet exist in literary studies the kind of account Sarah Kozloff has compiled for film studies[23] – a generic taxonomy of literary dialogue types – is not only because of the daunting scale of such a project, but because in spite of the sophisticated theoretical inquiries into nearly all aspects of narrative, there remains a fundamental presumption that dialogue is not truly deserving of scrutiny. One of my primary ambitions in undertaking this project, then, is to help restore a sense of dialogue's *madeness*, the sense that as Bakhtin will emphasize, voices in the novel are always "artistically organized" (DI 262). It is not that voices in modernist texts are any more "made" or "organized" but rather, as I hope to demonstrate, that they disclose its status more conspicuously. Such conversational "madeness" might manifest in various ways: in the verbal superfluities of *Absalom,*

[23] See Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (U of California P, 2000).

Absalom!, the pronounced echolalia of *The Ambassadors,* the extreme communicative compression of *The Sun Also Rises*. Or, perhaps, in the kind of "rounding or even flattening procedure" that Flaubert employs in crafting his characters' utterances: in "eschew[ing] the phonetic representation of speech idiosyncrasies," as Haig shows that he does, he is in many ways a predecessor to modernist dialogue writing (Haig 172).

Such a willingness to disclose the wrought-ness of fictive speech could be seen as consonant with a far larger tendency among modernist writers to declare their distance from 'real' language. Peter Nicholls, for instance, dates this kind of decreased concern with referential transparency to Baudelaire, and notes that "after 1848, writers began to adopt a kind of self-imposed exile as a necessary condition of creativity and with that gesture went a new conception of poetic language as something quite distinct from a shared language of communication" (13). And it would not be too much to say that the language and structure of dialogue, too, becomes more visibly and self-consciously poetic. If, as André Bleikasten has argued, modernist fiction is characterized by "neither naïve realism nor systematic antirealism, but the ever renewed tension between *mimesis* (foregrounding of the referent) and *poesis* (foregrounding of the medium and the writing process)," then one could argue that modernist writers specifically "renewed [that] tension" in the writing of conversation, and perhaps even shifted the balance, in favor of creating more conspicuously *poetic* voices (*Perspective* 84).

III. "Ideas of Dialogue"

Some of the strongest work to date on dialogue's poetic dimensions can be found not in systematic overviews of the subject, but in single-author studies. Haig, along with

Mark Lambert and Aaron Fogel, have produced fascinating accounts of the treatment and organization of character voice in the work of Flaubert, Dickens, and Conrad, respectively, while at the same time putting forward extremely useful formulations about fictional dialogue, more generally, to which I regularly turned in my research. Lambert, for one, elaborates a kind of discursive hierarchy in Victorian fiction, whereby the directness with which the author renders a fictional subject's speech becomes an important metric of his or her characterological importance. (Thus, for instance, quoting characters' words, instead of paraphrasing them, confers on them a special prestige). Underlying his argument is the extremely suggestive claim that an author's choice of discourse (direct or indirect) should be seen not just as a "stylistic choice," but an ideological one, "a choice between two attitudes toward the integrity of speech" (23). Fogel takes a similarly 'metrical' approach to dialogue in his analyses of Conrad's work, but instead of looking just at the *quality* of a character's speech, he looks at the *quantity* of it as well. The result is what he calls an "abstract proportional model" of discourse, one that considers the "relative amount spoken" by Conrad's characters (6). Perhaps even more central to my methodology is Fogel's claim that all novels contain and express "ideas of dialogue," which are "founded on what generally happens when people meet and talk" (12). These "ideas," in turn, emerge or are "made available to the reader through formal repetition" – which can range from the "subtle" to the "deliberately highly outlined and visible" (13).

Though Fogel confines his analyses to Conrad's fiction, this notion – that novels have "recognizable ideas of dialogue," and that these 'ideas' may reveal or express other ideational content within the text, not elsewhere expressed – may be more broadly

relevant to the study of dialogue, and the study of modernist dialogue in particular, which, as I will argue, frequently make these "ideas" more "highly outlined" and "visible" (13).[24] Each of my chapters, then, will explore the "ideas" of dialogue that emerge in and across of modernist fiction. I will also build, more specifically, on Fogel's suggestion that these 'ideas' find expression in dialogic form, as well as (or more than) in content (14).[25] It is a proposal that resonates with the one Stephen Ross puts forward, though less explicitly, in his studies of Faulkner's use of voice. Like Conrad, in whose work, Fogel suggests, "the reader is successfully let in on dialogue as form, even as ritual," Faulkner in Ross's view similarly foregrounds certain iterative dialogic structures[26] (14). "Just as an author's style grows in part out of differentiation within his or her prose," he argues, "so an author will usually manifest habitual ways of verbally structuring and arranging speech acts in dialogue" (Ross, *Inexhaustible* 78). As an example, he cites Faulkner's frequent "transitions from one speaker's utterances to another's through some affirmative signal of comprehension": "Words like 'yes,' 'all right,' 'I see," often begin one character's answer to another's talk" (*Inexhaustible* 79). While Ross identifies this pattern of "affirmative transitions," he seems more hesitant to interpret it (79). Fogel, by contrast, puts forward a strong reading of one of Conrad's more habitual representational tendencies: his extremely disproportionate distribution of

[24] Intriguingly, Fogel hints at the broader applications of his theory – alluding to major 19th-century novelists like Austen, Balzac, Tolstoy, Stevenson, James, and Dostoevsky, who all "have recognizable ideas of dialogue" – but not pursue these possibilities further (12).
[25] Particularly interesting is Fogel's translation of the novels' dialogic structure into visual form: he refers, in particular, to the "striping" between "direct speech and narrative prose" that is visible on the page (10). See also Mepham (1998), who similarly explores the "graphic symbolism" of modernist dialogue (424).
[26] While Fogel argues of Conrad that "[n]o other novelist makes the abstract proportional model (the relative amount spoken) a figure on the page to be *seen* so consistently, so forcibly, or with such cumulative effect, as Conrad does in his 'political' works" (6), I would suggest that *Absalom, Absalom!,* among other of Faulkner's works, may come close.

speech, which, he posits, "ask[s] the reader to think about dialogue as formal and proportional rather than simply excessive" (19).

In so doing, Fogel models the kind of analytical approach that I will be taking, one that focuses not just on discrete "scenes" or utterances, but attempts to consider the larger system of utterances that emerges in a given text. It is a method that in some ways seems to anticipate Franco Moretti's more recent practice of "network analysis," as reflected in his work at the Stanford Literary Lab, and epitomized in a 2011 article mapping conversational interactions within *Hamlet*.[27] Though the notion that how, and how often, characters speak could be important indices for literary critics is not an entirely new one (indeed, it is an underlying assumption of much American feminist criticism, in which silence often – and sometimes problematically[28] – is treated as a textual indicator of oppression) the scale of such analyses in this direction has clearly expanded. A particularly impressive illustration of the benefits of this kind of macro-approach might be Alex Woloch's *The One vs. The Many*, which elaborates a theory of character relations and "character space" within the realist novel. His emphasis on the "asymmetric structure of characterization" – in which a "major" character is arrayed against the "minor" ones – is in many ways analogous to Fogel's insistence on the "asymmetric" or "disproportionate" arrangement of utterances in Conrad's novels. If Woloch's focus is on narrative rather than discursive asymmetry, he also hints at some overlap between the two, noting that a character's "major-ness" will often be expressed in

[27] See "Network Theory, Plot Analysis," *Literary Lab Pamphlet 2* (2011) 1-31. As Moretti notes in a recent interview, one of the experiment's more interesting findings was "how central Horatio was to the play," a discovery which in turn "disproves our thinking about characters in binary terms: i.e., they're either a protagonist or a minor character…[n]ow there seem to be more positions along this continuum" (*Hamlet*).
[28] See Elizabeth Alsop, "Refusal to Tell: Withholding Heroines in Hawthorne, Wharton, and Coetzee," *College Literature* 39.3 (Summer 2012). 184-105.

their mode of speaking. Thus Austen's Emma, for instance, "has a wider range of discourse than anyone else in the novel. She can out-talk, over-talk, everyone…"; minor-ness, by contrast, may "catalyze…inadequate speech" (Woloch 87, 26). Like Fogel and Moretti, then, Woloch embodies what is in many ways a central presupposition of this project: that dialogue can convey information not just about distinct characters, but about their interrelation, and the priorities structuring the novels that contains them.

Where I diverge from Woloch and even Fogel, however, is in their reliance on a rhetoric of competition, violence, and *force* to make sense of character – and by extension, speaker – relations within the novel. Granted, Woloch clearly confines his study to the 19th-century novel, and Fogel, to the work of one novelist. Still, their investment in discerning asymmetry, disproportion, and disequilibrium can seem monolithic, and possibly, excluding of other equally valid interpretive possibilities. To say that dialogue enacts competition or coercion in Conrad's work, as Fogel does, is certainly a compelling "idea" of dialogue. But it is just one idea. My third and fourth chapters, in particular, challenge the relevance of a competitive paradigm to 20th-century texts (and non-Anglophone ones) which may choose to emphasize, instead, more collaborative, consensual, and deliberately symmetrical models of narrative and discursive arrangement. As Molly Hite writes of *The Waves*, one of the primary ways in which it challenges "familiar habits of reading" is by refusing to concede the minor-ness of any character, and insisting instead on the "equal status" of all six (xxxix). Particularly problematic, for my purposes, is Woloch's suggestion that Bakhtin originated this kind of fiercely individualist understanding of the novel, wherein "the speaking person and his discourse" must "[strive] for social significance…as one distinctive language in a

heteroglot world" (336). However distinctive the "speaking person and his discourse," it does not necessarily follow, I would argue, he be seen in competition. What happens, for instance, when his language is *not* distinctive? Or if we were to instead view the "speaking person" in collaboration with others – as David Kurnick, for instance, suggests we do when reading James's late fiction?

The possibility is one that may be finding increased reinforcement among scholars of modernism, who have long had to contend with commonplace assumptions about modernist solipsism and 'self'-involvement. As critics as various as Nicholls, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and Seth Moglen have suggested, modernist fiction may be far more committed to envisioning collectivity – and less invested in subjectivity – than has traditionally been alleged.[29] As Nicholls confirms, it is "worth emphasizing the [modernist] attachment to public values since modernism has so often been defined in terms of a turn to subjectivity" (274). While it may be true as Woloch suggests, that "social competition" is the issue with the greatest thematic traction in the 19th-century novel, it is hardly as relevant to the 20th-century one, which seems to demand a new and different lens through which to interpret character and speaker relations. Therefore, instead of perceiving dialogue as "another illustration or figuration of competition between characters (within discourse) as a form of battle or violent conflict" – though *characters* may certainly perceive it that way, as I discuss in my second chapter – it seems more productive to read modernist novels with an eye to discerning the many other themes or ideas that dialogue might serve to "illustrate" or "figure" (Woloch *Minor* 319).

[29] During a discussion with Cuddy-Keane at the 2012 Narrative conference, she mentioned that in a forthcoming project on modernist keywords, the editors would be using the term "common mind" to refer to the constellation of concerns – with community, consensus, etc.– that surface within modernist prose.

An underlying goal of this dissertation, then, is to counter the prevailing view of modernism as singularly concerned with the individual, at the expense of the group, community, or collectivity.[30] Or, put another way, to suggest that the novel post-Flaubert has not simply been set on a progressively inward trajectory. It seems particularly significant, in this light, that the studies linking the novel's rise to the individual's – such as Ian Watt's, or more recently, Nancy Armstrong's – end just around 1900.[31] It is certainly true, as Bleikasten has argued, that modernist writers "bear witness to the increasing acceleration and complexification of the 'inward turn' taken by the novel since the last nineteenth century" and that "they all created sharply interiorized fictional spaces, in which the reader was made to feel individual psyches at work" (*Perspective* 81). But it is also true, if less widely recognized, that they also created compelling *externalized* spaces, often through the orchestration of character speech. Herman suggests as much, when he notes of *To the Lighthouse* that "Woolf's representations of talk require a rethinking of modernist narrative construed as a foregrounding of inner experience" (*Scenes of Talk* 75-76). In fact, I would argue that modernist narrative, not only in its depiction of speech, but its attention to speaking as an activity, reveals it to be at least as concerned with public and social as with "inner" and private experience.

[30] Particularly representative of this position is Georg Lukács, who claims in *Theory of the Novel* that the "modern novel" entails the "immoderate elevation of the subject" (117). More recently, Armstrong similarly takes for granted modernism's obsession with the subject, arguing that its texts reflect the "aesthetic imperative" to "not only tell the story of the group as that of the individual," but "also tell the story of the group from the perspective of that individual" (110). Linda Wagner-Martin confirms this reading by asserting that in contrast to collectively-minded fiction of the 1930s, "most modernist fiction did not emphasize community," and instead focused on "a character's individual psyche" (96, 106).

[31] Both Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* and Armstrong's *How Novels Think* present the novel's "rise" as coeveal with the individual's. As Armstrong argues, "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" (Armstrong 3). For a countervailing account, see J. Hillis Miller, who suggests that novel as "the form of literature developed to explore the various forms intersubjective relations may take" (22).

It is with all this in mind, then, that this dissertation will call for – and seek to model – a way of reading modernist dialogue less "for" subjectivity, than beyond it. At first glance, such a project might seem counterintuitive, given that we are trained as readers to look for individuating differences, rather than correspondences and synchronies. Indeed, to suggest that fictional speech might be read more synchronously and systematically – that is, read as a system, or what Moretti calls a "network"– might be as surprising as to suggest that it could serve as a conveyor of inter- or extra-subjective ideas or affects, of something "more than" character. Yet I'd suggest that such a reading, one that "studies connections" within a novel's "large group" of utterances, is both possible and potentially productive (Moretti, *Network Theory* 2). The key, I suggest, is a willingness to shift one's interpretive sights: to attend to inter- and extra-subjective configurations, as well as single subjects; to treat direct discourse as seriously as discourse in its indirect or free indirect forms; and to consider what the general shape of discourse in the novel might disclose – what ideas or ideals it might enact – that specific instances alone cannot.

IV. Terminology and Chapter Overview

A few final notes about terminology and organization: Although my project is organized around modernist fiction, I embrace the view that modernism is more a mode than a moment – or, to paraphrase Gavin Jones's definition of realism, "an ideological practice that goes on in a text, not a generic category that contains the text in its entirety" (10). In other words, my choice of primary texts has been guided by the sense that modernism is not just a historically delimited movement, but a constellation of concerns

and aesthetic techniques that can manifest in different genres and traditions. Among the scholarly benefits of such an approach are that it allows me to identify "modernist" dimensions within – and continuities among – works produced in national traditions (like Italy) or media (like film) that have not historically valorized the term.[32] I should also note that while current debates revolve around the metaphorical resonance of the word "dialogue,"[33] I use the term – like the similarly metaphorical "voice" – to designate a concrete textual phenomenon: what Bakhtin calls the "represented objectified discourse" or the "*direct speech of characters*," and Fludernik refers to as "the internal communication *between* characters within the story" (PDP 186, Fludernik 63).

My dissertation consists of four chapters, each of which is organized around a pair of texts that exemplify a particular dialogic pattern, and by extension, a particular "idea" of dialogue. In my first chapter, I examine the trend toward consensual speaking that emerges in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises,* and suggest that it is used to express a fantasy of reciprocity widely shared by the novels' speakers, and telegraphed through their response-privileging discourse. In my second, I analyze the countervailing concern with preserving individuation that manifests in the monologic speech habits of two characters, Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's "The Dead," and Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury.* My third chapter considers the more radical movement toward undifferentiated speech in Faulkner's

[32] See Paolo Valesio, who notes that "the category of 'modernism' has never really been at home" in Italy; yet it's hard to deny its importance to writers like Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese, who helped translate and disseminate its products (ix). And if the category's foothold in film studies has been similarly uncertain, recent studies such as Andras Kovács's *Screening Modernism* testifies to the term's relevance.
[33] Jon Synder provides a useful overview of dialogue's increasingly positive valence in critical discourse, noting that the word has become "a catchword across a broad spectrum of disciplines, from anthropology to hermeneutics to literary theory to psychoanalysis," and "a metaphor and a model of intersubjective relations or of language itself" (viii). For more on the idealization of dialogue and rebuttals to it, see Middelton and Thomas's *Fictional Dialogue* p. 37.

Absalom, Absalom! and Woolf's *The Waves*, novels which – despite their apparent investment in disambiguating voices – emphasize the high degree of similarity among them. My fourth chapter places my findings in a comparative context, and argues that post-war Italian novels – such as Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* and Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falò* –provide new modes of representing voice in fiction, based around the idea of "chorality" (*coralità*) and collaboration, rather than competition. Extending my analysis to the field of film studies, I also locate analogous examples of this phenomenon in Italian cinema of the post-war period, particularly in Vittorio de Sica's *Sciuscià* (1946) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962), which make use of a "choral" or collaborative gaze.

Of course, Fogel is right to note that "the critical method used…largely predetermines the meanings found in any work" (39). And my method, moreover, is far from cohesive. But by using what I believe to be a somewhat new method or blend of methods – that is, by making use of analyses both close and "distant", qualitative and quantitative – I hope to at the very least arrive at some new meanings, and to suggest some new ways of understanding a chronically overlooked aspect of literary narrative.

Chapter 1
The Consensual Voice: Fantasies of Reciprocity in James and Hemingway

It is no secret that characters in Henry James's late fiction have a habit of repeating each another. One could open to almost any page of *The Ambassadors*, or *The Wings of the Dove*, or *The Golden Bowl* and find examples of speakers' tendency to "echo and qualify" each other's words (Yeazell 37):

> "To lie 'for' her?"
> "To lie *to* her, up and down, and in and out…" (GB 414)
>
> "He has done everything."
> "Oh – everything! Everything's nothing" (WD 99)
>
> "Yet at the same time I see it as bearing you up."
> "Oh it does bear me up!" Strether laughed.
> "Well then as yours bears me nothing more's needed." (AM 47)

At times, this reiterative habit is taken to almost absurd extremes ("Kept her, on that sweet construction, to be his mistress?" "Kept her, on that sweet construction, to be his mistress") (GB 419). James, as if acknowledging this rhetorical tic, will even on occasion use "echo" to describe conversational activity ("he could only after a moment re-echo Miss Barrace") (AM 326).

Yet despite the ubiquity of this sort of intersubjective speaking in the later novels, relatively little has been written about its motive or function within James's fictional universe.[1] One exception has been Ruth Yeazell, who along with Leo Bersani, has attended to many of the more idiosyncratic elements of Jamesian conversation. In "Talking in James," she addresses the collaborative, highly concatenated nature of

[1] Although Sharon Cameron and George Butte, among others, have written extensively about the intersubjective orientation of consciousness in James – the prevalence of "supposedly separate characters with supposedly separate consciousnesses, which then dominate each other" – their focus has been primarily on interpenetrating thought, rather than speech (Cameron, *Thinking* 29).

speaking in the late novels, noting that Strether's exchanges with Maria Gostrey give one the impression that "they were not just separate persons, but part of a single self" (67). It is an insight that lies behind David Kurnick's more recent study of the "performative universalism" in James's fiction: the fact (which he agrees has "largely escaped critical commentary") that James's "quite different characters" all speak more or less alike (215). (And, one might add, more or less *un*like any other speakers, real or fictional.) Yet despite his suggestive analysis of the "striking verbal similarities that hold across the whole cast of Jamesian characters," his conclusion – that such "similarities" ultimately signify the characters' "shared purposiveness" and awareness of themselves *as* characters, engaged in creating a "larger fictional product" – is not entirely convincing. While I agree that the "stylistic indistinction" of the late novels points towards the intriguing possibility of style's "collectivism," Kurnick's next step – to extrapolate a "collectivity" among the *characters* – seems too utopian,[2] and the purposes of characters within the texts more varied than this metafictional reading allows (216). The questions raised by the consensual speaking in James's late fiction therefore persist. Why do his characters talk this way? What, to paraphrase the title of Kurnick's essay, does Jamesian conversation *want*?

Further complicating this question is the fact that James was not alone among early 20th Century writers in dramatizing this sort of homogeneity among his novels' speakers. Ernest Hemingway, whose style is inimical to James's in so many respects,[3] is

[2] As do James Carlos Rowe's conclusions – based on his readings of James's essays on American speech – that he "celebrates the social and political powers of language," and "treats verbal communication as the chief basis for forming what a proper critical theorist would term 'class consciousness'" (31).
[3] A contrast epitomized by the clash between Hemingway's ambition to "write books without any extra words" and James's deprecation of "American simplicity": "I glory in the piling up of complications of every sort" (SL 215, Edel 687).

famous for his highly recursive diction – and his characters' is often no less so. So marked is the phenomenon in his early novel, *The Sun Also Rises,* that the protagonist Jake Barnes comments upon it: "the English spoken language – the upper classes, anyway – must have fewer words than the Eskimo…One phrase to mean everything" (153). In fact, nearly all of the novel's speakers, British or not, talk a similarly synchronous language: "'So that's the way it was in Vienna,'" Brett says, and Bill responds, "'It was like everything in Vienna'" (81). In contrast to James's critics, however, Hemingway's have not hesitated to assign a motive to this stylistic technique. Like Gertrude Stein, whose *Making of Americans* modeled her belief that "everybody sa[ys] the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again," Hemingway is often seen to be pursuing a primarily mimetic program (Stein 64). Typical of this position is Robert Lamb, who makes the case that the repetition in Hemingway's conversation – not only in *The Sun Also Rises*, but throughout his work – "invests it with verisimilitude" (467).

Yet Hemingway's repetitions are perhaps no better explained as a reality effect than James's are understood as a metafictional one. Rather than read the texts' dialogue symptomatically – as the formal byproduct of some larger aesthetic or epistemological program – it might be more productive to read it rhetorically: that is, as a rhetorical structure in its own right, one capable of conveying ideas or affects that exceed the boundaries of any single character. In proposing such a reading, I do not mean to suggest that the conversations' consensual arrangement be seen solely as the product of authorial intent; following James Phelan, I ascribe to a model of rhetorical narrative theory that involves less "an author…extending a multidimensional…invitation to the reader," than a

"synergy occurring between authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response" (Phelan xi-xii). But I *am* suggesting that James and Hemingway, here, might be using figural speech differently than it had conventionally been used in fiction, less to develop character or plot, than as an independent channel of communication and representation.

More specifically, I would suggest that dialogue in these texts may dramatize – through its highly symmetrical and response-privileging structure – a longing for the kinds of reciprocity and consensus widely portrayed within the world of the novels to be absent. That both James and Hemingway might themselves have perceived such an absence emerges from even a casual survey of their personal writings, which register a strikingly similar sense of isolation. Hemingway's letters, for instance, refer frequently and glibly to loneliness – to being " lonely as the deuce" or "lonesome as hell" – while James, for his part, admitted that the "deepest thing" about him was "*the essential loneliness of [his] life*" (SL 53, 205; qtd Edel 511). And their novels express more manifest misgivings about the feasibility of human connection. As Robert Pippin points out, James tends to

> situat[e] his characters in a social world where various uncertainties in any common form of life, and the profound and unstable dependencies now characteristic of modern societies, have made much more difficult…basic elements of mutual understanding. (147)

One of James's characters, Van, comes to much the same conclusion in *The Awkward Age,* when he casually dismisses "the existence of friendship in big societies" (AA 13). And the idea finds further and more general confirmation in cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks's pessimistic assessment, fifteen years later, of friendship's viability in the "vast Sargasso sea" of modern America (149).

Recently, modernist scholars have begun to recognize how regularly 20th Century texts registered this concern with an absent or threatened consensus. Seth Moglen, for one, has argued that American modernist fiction frequently reflects "a crisis in the capacity for social solidarity at the public level, and for emotional and sexual intimacy at the private level" (5). And Jessica Berman, borrowing from Raymond Williams and Walter Benjamin, has suggested that the defining event of the early part of the century was precisely a dissolution of "knowable communities" or "communit[ies] of listeners,"[4] a shift not lost on its novels, in which often "the only community available seems to be the more ad-hoc 'community of speech'" (2). Given the dissipation of such "knowable" social groups, it is perhaps not surprising that so many modernist texts contain what Peter Nicholls calls "images of failed sociality" (23). What I would suggest is that certain authors tried, through literary discourse, to imagine an alternative.

Of all James's fiction, I would argue, it is *The Ambassadors* that features this theme of "failed sociality" – and attempts to compensate for it – most prominently. Like *The Sun Also Rises*, its reluctant heir,[5] *The Ambassadors* is centrally concerned with the search for new and more authentic communities. And in both novels, this search is carried out primarily through speech, which is treated less as the psychological expression of a single subject than as a means by which to arrive at a state of what might alternately be called consensus, mutuality, or reciprocity. In this sense, both James's and Hemingway's texts could be said to put forward an inter- or even extra-subjective conception of voice, which, as Sharon Cameron has suggested of character in certain

[4] For Berman, James is one of the writers to "engage directly with early twentieth-century historical and political transformations of community," and whose novels "return again and again to issues of commonality, shared voice, and exchange of community" (3).
[5] For more on the novel's indebtedness to *The Ambassadors*, see Hays and Houston.

modernist fictions, "does not seem to be an autonomous or independent entity" (*Impersonality* 181). And thus, moreover, the pervasive vocal sharing in these texts could be seen as a means of expressing desire for, or even attempting to bring about, a more profound kind of ontological sharing.

I. The Question of James's Speech

Although James had long been conducting "fictional exploration[s] of vocal culture,"[6] it was not until 1905 that he offered a more sustained commentary on the subject, in a talk delivered to the graduating class at Bryn Mawr (Jones 97). Entitled "The Question of Our Speech," the lecture (later published as an essay) makes an impassioned if at times pedantic plea for the restoration of linguistic standards, which James, recently returned to the U.S. after a twenty-year hiatus, found sadly deteriorated.[7] More specifically, he exhorts students to create a "virtual consensus of the educated…in regard to the *speech*…they profess to make use of," without which the "imparting of an educative process" and the "imparting of a coherent culture" will "never get under way" (QS 6). To aid in the development of this educated "consensus" James proposed a program of verbal emulation and imitation: "Imitating, yes; I commend to you…the imitation of formed and finished utterance wherever, among all the discords and deficiencies, that music steals upon your ear" (QS 50).

Given the roughly coeval production of this essay and his late novels, it is logical to assume that this work of "verbal criticism" might shed light on readings of *The*

[6] James himself "trace[d] his ideas of language back to the early 1880s, just prior to his creation of *The Bostonians*" (Jones 83).
[7] James was especially horrified by the effects of immigration on the English language; see Leon Edel for a description of his trip to New York in 1904, during which he felt himself to be in the "torture rooms of the living idiom'" (qtd Edel 613).

Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and *The Golden Bowl*.[8] Indeed, one can easily discern a correspondence between the "conscious, imitative speech" James espouses in his essay and the kind of talk one finds in this fiction. So readily and habitually do characters take up or "imitate" the words of their interlocutors, in fact, that it almost seems as if they are being made to model the verbal habits James proscribes in his essay as the antidote to the many "discords and deficiencies" of fin-de-siècle American English (QS 50). Of course, to suggest that the novels be read in this way – as mere illustrations of his theories – would be to do them a great disservice: James's fiction is hardly that didactic. Yet what does, as James would say, *beautifully* survive in the contemporaneous novels, more than any of his specific recommendations, is the assumption that underlies them: the belief that speech is instrumental to creating and sustaining communities.[9] Or that, as James puts it, "the question of our speech" is always already a "question of our relations with each other" (QS 10).

In this sense, the essay makes explicit a theme implicit in much of James's later work, and particularly in *The Ambassadors*, whose protagonist, Lambert Strether, is almost fanatical about achieving and sustaining verbal consensus. Considered in this light, Strether may emerge not only as a biographical surrogate for James,[10] but also as something of an ideological avatar, a representative or "ambassador" for his author's stated aspirations for speech – even if, in the novel, such aspirations emerge in

[8] As Gavin Jones reminds us, "we should not forget that James's late style coincided with his most outspoken remarks on 'the question of our speech,' which place linguistic speculation firmly in a social and cultural context" (97).
[9] Though Michael Levenson notes similarly that language in the late novels is "both the source of communal solidarity and the occasion for what remains of the subject's freedom," he ultimately see it in the service of individualism – a point on which we diverge (58).
[10] A commonplace of James's criticism. As Edel puts it, like *The Awkward Age's* Mr. Longdon "or the unnamed narrator of *The Sacred Fount*" before him, "the curious New England 'ambassador' Lambert Strether would re-embody a new, still slightly bewildered novelist" (477).

substantially transmuted form. If James is primarily concerned with achieving cultural consensus, Strether is far more interested in attaining a personal or affective one. Put another way, one could say James's public ambitions for spoken language manifest in *The Ambassadors* as Strether's far more private ones – a movement in keeping with what Gavin Jones, for one, has seen as a greater trajectory within James's fiction, whereby "questions of speech" are increasingly "related less to public problems than to the radically private problems of individual consciousness" (97).

And yet, the "questions of speech" raised by the novel seem to relate to more than just Strether's "individual consciousness." Although he and Maria Gostrey may be principally "responsible" for the drive toward consensus in the novel, such consensus-seeking is also a more unconsolidated and less character-centered activity, as I demonstrate in the second half of my argument. For it is not only in the response-oriented structure of Strether and Maria's exchanges that we see evidence of the consensual impulse, but also in the omnipresence of certain syntactic and lexical features so diffuse as to be un-attributable to single characters. In this sense, voice – much, as Cameron has suggested, like consciousness – may resist being entirely psychologized within the novel.[11] Instead, it serves to convey what could be called a collective *desideratum*, a desire for reciprocity that if only obliquely expressed in the narrative's content, is more emphatically broadcast by its discursive structures. Thus if speech has long been identified as an area of difficulty within James's fiction (both by his critics and, as in *The Awkward Age*, by the characters themselves) it is important to recognize that it is also

[11] See *Thinking in Henry James*, in which Cameron argues that in James's novels "consciousness is disengaged from the self," and "reconceived as extrinsic, made to take shape – indeed, to become social – as an intersubjective phenomenon" (77).

treated, at least in the fictional world of *The Ambassadors*, as a potential means of rapprochement.

II. Wishful Speaking in The Ambassadors

Strether's exchanges with Maria may provide the novel's most vivid example of verbal consensus-building. In one of their first conversations, Strether agrees to accompany Maria on an impromptu walk around Paris. Maria speaks first:

> "You're doing something you think not right."
> "Am I enjoying it as much as that?"
> "You're not enjoying it, I think, so much as you ought"
> "I see," he appeared thoughtfully to agree. "Great is my privilege"
> "Oh it's not your privilege! It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with yourself. Your failure's general."
> "Ah, there you are!" he laughed. "It's the failure of Woollett. That's general"
> "The failure to enjoy," Miss Gostry explained, "is what you mean."
> "Precisely. Woollett isn't sure it is out to enjoy…" (25)

Although the two characters have known each other for all of twenty minutes, it is clear that they have already become what Yeazell calls "verbal collaborators" (69). As they talk, each integrates the word of the other – "enjoy," "privilege," "failure" – into their own responses, resulting in an ever-lengthening (if only ambiguously referential) locutionary chain. In this sense, it is paradigmatic of the similarly cooperative exchanges that take place over the course of the novel, and which routinely violate conversational economies, as well as narrative ones. Here, as in these other exchanges, the readerly lesson to be learned is that characters may speak less to communicate, per se, than to prolong the sheer act of communication: to achieve what linguist Bronislaw Malinowski

describes as "phatic communion."[12] Arrayed across the "mere laid table of conversation," as Strether puts it, neither he nor Maria can condone "forsaking the board" (19).

Strether seems to place a particular premium on sustaining this sort of verbal "communion" – of not only not "forsaking" it, but of continually and tenderly cultivating it. Given what we know of his sentimental history, it is not hard to discern a motive for this assiduity. "It had been," Strether reflects, "a dreadful cheerful, sociable solitude, a solitude of life or choice, of community; but though there had been people enough all round it there had been but three or four persons *in* it" (61). Of these "three or four persons," two, his wife and son, have died. In retrospect, however, Strether suddenly sees even these tragedies as part of a greater pattern of relational failure – of his having "failed, as he considered it, in everything, in each relation" (61). But if he has failed, he now realizes he has also *been* failed. Indeed, it is not until he has left this "life…of community" that he becomes aware of how socially impoverished a "life" – and how limited a "community" – his has been. That he is as suspicious of Chad's "strange communities" as the too-familiar one he left behind in Woollett suggests that, despite the term's historically positive connotations in English literature,[13] for Strether its value may be depreciated (130). At the same time, however, this critique of the Woollett community implies the existence in his mind of some preferable alternative. Or at least, his peception of a binary distinction – between the sort of "peripheral" relations he enjoyed in Woollett ("people…all around"), and the more profound ones he hopes to find in Paris, and which entail people being not just present, but actually let "*in.*"

[12] Malinowski used the term to refer to the "type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (303).
[13] In *Keywords*, Williams notes that community is a "warmly persuasive word": "unlike all other terms of social organization…it seems never to be used unfavorably" (76). Terrence Doody, similarly, has argued that community "almost always means a positive alternative, a better quality of human relationships" (12).

That Strether believes speech – or a particular kind of speech – is the key to realizing this sort of mutually interpenetrating relation is revealed not only by his behavior in conversation, but by his allusion, in an earlier comment, to the paucity of it that characterized his previous life. During his first conversation with Maria, he reflects that "it wasn't till after he had spoken that he became aware of how much there had been in him of response; when the tone of her own rejoinder, as well as the play of something more in her face…seemed to notify him" (19). It is significant that Strether thinks about his own loneliness in linguistic terms, as a lack of opportunities for "response," for it tells readers much about the role of communication in his imaginary. Indeed, Strether's attention both to his own "response," and to Maria's "rejoinder," suggests that dialogue may be as important to him in theory as it is in practice – that it may even function as a metaphor for the sort of mutuality to which he aspires. Compared to the singular "voice…of Woollett," Paris, with its "talk more or less polyglot," would seem to reveal its conduciveness to real exchange (38, 109). The implication, then, is that Strether may be looking less for any particular community, than for the ideals – of belonging, mutuality, responsiveness – that certain communities appear to embody and promote.

So anxious is Strether to realize this sort of intersubjective ideal that he will routinely subordinate his own voice to achieve it. When Maria labels Mrs. Newsome a "swell," for instance, he is only too ready to take up her term ("Oh yes, she's rather a swell!") (50). A page later, Maria offers a further revision ("She's just a *moral* swell") and Strether "accepted gaily enough the definition": "'Yes – I really think that describes her'" (52). It is only one of a number of instances in which Strether will eagerly – even over-eagerly – "accept" the definition of another. From the opening pages of the novel,

there is widespread evidence of what we might call his citational habit, his practice of citing or quoting others: "he's 'notoriously,' as he put it himself, not from Boston" (73), "it had been 'given him,' as they said at Woollett" (95), "Chad…was more than ever, in Miss Barrace's great sense, wonderful" (127), "what you call a *parti pris*…" (230). Most famously, he will adopt Little Bilham's characterization of Chad's relationship as a "virtuous attachment," and thus, quite literally, take "his" word for it (112). Yet Strether's apparent deference to the discourse *of* others should not conceal what seems to be a competing desire, to have his own discourse acknowledged *by* others. In the novel's third book, we find Strether "waiting…to get back from [Maria] in some mirrored form her impressions and conclusions" – not unlike Charlotte Stant, in *The Golden Bowl*, who waited "till [The Prince] spoke again with a gesture that matched" (AM 86, GB 291). Short of "mute communication" – a mysterious quantity that occurs frequently in James's fiction, and which is frequently, if mistakenly, upheld as the *sine qua non* of intimacy among its characters – such "mirroring" or "matching" is often treated in the late novels as the greatest possible proof of fellowship (GB 139).

Yet if Strether's conversations with Maria seem designed to promote intimacy, they also at some level serve to forestall further advances, and to allow Strether to shelter indefinitely within the realm of purely verbal relations. Particularly illustrative of dialogue's dialectical status – as both flirtation and form of deferral – is Strether and Maria's shared allusion to Waymarsh's "sacred rage." On the one hand, the phrase – which "was to become between them, for convenient comprehension, the description of one of his periodical necessities" – would seem to testify to the pair's affective synchrony (41). Indeed, James is hardly alone, in evoking a "private phraseology," as

Maggie Verver calls it, to telegraph two characters' intimacy (GB 359). One thinks of Proust's lovers, Swann and Odette, whose phrase, "faire cattleya,'" having become for them

> un simple vocable qu'ils employaient sans y penser quand ils voulaient signifier l'acte de la possession physique – où d'ailleurs l'on ne possède rien – survécut dans leur langage, où elle le commémorait, à cet usage oublié. (230)
>
> a simple verb which they would employ without thinking when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession…survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long-forgotten custom from which it sprang. (331)

Like "the sacred rage," to "do a cattleya" becomes a short-hand, even a shibboleth, for the couple, the sort of "esoteric vocabulary understood only by the members of a closed social world" (Yeazell 75). Yet while Swann and Odette's metaphor served to "commemorate" their love ("elle le commémorait") Strether and Maria's can only ever gesture, obliquely, toward the possibility (or impossibility) of it. Unlike Proust's couple, James's never share a kiss, never consummate their flirtations.[14] In other words, the phrase does not "signify" or memorialize an event – it *is* the event. Behind this brief exchange, as behind perhaps all of Strether's conversations with Maria and her continental double, Marie, thus lies a greater expectation: that shared language might actually *bring about* a mutual understanding, rather than, as in *L'amour de Swann*, be merely a byproduct of it.

In this sense, I would argue, these exchanges with Maria may serve to dramatize and enact a central fantasy of Strether's: that language may engineer intimacy; that verbal intercourse might not just substitute for, but actually be superior to, its sexual variant, Proust's 'act of physical possession.' Put another way, one could say that Strether is

[14] This is very much in keeping with E.M. Forster's famous observation that James's characters "are incapable of fun, of rapid motion, of carnality…their clothes will not take off" (427).

engaged in a sort of *wishful speaking* – an attempt to realize, through talk alone, the "possibility of mutuality" with which Pippin, for one, claims James had long been concerned (148). Complicating this conclusion, however, is the fact that such wishfulness does not seem confined to Strether, and that alongside this psychological explanation for the novel's distinct locutionary tendencies, may dwell other, less characterologically-determined ones. Attesting to the diffuseness of this fantasy is the fact that it can be seen to organize other of James's novels beyond *The Ambassadors*, and particularly the later novels, which often betray similar speech-centered longings. Indeed, there are a number of characters who seem to adhere to similar sublimating strategies as Strether. One thinks especially of John Marcher, for whom sharing the "real truth" with May Bartram is enough "to constitute between them a sensible bond" (CS 747); or Mr. Longdon, for whom "talking on a bench" is the greatest intimacy to which one can aspire, and who imagine, like Marcher, that a shared "secret" or "hope" could qualify as "[the thing] that will have drawn us together" (AA 147, 247). That Strether invests so much in his verbal rapport with Maria only to turn down the possibility of a physical or conjugal one at the end suggests strongly that when he extols the need "to live," he may mean less "to live sexually," as Peter Brooks has suggested, than to live affectively, emotionally, relationally.[15] That Longdon and Marcher similarly settle for talk alone suggests they too may imbue speech with magical properties.

While it is Strether, then, who may most prominently embody this attitude, there is also evidence that the fantasy of verbally-achieved intimacy is more widely distributed within *The Ambassadors*, as I will demonstrate in the following section, and also beyond it, in the fiction James produced shortly before and after. Indeed, the dialogue-heavy

[15] See *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993, p. 114.

novels that followed James's foray into theatre seem to be constructed with this ambition in mind: represented speech becomes increasingly elliptical, vague, and incomplete, thus inviting – even demanding – further elaboration or interrogation by the fictional listener.[16] In *The Turn of The Screw* (1898), for instance, the governess's conversations with Mrs. Grose are characterized by a disproportionate number of open-ended statements whose construction, even when not in interrogative form, necessitates that the inerlocuter supply the missing object: "But not to the degree to contaminate –" (11), "But aren't they all –?" (10), "Then you have known him –?" (11), "That was the great reason –" (48), "You leave him –?" (65), "I can't think wherever she must have picked up –" (74), "Then in spite of yesterday you believe –" (75). It is as if James had discovered a means of dramatizing, through the discourse of his characters, the desire for reciprocity, for the experience of "with-ness," that haunts much of his previous fiction.[17]

And, perhaps, haunted James himself. One can't help but think here of the author's own desire for public response, his "disappointment in the marketplace as well as the world of letters" (Edel 396). As his biographer Leon Edel puts it, "he had felt so many times that the world did not want his art and did not recognize his genius" (684). In 1908, still stung by the disastrous reception of *Guy Domville*, James was doubly shocked by the poor sales of *The New York Edition*: "The non-response of *both* sources," he wrote to his agent, James Pinker, "has left me rather high and dry" (Edel 663). It may be no coincidence, then, that some of his most biographically proximate characters seem

[16] See Cynthia Ozick, who argues that after "the 1895 crux" of *Guy Domville*, James "would never again write the kind of novel he had written during his earlier years, before he began playwriting" (Ozick xiv, Edel 434). Instead, as Edel points out, he now "imported the stage into his novels" (434).
[17] Here, I am referring to the propensity of characters in the later fiction to find others willing to "watch," "wait," or "act" *with* them. It is a desire that seems to reach its apotheosis in *"*The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), which is centrally about Marcher's hope that May should "watch with" him (CS 746).

similarly sensitized to the experience of non-response. Thus it is not only Strether – the "perfectly equipped failure" – but his earlier iteration, Mr. Longdon, who expresses this note of frustration: "I was no success as a young man. I mean the sort that would have made a difference. People wouldn't look at me" (AA 20). "Well, we shall look at you," Vanderbank responds – as plausible as motivation as any, perhaps, for Longdon's sudden attachment to the younger man (20). The worst fate, such evidence implies, is that of being *not* looked at, *not* responded to. It is almost as if James, in his fiction, anticipated the idea Bakhtin would formulate in his later theories: that for "the word (and consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response" (SG 127).

And nothing more desirable, one might add, at least for James' fictional subjects, than the presence of one. It is in this light that it becomes possible to suggest that the synchronicity among James's speakers is best explained neither as a stylistic provocation, nor as an expression of James's "social Utopianism" (Rowe 17). Instead it may most plausibly be read as a mode of representation: the textual manifestation of certain aspirations – to reciprocity, to mutuality – that James himself may have maintained, and that he seems regularly to have attributed to his late-fictional subjects. Indeed, by portraying a linguistic landscape that is so improbably uniform, and so uniformly unnatural, James seems to signal speech's status *as* fantasy: as the dramatization of a dream, rather than a reflection of reality. At a moment when many of his contemporaries in American letters were engaged in reproducing real dialects,[18] James, one could say,

[18] See Jones, who argues "late-nineteenth-century America was crazy about dialect literature" and the vocal difference it dramatized (1). The result, as he argues in his first chapter, was that writers attempted to record and "redact an astounding variety of cultural voices" (1, 4).

was focused on inventing one: on creating a language to telegraph the aspirations that the plots of his novels would almost uniformly fail to sustain.

III. "Making Out,""Taking In," "Keeping Up": James's Aspirational Phraseology

To understand the operation of this aspirational language, however, requires a closer look at its mechanics. For what we find is that reciprocity in *The Ambassadors* is not only demonstrated through conversational symmetry, of the kind we just witnessed, but through other kinds of locutionary displays, and by characters other than Strether. In addition to the textual phenomena mentioned above – echolalia, compulsive citation, collaborative speaking – there are other recurring features of character discourse that seem designed to maximize the possibility of consensus. Most distinctive, perhaps, is the use of "phrasal verbs": those compounds of verbs and modifying particles that are so typical of Jamesian conversation. In *The Ambassadors* alone, characters take in, take out, take from, or take up; come in, come on, come out, come down or come up. Historically, the category has been of great interest to lexicologists, from Samuel Johnson to James's near-contemporary, William Pearsall Smith, who noted that "there is hardly any action or attitude of one human being to another which cannot be expressed by means of these phrasal verbs" (Smith 254).[19] Yet they have not roused the interest of literary critics, despite the fact that such collocations pullulate in his fiction, sometimes to almost comical effect. Take, for instance, Maria's introductory gambit to Strether:

> If you'll only come on further…you'll at any rate make out. My own fate has been too many for me, and I've succumbed to it. I'm a general guide – to

[19] Johnson, for his part, bemoaned the difficulty of indexing this "kind of composition, more frequent in our language than perhaps in any other," in which we "modify the signification of many verbs by a particle subjoined" (12).

> ‘Europe’ don’t you know? I wait for people – I put them through. I pick them up – I set them down…I take people, as I’ve told you, about. (26)

Here, Maria describes her activities almost exclusively by means of these verbal formula: in terms of ‘coming on,’ ‘making out,’ ‘waiting for,’ ‘putting through,’ ‘picking up,’ ‘setting…down,’ and ‘taking about.’ In this case, the primary function may be self-mockery – Maria’s deflation of her importance as a “general guide.” But given the frequency with which these constructions appear in characters’ speech, it seems clear they have another, less ironic functionality. If Smith, for one, praises the expressive power of such compounds, James’s characters seem to take advantage of the degree to which they *don’t* express – their capacity to leave events and actions deliberately underdetermined. What does it mean, after all, for Maria to “pick people up,” “set them down” or “put them through”?

Yet more important than whether we, as readers, understand may be the implied presumption that Strether will. In other words, to rely as Maria does on discursive structures this vague is to trust your interlocutor to ‘make out’ your meaning – in a sense, to presume the intimacy you may only as yet aspire to. Like the “enigmatic language of praise” in which James’s characters speak, or the “high generality of [their] diction,” these constructions have the benefit of both heightening the impression of intimacy and, just as importantly, allowing the greatest possible margin for error between speakers (Yeazell 75, Levenson 15). In this sense, I would argue that the phrasal verbs that recur in *The Ambassadors* are designed less to mean than they are to place-hold: to map out some maximally neutral, and thus easily shared, verbal terrain. And to imply less the absence

of referential meaning (as some have suggested)[20] than its superabundance – since only a confidence that something is being signified could justify the use of such otherwise meaningless signifiers.

Similarly suggestive in this regard is the use of what we might call pseudo-idioms: codified expressions that have been tweaked just enough to destabilize their clichéd status. Indeed, it can be difficult to find a cliché that *hasn't* been emended in some way, whether by the insertion of an adverb ("as if you wanted one immediately to know the worst") (29), prepositional phrase ("We've tired out, between us, her patience," "there at any rate it *is*") (186), or other qualifying clause ("But there – as usual – we are!, "He can bear it – the way I strike him as going – no longer", "You're looking, this morning, as fit as a flea", "I don't do it, for instance – some people do you know – for the money") (247, 192, 186, 26). At other times, however, the deviation from fixed expression is more elaborate, and the effect, more ambiguous. After dispatching a message to Woollett, for instance, Strether considers it was at best "a sort of whistling in the dark":

> It was unmistakable moreover that the sense of being in the dark now pressed on him more sharply – creating thereby the need for a louder and livelier whistle. He whistled long and hard after sending his message; he whistled again and again in celebration of Chad's news… (196).

In the following paragraph, Strether returns to further embellish the figure: "the increase of his darkness, however, and the quickening, as I have called it, of his tune…" (197). At first glance, Strether would seem to be attempting to reactivate a moribund cliché. But in fact, a close reading of the passage suggests he may be less interested in the meaning of

[20] I am thinking here of what one scholar calls Leo Bersani's well-known "dismissal of referential meaning in the book," but also of Cameron, who argues that in *The Golden Bowl* "speech is emptied of significant implication" (Sabin 96, Cameron *Thinking* 85).

the words – which diminishes with their increasing distance from the original figure – than in the sheer pleasure of manipulating them within given constraints. As with the phrasal verbs, the goal of these pseudo-idioms once again seems less to "mean," than to demonstrate mastery, one's ability to communicate in even the least communicative of terms. Within the novel, they might best be understood as shows of verbal prowess: proofs of fluency not just in one's mother tongue, but in that *other* tongue, the invented one that nearly all James's characters speak.

The paradoxical implication is that Jamesian characters must diverge from conventional verbal codes to demonstrate their mastery of *this* code – and hence, their membership in the tribe. That belonging is predicated upon such proficiency is made abundantly clear in *The Ambassadors*. It is not, after all, until "after the first exchange" with Little Bilham that Miss Gostrey can declare him to be "one of *us*!" (83). As Strether explains, "a quick unanimity between the two appeared to have phrased itself in half-dozen remarks" (83). On the one hand, there is something utopian about the idea that "unanimity" could be as simple as a shared phraseology, and that a "half-dozen remarks" are sufficient to affect a common understanding. In just this brief scene, Maria and Chad seem nearly on the verge of realizing the sort of "virtual consensus" James calls for in his speech.

Yet there are also evident consequences of this pursuit of uniformity: the attenuation – or even expulsion – of difference. "In Little Bilham's company," Strether notes at one point, "contrarieties in general dropped" (83). Much the same, however, could be said of almost any company in the novel, though it is Strether who may ultimately be the most inimical to contrariety. Confronted with or (as James put it)

"sinking…up to his middle in the Difference," Strether almost inevitably strives to neutralize or assimilate it (N 28). This is particularly evident during his encounter with the potentially "unfamiliar phenomenon" of Marie de Vionnet (129). Though he anticipates a "*femme du monde,*" once they begin to talk, Strether is almost immediately reassured: "she – oh incontestably, yes – *differed* less; differed, that is, scarcely at all – well, superficially speaking, from Mrs. Newsome or even from Mrs. Pocock" (129). Indeed, by the end of their conversation, he is convinced of her "common humanity": "she did come out, and certainly to his relief, but she came out as the usual thing" (129).

As the novel eventually reveals, however, this assessment could hardly be less precise: Madame de Vionnet does "differ," she is not the "usual thing." And the implication is that Strether, desirous of finding something "usual," has simply persuaded himself that he *has*: aided in this effort by both the epistemological generosity of his claims, and by the kinds of verbal formula ("come out") which function to muffle the slightest intimation of difference. Significantly, they do the same for Madame de Vionnet, a native French speaker who nonetheless talks the same strangely idiomatic English as the novel's Anglophones: "It's just there that, since you've taken it up and are committed to it, it most intensely becomes yours," she explains to Strether, during their colloquy in Notre Dame (183). It is only when Marie's ontological "difference" asserts itself – when she is exposed as un-virtuous – that her verbal difference suddenly does, too: then, for the first time in the novel, Marie begins to speak French. This change, Strether reflects, had the "odd" effect of "fairly veiling [Marie's] identity, shifting her back into a more voluble class or face to the intense audibility of which he was by this time inured" (312). Though he may couch it in heavily qualified, almost

incomprehensible language, what is clear in this moment is that Marie is being *punished* for her difference: demoted, in Strether's mind, from a privileged class to a "more voluble" one, and from an embodiment of a transnational ideal, to the "face" of an "intensely audible" and geographically specific locale. By choosing to synchronize her shift in language with her shift in "class," James implies that the price for any form of consensus may be conformity: verbal, ideological, socioeconomic. And that even the most putatively cosmopolitan culture may harbor, beneath its inclusive surface, more covert forms of orthodoxy.

In this way, James reveals how radically Strether's fantasies of community are out of touch with the lived reality of it, as represented not only by the repressive (and openly satirized) regime of Woollett, but also by what the concluding chapters show to be the perhaps equally exclusionary society of Paris. Far from endorsing the consensual ideal, then, *The Ambassadors* might more accurately be read as an illumination of its dangers. In straining to identify consensus, Strether has imagined it where it did not exist, and overlooked it where it did – most notably, between Marie and Chad. Indeed, the novel goes so far as to suggest that Strether's pursuit of reciprocity might be nearly as dubious as Woolett's cult of conformity, both ethically, and epistemologically. To accept unconditionally the words of another may be to promote a superficial understanding, but it is also to minimize the chance of reaching a more profound one. Enamored as Strether is of what Barthes calls "the discourse of others," he fails to vet such discourse adequately for truth. "*Do* take it from me," Little Bilham assures Strether, who of course does (112). But at some cost. For in adopting Little Bilham's characterization of Chad's relationship as a "virtuous attachment," Strether recuses himself from the task of having

to characterize it for himself. In this sense, the phrase becomes not only a "simplifying rubric," but a stultifying one (Weinstein 131).

That codified language can have such stultifying effects is illustrated even more poignantly in an earlier passage, when Strether refers twice in the space of one paragraph to the death of his "little dully boy" (61). As becomes clear, this epithet has served to perpetuate a possibly false image of his son, who may be quite different than this memorializing language would imply.[21] It is only when he belatedly interrogates the cliché, however, that Strether begins to consider what it may have disguised: "It was the soreness of the remorse that the child had in all likelihood not been dull – had been dull…mainly because the father had been unwittingly selfish" (61). In this light, it is significant that James himself relied on a similar technique in the wake of his friend Constance Fennimore Woolson's suicide, when he "came to rest in a conventional and distancing judgment – 'fundamentally tragic being!" (Ozick xx). However incidental, such an anecdote reveals the psychological power linguistic strategies may unconsciously have held not only for James, but also for his characters, even as his novels seem to place an unremitting emphasis on their dangers.

There may be no better illustration of the epistemological risks of relying overly on such formula than Strether's use of the phrase, "let oneself go." Strether not only hopes to "let himself recklessly go," he prescribes the same course of action to Waymarsh ("*Let* yourself, on the contrary, go…") and playfully bemoans to Mrs. Pocock his failure to follow his own advice: "Oh, I've not let myself go very far…I'm only afraid of showing I haven't let myself go far *enough*…" (118, 275, 222). It is something of a

[21] For more on the way tropes in James's fiction work to promote magical thinking, see Yeazell, who argues that metaphors act as "ways of mediating…dangerous knowledge," or Kurnick's discussion of the mystifying effects of the image of Kate's analogy of Milly to a "dove" (Yeazell 39, Kurnick 219).

comic punch line, then, that Strether should share this seemingly unobjectionable ambition with a character who is perhaps his antithesis in modernist fiction: Molly Bloom. When, during her closing monologue in *Ulysses*, she wishes "he was here or somebody to let myself go with," her intended meaning could hardly be more different than that of the prudish Strether, who is shocked when confronted with proof of precisely the sort of un-virtuous behavior Molly is proposing (U 18.584-5). But it only goes to show how radically non-consensual even the most seemingly centripetal language may be. It is a fact that James was, perhaps, only able to admit in his fiction. In "A Question of Our Speech," James asked his audience

> to take it from me, as the very moral of these remarks, that the way we say a thing, or fail to say it, fail to learn to say it, has an importance in life that it is impossible to overstate – a far-reaching importance, as the very hinge of relation of man to man. (QS 21)

That even James's hyper-conscious speakers may fail to think about "the way [they] say a thing" is only a testament, then, to the difficulty of securing the "relation of man to man" – of ensuring the sort of verbal and social consensus that James's fictions nonetheless continue to long for.

IV. Hemingway's Rhetoric of Disavowal

If *The Ambassadors* retains some faith in the capacity of language to realize social or affective consensus – however misguided this faith is revealed to be – *The Sun Also Rises*, by contrast, would seem to scorn such possibilities. Unlike James's characters, Hemingway's express few hopes that what they say could "do" or mean anything. When early in the novel Jake asks Robert Cohn, "What's the matter?", Cohn responds, enigmatically, "Talking" (21). His answer is in many ways paradigmatic of attitudes

throughout the novel, which is rife with similar disparagements of speaking: "Well, let's shut up about it," (34), "Yes, it's a rotten shame. But there's no use talking about it, is there?" (55), ""Let's not talk. Talking's all bilge," (62), "Don't let's ever talk about it" (257), "You'll lose it if you talk about it" (249). Repeatedly, Jake and Brett admonish each other not to "talk like a fool"; Jake, at one point, confesses to having done so ("when I'm low I talk like a fool") (30, 34, 88, 63). In this light, one could say that if *The Ambassadors* treats speech as a potential solution, a means by which consensus and community might be achieved, *The Sun Also Rises* treats talking antithetically, as a problem: an obstacle to real intimacy or intersubjective exchange.[22]

Considering its historical context, it may be hardly surprising that the novel's characters see speech as devalued currency. As James Dawes has noted, World War I was widely believed to have "initiate[d] a semantic crisis, a crisis of meaning premised upon disbelief in language's ability effectively to refer to and intervene in the material world" (131).[23] Indeed, James himself – writing just over a decade after *The Ambassadors'* publication and a year after the onset of the war – would reach a strikingly similar conclusion in the pages of *The New York Times*:

> One finds in the midst of all this as hard to apply one's words as to endure one's thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; they have, like millions of other things, been more overstrained and knocked about and voided of the happy semblance during the last six months than in all the long ages before, and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression, through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk.[24]

[22] For more on the novel's "thematic distrust of verbal communication," see Frederic Svoboda, who focuses especially on the inadequacies of "long distance communication" (46, 30).
[23] See Paul Fussell for a comprehensive study of the war's transformative effects on language, as well as Vincent Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford UP, 2003).
[24] "Henry James's First Interview." *New York Times* 21 March 1915. Web.

In its lament for the condition of the English language, James's comments represent a grim reversal of the message he offered at Bryn Mawr; here, he raises the "question of our speech" only to foreclose on the possibility of an answer. It is likely no coincidence that a similar pessimism – and a similar rhetoric of "deterioration" and "depreciation" – finds its way into *The Sun Also Rises*. As is widely known, Hemingway transcribed this excerpt of James's essay onto a typescript page of *A Farewell to Arms*, a novel whose hero famously decries "abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow": "those big words," as Stephen Dedalus called them, "which make us so unhappy" (AFTA 185, U 2.264).[25] In this context, both the denigration of speech in *The Sun Also Rises* and the novel's famously laconic style could be seen primarily as aesthetic responses: Hemingway's confirmation that words were in fact "used up."[26] By a similar logic, the radically diminished diction in which Jake, Brett, and the rest of the novel's company speak might be read as a pathological symptom, a verbal analogue of the various forms of bankruptcy – moral, affective, financial – thematized within the novel.

Yet a closer reading of the novel reveals that these disavowals are in fact discrete manifestations of a more complex verbal code. In other words, it reveals that the characters may not be acting out the failure of language, so much as using language – or a specially designed language, a language that only *looks* failed – to substitute for the non-linguistic modes of social cohesion widely perceived in the world of the novel to be lost. Hemingway himself was frank about the book's elegiac quality: the fact that it was about a "lost generation," metonymically represented by protagonist Jake Barnes, who suffers

[25] As Houston notes, Hemingway copied this "Jamesian lament" in a typescript to *A Farewell to Arms* (36).
[26] Zoe Trodd, most recently, has argued that Hemingway's style should be understood as his "calculated response" to linguistic depreciation, noting his "limited vocabulary, few adjectives, and concrete descriptions of specific objects all countered with minimalism the problem of 'used up' words" (8).

from "the loss or atrophy of certain non replaceable parts" (SL 223). And it is haunted equally by the loss of affective possibility: by both "failed efforts at heterosexual connection" and the "fragility…of male homosocial consensus," as well as by the more generalized "isolation" which "finds all the major characters…searching for acceptance and a sense of community" (Moglen 29, Helbig 85).[27] In this light, it seems hardly surprising that words in *The Sun Also Rises* should become a sort of communal property, "implicitly and explicitly shared," rather than "purified through a single consciousness," as David Humphries has argued (117). Faced with the non-feasibility of more "natural" forms of consensus, characters turn to speech to achieve it.

Like James's characters, then, Hemingway's use talk, or specific kinds of talk, to engineer intimacies. Yet there is an important difference. If consensual speech in *The Ambassadors* reflects a fantasy, in *The Sun Also Rises*, it has the feel of a calculated response, and to a historical crisis that is both more urgent, and more urgently present, in the plot of the novel. For Hemingway's characters, then, it is arguably less a question of aspirational than *oppositional* speaking: an idiom developed less "in the hopes of," than "in response to." And what is being opposed is a certain kind of individualistic, idealistic, and "abstract" mode of expression, a language linked temporally to the pre-War era, and spatially, to the character of Robert Cohn, in whom such objectionable speech is almost exclusively localized. Unlike *The Ambassadors*, *The Sun Also Rises* does not insist on the improbable "universalism" of speech. Instead, it uses one character's deviation from the verbal norm in order to draw attention to its contours, and the ideology it necessarily implies.

[27] Unlike Helbig, I would argue that the novel's language is not a "confessional discourse" so much as a collective one that serves to engender a sense of affiliation.

V. "Let's Utilize It": Language and Collective Ethics

That speaking functions to produce consensus is evidenced by any number of episodes throughout the novel. A particularly good dramatization of its role in social bonding takes place during Jake, Bill, and Harris's fishing trip to Burguete:

> "Isn't that a pub across the way?" Harris asked. "Or do my eyes deceive me?"
> "It has the look of a pub," Bill said.
> "It looks to me like a pub," I said.
> "I say," said Harris, "let's utilize it." He had taken up utilizing from Bill. (133)

As the scene continues, Harris and Jake will increasingly "take up" Bill's word ("I say. You know this does utilize well," "Come on and utilize another glass"), much as Strether did Little Bilham's (SAR 134). Perhaps because Jake comments explicitly on the phenomenon ("he had taken up utilizing from Bill"), and because the repetition is so emphatic, the episode has often been frequently celebrated as an example of "how language can create a community" (Humphries 117). Yet less scrutinized are the mechanics of *how*, exactly, such community gets created. On the one hand, fellowship is clearly the product of the sort of "explicit" verbal sharing we see above. When Jake and Georgette discuss being "sick," or when Brett and the Count riff on the word "joke," or when Jake and Montoya debate who is and is not "*aficionado*," the goal is to identify and consolidate the like-minded, to sift "us" from "them" (23, 65, 136). In contrast to the *The Ambassadors*, then, "community" in *The Sun Also Rises* can be the function of something as simple as a shared word, rather than a more syntactically elaborate phrasal unit.

Yet there is one type of construction whose role in producing community has been more overlooked, not just in this scene, but throughout the novel – the use of the first-person plural imperative "let's." Counting Harris's exhortation ("let's utilize it"), it appears forty-seven times within the text, making it one of the most frequently occurring

words in the characters' collective idiom ("nice," by contrast, appears forty-three times; "tight," twenty-four; "hell," fifty-three). And also one of the most evenly distributed: it is something of a common lexical denominator among the characters, voiced by everyone from Bill ("Only let's not get daunted," (79) "Let's find the gang and go down," (137) "let's translate Brett to the hotel" (163)) and Mike ("I say Brett let's turn in early," "Let's take a drive" (85, 234)); to Jake ("Well, let's shut up about it" (34), "Let's have a drink then" (63)), and especially, Brett who tends toward negative formulations ("Don't let's go there" (211), "Don't let's talk about it" (247)).

Significantly, Robert Cohn is the one character who does not make regular use of this construction. Compared to the novels other speakers, who regularly invoke the collective, Cohn is far more likely to speak in the singular. This brief exchange with Jake at Burguete is a case in point:

> "Well, Bill and I will go up right after lunch," I said.
> "I wish I could go. We've been looking forward to this fishing all winter." He was being sentimental about it. "But I ought to stay. I really ought. As soon as they come I'll bring them right up."
> "Let's find Bill."
> "I want to go over to the barber-shop" (106).

It is not only that Cohn fails to agree to Jake's plan, or to respond in kind. More significant is the emphasis he places on his individual desires ("I wish…", "I want…"), in contrast to Jake's more collective orientation ("Bill and I will go," "let's find…"). His openly ambitious and egocentric speech is an anomaly in the novel, and even his "we's" are misleading.[28] In short, Cohn's 'self'-interest runs completely counter to what the novel increasingly reveals to be a group mentality. When at one point, Bill jokes to Mike,

[28] As Helbig points out, Cohn is both an inveterate mis-user of 'we,' and an over-user of 'I' (97-98).

"don't you detach me from the herd," he makes explicit what the novel's dialogue has already done much to disclose (145).

In this sense, one could say that Cohn disrupts not only the verbal and social consensus, but the philosophical and ethical one that underlies it: one that privileges self over other, reciprocity over originality, collectivity over "self"-expression. This collective ethics manifests in a number of other discursive features, not only the inclusive predicates and shared diction, but also, in the sort of parallel speaking practiced in *The Ambassadors*. When Bill first meets Brett, for instance, it does not take him long to modulate his speech to hers:

> "Vienna," said Bill, "is a strange city."
> "Very much like Paris," Brett smiled at him, wrinkling the corners of her eyes.
> "Exactly," Bill said. "Very much like Paris at this moment." (80)
>
> "So that's the way it was in Vienna," Brett said.
> "It was like everything in Vienna." (81)

This exchange exemplifies the sort of "discourse of non-specificity" that pullulates in the novel, and in which Hemingway's speakers are almost universally proficient (Tomkins 750). And like the "high generality of the diction" in *The Ambassadors*, this "non-specific language" of *The Sun Also Rises* seems at least partly designed to maximize opportunities for concurrence among speakers (Levenson 15, Tomkins 750). Indeed, it is Bill's proficiency in this "language," his willingness to privilege consensus over self-expression, that is the measure of his belonging. Just as Maria must exchange "a half-dozen remarks" with Chad before declaring him, "One of us," so, too, must Brett hear Bill speak – and establish with him something like Maria and Chad's "quick unanimity" – before quickly expressing her approval: "Brett smiled at him again. 'You've a very nice friend, Jake" (AM 83, SAR 81). While Jake, then, may try to make such rhetorical

sharing sound casual ("When you were with the English, you got into the habit of using English expressions in your thinking"), the novel repeatedly implies that such overlap is – much like the "work" Jake will never be caught doing – the product of concerted effort, and invested with considerable importance (153, 19).

Once again, Cohn is the one character who fails to adhere to these reciprocal protocols: to "take up" the word of others, as Jake and Harris take up Bill's, or respond to verbal cues, as Bill does Brett's. His exceptional status is especially evident in one of the novel's early scenes, when Jake, having been asked by Cohn for his opinion of Brett, responds that she is a "nice girl." Cohn speaks first:

> "She's a remarkably attractive woman."
> "Isn't she?"
> "There's a certain quality about her, a certain fineness. She seems to be absolutely fine and straight."
> "She's very nice."
> "I don't know how to describe the quality," Cohn said. "I suppose it's breeding." (46)

In *Our America,* Walter Benn Michaels observes that the full measure of Cohn's difference from Jake is registered in their diction: " 'Breeding' is the term used by people who don't really have any; 'nice' is the term used by people who do'" (26). Yet more revealing even than Cohn's choice of words is his deafness to Jake's: his refusal to accept Jake's assessment of Brett – that she is "nice" or "very nice" – in favor of his own.[29] If, before falling in love with Brett, Cohn "never made one remark that would, in any way, detach him from other people," as Jake alleges, the implication is that now, his remarks do "detach" him: they have that power (52).

[29] Helbig makes a similar point in Bakhtinian terms, noting that this dialogue "closely resembles a monologue," since Cohn is "deaf to the other's response" (95).

As the novel makes clear, then, Cohn's verbal contrarianism have consequences. (That he is spoken differently *about* – by his full name, rather than just his first one – is just another manifestation of his verbal difference.) Most memorable may be Jake's excoriation of the telegram Cohn sends to Burguete ("Vengo Jueves Cohn"): "What a lousy telegram!...He could send ten words for the same price. 'I come Thursday.' That gives you a lot of dope, doesn't it?' (133). On the one hand, Jake's withering critique could be taken as another symptom of the more generalized antipathy toward Cohn, or an expression of his well-documented "difference." Yet what if we were to reverse that logic, and read Cohn's deviation from rhetorical norms as the *cause* of his marginalization, rather than as an effect of it?[30] Indeed, it seems like no coincidence that the character who comes in for the most criticism in the novel – who is derided alternately as "pitiful," a "moron," and a "kike" – should also be the character who most consistently fails to adhere to the novel's discursive standards. Thus, while Jake may insist there is "no password" among *aficionados*, it seems clear that talk can still function as shibboleth. And that Cohn's social exclusion, moreover, might have less to do with his Jewishness, than with the increasingly discordant nature of his "remarks," his rhetoric, his verbal repertoire.

This idea has clear implications for the understanding of Cohn's character, and his status within the novel. Rather than see Cohn as an expiatory figure – as critics of the novel have often done – I would argue that it is equally possible to see him as an antagonist, or as a threat to the ethos modeled by the majority of the novels' speakers. In other words, it is plausible to suggest that he bears some responsibility for his own

[30] Whereas Alex Woloch has argued that a character's minor status might "catalyze…inadequate speech," I am arguing the opposite: that inadequate speech might catalyze a character's minorness (26).

exclusion; or better, that he is "excluded" not for what he *is* (as critics have often argued[31]) so much as for what he *says* – and what it reveals about his system of values. To put it in the terms René Girard introduced in his book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, one could say that Cohn is a Romantic hero in a *romanesque* world: convinced of the originality of his desires despite the fact of their mediation. Mark Spilka was only the first of many critics to highlight Cohn's adherence to a pre-War "code" or sensibility;[32] and it is a value system that manifests itself not just in his behavior, but in his speech as well. Even his brief exchange with Jake relies on what Frederic Henry might call "abstract" words, though more romantic than militaristic: "love," "best friend," "honest woman" (46-7). Like Strether's blind faith in Chad's "virtuous attachment" – or even Jay Gatsby's quixotic devotion to Daisy – Cohn's rhetorical inflation of Brett is meant to telegraph his attachment to outmoded ideals. Moreover, it suggests that he takes at face value terms that the novel's other characters reflexively deflate or ironize. Thus, in the conversation above, Jake's "girl" is Cohn's "woman"; and his "nice," amplified by adverbs into Cohn's "remarkably attractive," and "absolutely fine and straight."

In short, Cohn talks precisely the kind of talk that characters in the novel – like Hemingway himself – seem most concerned to disavow. It is in his speech, in other words, that we recognize the target of the novel's opprobrium: language of the standardized, institutionalized, or otherwise "abstract" variety. When in Burguete with Bill, Jake excoriates Cohn for speaking "with an air of superior knowledge that irritated us both," there is more at stake in their accusation (101). For such "superior" speaking

[31] Cathy and Arnold Davidson, for instance, see Cohn as one of "those excluded others" who "are required to define the code" (93); Benn Michaels examines his expulsion in historical context, as the product of Nativist and anti-Semitic sentiments.

[32] Spilka describes Cohn as "the last chivalric hero, the last defender of an outworn faith"; more recently, Fulton calls him "a romantic type basically untouched by the war" (Spilka 109, Fulton 71).

contravenes the more understated mode of communication epitomized by the characters' highly telegraphic way of talking, which like Hemingway's own style, privileges economy. Bill, in particular, tends to speak as if he were paying by the word: "Must bathe," "might do that," "Beautiful lady…going to kidnap us" (80). It is well known that Hemingway emulated the "language of cables, which had entranced him since his newspaper days," and Paul Fussell suggests he may have similarly learned from the "Great War style of British Phlegm" adopted by many of the soldiers writing home from the front (SL xi; Fussell 181). That the majority of his characters seem to mimic this style suggests that they, too, may be cultivating a deliberate "aesthetic," which in turn, conveys a certain ethic. It is in this sense that Hemingway implies his characters' deflated diction is not a pathological symptom, so much as an adapted response. If spontaneous expression is no longer possible, the best one can do is to disclose the un-original, the always already inflected quality of one's speech.

VI. "Do you joke him?"

Unlike James's novel, then, it is clear that in Hemingway's not all interlocutors are created equal. If, as we noted, all of *The Ambassadors'* speakers produce the same, oddly structured English, foreign speech in Hemingway's novel often retains trace of its origins: thus Georgette's comment that "This is no great thing of a restaurant" (24), or Jake's question, to a waiter in Spain, "How does one eat inside?" (236). Yet there is a far more significant discrepancy that emerges than the one between "native" and "foreign" speakers. A closer analysis reveals a structuring opposition between the majority of speakers, who treat language with suspicion; and those few, mostly Spanish or ethnically

distinct speakers – Cohn, Pedro Romero, Montoya – who maintain serious, un-ironic stances toward it. That this difference is meant to be understood in generational terms more than ethnographic ones, however, is strongly suggested by the fact that these speakers are also the novel's non-combatants – and thus, do not qualify as members of Stein's *generation perdue*. "In those days," Hemingway explained in *A Moveable Feast*, "we did not trust anyone who had not been in the war" (MF 82). If for James, in 1905, a "common" tongue was still the product of a common national identity, Hemingway makes it clear that solidarity is now to be founded on experiential, rather than ontological or geographical grounds. Thus the "question of our speech" that James raised had for Hemingway become also and inevitably a question of "our time."

Within the world of the novel, however, this verbal dichotomy is more often staged not as a clash between pre- and post-war sensibilities, but in the tension between irony and sincerity. When, during a debate with Jake, Cohn insists, "I'm serious," readers realize he is one of the few speakers within the novel who could make such a claim. Perhaps another is the Italian general who visits Jake's bedside: "Then he made that wonderful speech…What a speech! I would have liked to have it illuminated to hang in the office. *He never laughed*" (39, italics mine). Though the general may not laugh at this speech, it is clear that Jake, our narrator, does – and thus at some level, invites us to. Indeed, the novel's persona seem to work strenuously to maintain this state of compulsory bemusement. Jake, as if following Bill's mock injunction "to be ironical the moment you get out of bed," will repeatedly laugh off his injury: "it's supposed to be funny," "It seemed like a hell of a joke," "I suppose it was funny" (119, 34, 38). Similarly, when Brett (jokingly) assures the Count that she and Jake don't "joke" each

other, it is both a rare glimpse of sentiment, and a sign of just how exceptional *not* joking is (65).

As the novel ultimately makes clear, however, joking is less a sign of nihilism than it is a mark of submerged feeling. Far from sharing what Andrew Del Banco has called Melville's fascination with "soul-dead characters who stand apart and laugh at the living," Hemingway seemed convinced that jokes were forms of self-defense, rather than shows of aggression (249). As he reflects in *A Moveable Feast*, following the news of a friend's suicide,

> They say the seeds of what we will do are in all of us, but it always seemed to me that in those who make jokes in life the seeds are covered with better soil and with a higher grade of manure. (MF 104)

Like Hemingway's famous "iceberg" analogy, this metaphor reveals the importance of the surface/depth binary to Hemingway's thinking, not just about writing, but about the self. More specifically, it implies that his characters may come similarly equipped with a (joking) surface and (feeling) depths. At the same time, Hemingway's comments supply a possible motivation for his subjects' ritual deprecations. To assume a posture of irreverence toward something – to "make jokes" about it – is to create a protective "cover" for one's true sentiments. If Hemingway himself seemed surprised by the reviewers' failure to recognize the novel's "depths" of feeling ("If you went any deeper inside they couldn't read it because they would be crying all the time") it may be a testament to how convincing a surface, a "jazz superficial story," he had created (L 226).

One could go so far as to say that "joking" is presented as both an analogous yet preferable alternative to "talking": if the latter is "all bilge," the former, by contrast, emerges as a way of articulating earnest emotion. Indeed, it may be only by "being

ironical" that one can, paradoxically, still hope to convey real sentiment. It is no coincidence that Bill, who spends more time joking than any character in the novel, is also most prone to expressions of feeling. As he confesses to Jake while fishing, "Listen, you're a hell of a good guy, and I'm fonder of you than of anyone on earth. I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot" (121). Here, it is the homosexual joke that seems to "cover" for – and thus ensure the sincerity of – the sentiment that precedes it; just as being "hard-boiled about everything in the daytime" purchases Jake relief from that posture "at night" (42). Similarly, it is no coincidence that Cohn – the character taken least seriously in the novel – is generally humorless. Part of what makes him so "wonderful" – that is, "awful" – is his inability to understand the transvaluation of language that has taken place, whereby what is tragic (Jake's accident) could perhaps only be talked about as "funny" (34). For this reason, he is unable to participate in the comic mishandling of language that Bill excels at; or to consider, more generally, the possibility that words – like his fling with Brett – might not "mean anything," or signify as he thinks they should (185).

At the risk of insisting too strongly on this binary, I would suggest that Cohn remains committed to "talking" in a novel whose other characters almost uniformly "joke." Or, put another way, that Cohn speaks with the goal of self-expression, while Jake, Brett, and the rest display what we can perhaps call a post-psychological conception of speech: talk not as organic product, but as affected – and inflected – performance. That Hemingway adhered to a similar conception of writing is evident from his comments on literary style, which advocated against the hallmarks of Cohn's speech – "abstract" words, the use of the "perpendicular pro-noun" – in favor of Bill-like irony and economy

(SL 107). (In fact, Hemingway's epistolary style reveals a similar tendency toward comic misappropriation: "Why not screed care the American Express Paris France?", "I morted a fiasco of wine at lunch," and so forth (SL 58, 65, 110).) There is no room, such a style makes clear, for the sort of "wordy, sentimental" expression embodied less by Cohn, than by the literary antecedents of which James was certainly one (SL 129). Indeed, it may be no accident that Hemingway assigns to the hapless Cohn a speech that sounds very like the one Strether delivered to Little Bilham:

> Listen, Jake…Don't you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you're not taking advantage of it? Do you realize you've lived nearly half the time you have to live already? (19)

What in James's novel was a revelation – an exhortation to the reader, as well as Little Bilham, "to live all you can" – is presented in Hemingway's as a banality (AM 132). And the implication is that the aspirations openly expressed in James's writing, can only, at best, be smuggled into Hemingway's, transmitted in a highly stylized code.

And yet, even the expulsion of Cohn's voice and the non-ironic modality it represents is not sufficient to ensure consensus. As the ending implies, even the novel's two most like-minded characters, Jake and Brett, cannot sustain the sort of synchronicity that, as the Count suggests, would seem to be natural or inevitable ("Why don't you get married, you two?") (68). Like the similarly editorial remark in *The Ambassadors* – that Maria and Strether "might have been brother and sister" – the Count's comment underscores the novel's ultimate disclosure: that even the most fated of affiliations (or filiations) may nonetheless fail to maintain (21). Interestingly, some critics of *The Sun Also Rises* have argued for the intersubjective potential of touch, over talk.[33] Yet the

[33] See Svoboda, who speaks for many critics when he observes the importance of "the ritual touch" in the novel: "the *corrida* must *touch* Jake before they are willing to believe him as a fellow *aficionado*" (30, 46).

evidence seems to mitigate against it. The affirmative "touch" Jake shares with Montoya does not prevent them from falling out; Jake's touch might "turn [Brett] all to jelly," but it cannot engender a lasting intimacy (34). And neither, the novel finally suggests, can language – though it may provide a comforting simulacrum. In the novel's last passage, Brett suggests to Jake that they "could have had such a damn good time together" (251). Although Jake concedes the "prettiness" of the sentiment, he knows it to be false, since even the most complete verbal synchrony can't substitute for the physical "togetherness" that Hemingway's characters, unlike James's, know to be superior.

VII. Conclusions: The Mute Consensus

Both novels, then, could be said to end with scenes of non-coincidence: with the surprising non-consensus of the two couples – Strether and Maria, Jake and Brett – most adept at the sort of reciprocal speaking practiced in each text. Yet even more tragic than failed consensus, both novels imply, is the false presumption of it where it does not exist. More often than not, such a presumption is the product of silence, paradoxically held up in both texts as the highest proof of consensus; that is, of the achievement of the sort of mutual understanding that renders talk superfluous. In *The Ambassadors*, Strether continually extols the expressive powers of muteness: "had he been able to put into it anything so handsome as so much fine silence," "her silences were never barren, nor even dull," "it ended by being quite beautiful between them, the number of things they had a manifest consciousness of not saying" (AM 31, 106, 232). As Leo Bersani points out, this idealization of silence and suspicion that "dialogue… compromises intimacy" is diffuse in James's later work (154). And *The Sun Also Rises*, as has been shown, registers a

similar suspicion of "talk," a preference for not talking – or at the least, radically curtailed speech – over more effusive variants.

Yet a survey of these texts reveals that mute understanding often conceals *mis*understanding. One could call it a case of mistaken intimacy, or unverified consensus. In both novels, such delusion is the result less of silence, per se, than of incomplete communication – which is truncated on the grounds of the speakers' apparent or overt similarity. Cosmopolitans like Strether and Little Bilham, after all, shouldn't require more than the barest phrase to understand each other; *aficionados* such as Jake and Montoya can affirm their bond with a single "touch." That both of these ostensibly solid relationships are revealed to be friable discloses the dangers of ever assuming reciprocity, which is revealed, again and again, to be profoundly unstable. As Ralph Touchett remarks (ironically) to Henrietta Stackpole, "I'm sure you understand everything and that differences of nationality are no barrier to you" (PL 139). The comment, far more applicable to himself than Henrietta, bespeaks a sort of cosmopolitan hubris that James, in particular, portrays as the basis of potentially perilous miscalculations.

If the expatriate's necessarily incomplete knowledge of their "host" culture, and potential eagerness to assimilate, make him or her particularly prone to error, these novels suggest that the danger is open to anyone inclined to this sort of romantic or solipsistic thinking. (Even Jake, who may believe himself inoculated against this kind of gaffe, indulges in something similar on the subject of Spain.) In fact, though, it is James's earlier and England-bound novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, which may supply the most memorable lesson in the perils of falsely presuming intimacy or understanding. And yet, it is a later contribution to American Modernist fiction, William Faulkner's *Absalom,*

Absalom!, that may express the most tragic iteration of this trope. Speaking of Sutpen and Judith, the narrator tells us that they have achieved the kind of absolute coincidence to which James and Hemingway's characters would seem to aspire. "They were two much alike," we are told: "[t]hey were as two people become now and then, who seem to know each other so well or are so much alike that the power, the need, to communicate by speech atrophies from disuse" (96). Henry and Bon similarly engage in a "dialogue without words, speech" (88). Idealized though they might be, such mute exchanges actually attest not to intimacy, but distance. Though Henry and Bon, like Sutpen and Judith, may be genetically "alike," this belief in their "likeness" ends by being a blind, in both cases, for gross and tragic forms of misunderstanding. Talking, of course, might not have forestalled the tragedy. But unlike silence, it could not have hurt.

Chapter 2
The Exceptional Voice: Joyce, Faulkner, and the Dream of Autonomy

In the opening paragraphs of "The Dead," before the beginning of the "Misses Morkans annual dance," readers learn a bit about its two hostesses:

> Though their life was modest they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout. But Lily seldom made a mistake in the orders so that she got on well with her three mistresses. They were fussy, that was all. But the only thing they would not stand was back answers. (200)

At first glance, the excerpt is worth remarking because it shares the "leaden ring" of the story's first line, and betrays the idiosyncrasies of syntax and diction that Hugh Kenner has identified as a trademark of Joycean free indirect style (15).[1] In this case, it is Lily's limited vocabulary and repetitive cadence that give her away: those two "bests," for instance, and the insistence on starting sentences – not once, but twice – with a "but," suggest that she is the narrator of this passage.[2]

More striking than Joyce's feat of ventriloquism, however, may be the irony of Lily's remark: for even as she claims the Misses Morkans cannot abide "back answers," she appears, in this very instance, to be "answering back" just the same. Indeed, her comment – with its self-rationalizing tone, its "buts," its willingness to pass judgment, however mild, on her employers' faults ("they were fussy, that was all") – would seem to constitute precisely the sort of response that is ostensibly disallowed. Even more suggestive, however, is that Lily's is not an isolated case: similar retorts surface repeatedly in "The Dead," from playful rebuttal ("West Briton!"), to sharp dissent ("And

[1] See *Joyce's Voices*, in which Kenner argues that the "Uncle Charles Principle" – which states that "the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's" – is a definitive feature of Joyce's style (18).
[2] For an alternative reading of this passage, see Margot Norris, who claims these sentences do not reflect Lily's voice so much as reveal the appropriation of her idiom by a "bourgeois agenda" – namely, that of the Morkans or Conroys (479, 479n).

why can't he have a voice too?"), to moments of far meeker protest ("I hadn't a bad voice as voices go") (216, 227, 221). So marked is this phenomenon of "back answers," that it seems possible to say of Joyce's characters what Mikhail Bakhtin has said of Dostoevsky's: that their "every thought…senses itself to be from the very beginning a rejoinder in an unfinalized dialogue" (PDP 32).[3]

In this sense, "The Dead," at first glance, would appear not only to exemplify Bakhtin's theories of dialogism,[4] expounded at greatest length in *The Dialogic Imagination*, but perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this project, to reproduce some of the locutionary patterns typical of James's and Hemingway's novels, and discussed at length in the first chapter. Though the speech of Joyce's characters is less distinctively concatenated or co-constructed than that of their counterparts in *The Ambassadors* and *The Sun Also Rises*, the quantity and quality of dialogue within "The Dead" suggests a similar investment in the principle of reciprocity. Yet despite the value apparently assigned to verbal exchange, closer examination suggests that the story may also harbor a conflicting set of priorities: a conception of talk and its potentialities that differs markedly from the one that emerges in James's and Hemingway's fiction, and which emphasizes its socially divisive properties over its consensus-building ones. As the above excerpts begin to indicate, there is a comparatively high degree of dissent – of *non*-consensus – among the text's fictional speakers. But there is also the incongruous behavior of its protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, who throughout the story manifests both an un-Jamesian ineptness at dialogue and an un-Joycean aversion to it. Far from participating in the construction of a shared or collectively-normed language, then,

[3] Norris, too, analyzes the story's "back answers," but through a more focused ideological lens: she reads them as a subversive "disruption[s]" to the status quo by marginalized, largely female voices (480).
[4] As do other stories in *Dubliners*. See R.B. Kershner for further application of Bakhtin to the book.

Gabriel seems more concerned with preserving the sanctity and exceptional status of his own.

That a similar dynamic surfaces in William Faulkner's 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury* provides further evidence that modernist narrative may encompass a competing paradigm of verbal expression to the one on display in James's and Hemingway's work. A conspicuously "polyphonic" text which, like Joyce's, has often been read in the light of Bakhtin's theories,[5] *The Sound and the Fury* likewise contains, in the character of Quentin Compson, a fictional subject whose attitude toward and practice of speech show him to be, like Gabriel, forcefully opposed to dialogic ideals. Because Quentin has so frequently been compared to Stephen Dedalus,[6] his parallels to the less superficially analogous Gabriel, another artist figure and author surrogate, have been largely overlooked. Yet the characters' attitudes toward spoken language – what we might call their philosophies of speech – are uncannily alike. Both, as I will demonstrate, consistently favor monologic over dialogic modes of expression, and both, when dialogue does occur, treat it as a site of confrontation, rather than an opportunity for collaboration. At the same time, each character practices a distinct type of dialogic resistance: if Gabriel tends toward chronic speechlessness, Quentin reveals a marked preference for "subvocal speech" over the actually uttered (Richardson, *Unnatural* 61). The question is what readers are to make of these sorts of rhetorical habits, and the texts' emphasis on them.

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[5] For some of the more recent applications of Bakhtin to Faulkner's work, see Charles Hannon p. 1-17 and Richard Godden, especially the Introduction.

[6] The comparisons are almost too commonplace to count; see, for instance, Kenner, who claims they share "aesthetic" pretensions" (195) and André Bleikasten who calls Quentin Faulkner's own "portrait of the artist as a young man" (142). Philip Weinstein goes so far as to suggest that the character of Quentin was directly inspired by Joyce's Stephen, who was "already there, waiting for Falkner to rewrite him" (111).

Why should Joyce and Faulkner choose to insert into their multiply-voiced fictions characters so committed to cultivating vocal exceptionalism?

On the one hand, it is possible to read this pattern as evidence of a more general shift in literary aesthetics: from a fictional universe in which everyone speaks more or less the same way (as they do in Hemingway's and James's novels) to one in which, as Joyce reminds readers of *Ulysses,* "everything speaks in its own way" (U 7.177). But it may also reflect an important shift in thematic concerns: away from issues of community and consensus, and towards the more familiar modernist problematics of subjectivity and selfhood. Having suggested in the first chapter that James's and Hemingway's deployment of dialogue telegraphs a distinct set of ideals, here, I will argue that the very different speech habits of Joyce and Faulkner's protagonists convey divergent, even antithetical aspirations: for autonomy, rather than reciprocity, and singularity, rather than sameness or consensus. Instead of striving, in the manner of James's and Hemingway's characters, to echo their interlocutors, Joyce and Faulkner's speakers go out of their way *not* to talk like, or even to, each other; to delineate and differentiate their own voices. Extrapolating from this pattern, then, it seems possible to suggest that Gabriel and Quentin's pursuit of verbal autonomy might function to convey their corollary desire for existential, intellectual, or ontological autonomy.

That the characters' desires might reflect certain of their authors' own concerns would seem to find support in Joyce and Faulkner's biographies. Indeed, it can be tempting to overstate both the parallels between the writers' native regions,[7] and their works' indebtedness to them. Yet it seems safe to say that for both writers, "community"

[7] Woodward is reacting to this critical tendency when he cautions, "If the comparison is not carried too far, William Faulkner's relation to the South resembles James Joyce's relation to Ireland" (265). See also Philip Weinstein, p. 109-113, who extends the comparison to a reading of *Dubliners* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

constituted less a fantasy than a fact of life: one that Joyce expatriated to leave behind, and that Faulkner would increasingly resent, as he became "stuck to – or stuck with – an extended family of as many generations of relatives as happened to be around at a given time" (Woodward 268). Indeed, it is no coincidence that both "The Dead" and *The Sound and the Fury* are noticeably *noisy* texts, full of voices and talk about voices; and that both take place in the thick of "more than…nuclear" families (Woodward 268). One could go so far as to say that Faulkner and Joyce use conversation to stage the same tensions between self and other anatomized in James's and Hemingway's work, but that here, those tensions are scrutinized from an inverse angle: from the perspective of writers for whom the norm was not deracination, or a lack of relations, but a superabundance of them.

This is not to imply that Joyce and Faulkner endorse their characters' "self"-absorbed outlooks. On the contrary, both texts are ruthless in undercutting their protagonists' pretensions to specialness: Faulkner, for one, consistently undermines Quentin's differentiation from other speakers in *The Sound and the Fury*, while "The Dead" similarly disrupts Gabriel's illusion that he is free of romantic and rhetorical debts. Yet the fact that these individualist agendas are associated with "major" characters – rather than, as in *The Sun Also Rises*, a "minor" one like Robert Cohn – suggests that they may not entirely repudiate them, or want readers to repudiate them. Even more suggestive in this regard is the authors' handling of their works' conclusions, which significantly, are both dominated by the writers' "own" voices, to the exclusion of the others previously featured. If Joyce, in "The Dead's" last, lyrically concentrated passages, seems to override the story's other speakers, Faulkner follows a similar

itinerary in *The Sound and the Fury*: broadcasting, in the novel's fourth section, the kind of distinctively "Faulknerian" idiom that had not previously been aired in the text (Bleikasten, *Splendid* 187).

To suggest that two such canonically modernist authors end their work by reducing possibilities for discursive pluralism may seem anathema, particularly given how often both Joyce and Faulkner have been recruited into Bakhtin's camp. But rather than assign an aesthetic or ideological motive to this reassertion of authorial voice, my goal in this chapter is to analyze the dialectic catalyzed by its reemergence: the opposition continually dramatized in both texts between the characters' dreams of autonomy, and the textually-documented reality of rhetorical indebtedness or interdependence. That this dialectic is sustained throughout both texts may ultimately be more interesting than the authors' own ideological commitments, since it makes apparent a certain residue of sympathy for ambitions these stories would otherwise seem to disavow.

I. Os, Ands, and Buts: Back Answers in "The Dead"

Reading "The Dead," it is easy to collect evidence of Joyce's "powerfully dialogic imagination" (Kershner 18). On the one hand, there is Joyce's propensity for actual literary dialogue, which, as R.B. Kershner notes, "gradually supplants narration" as *Dubliners* progresses, allowing Joyce to show off his "miraculous ear for verbal nuance" (Kershner 95, Burgess 238). In the relatively brief span of "The Dead" alone, Joyce showcases, via his characters, an encyclopedic array of speech practices: from mimicry, imitation, and parody, to allusion, quotation, and paraphrase. If *Ulysses,* then, has been

called "a thesaurus of Bakhtinian discourse types," "The Dead" may provide a similarly comprehensive, if more condensed, index (Lodge 86).[8] Particularly suggestive is the proliferation of "ands" and "buts" at the beginnings of sentences, along with interjective "Os." While one might assume that the "buts" in the opening excerpt are specific to Lily's idiolect – perhaps a product of what Bakhtin calls "character zone"[9] – it soon becomes clear that this linguistic tic is far more widespread (DI 234). A brief survey reveals that introductory "buts" appear more than thirty times within the text, both in directly reported speech, and in *skaz*: "But she liked the review immensely," "'But you will come, won't you?'", "'But there's such a thing as a common everyday politeness,'" "But she had no right to call him a West Briton," "'But she never would be said by me'" (189, 195, 191, 194). In the aggregate, these interjections testify to the importance the text's speakers assign to the act of rejoining, of talking so that every comment is already a comment *back.*[10]

Of all the characters in the story, it is Gabriel who consistently contravenes this dialogic imperative. He does so most notably over the course of three verbal exchanges which have come to be known as the "three rebuffs," and which, though exhaustively examined, have historically been seen as indices of Gabriel's other problems – with women, with Ireland, with nationalism – rather than his problems with language, per se.[11] Recently, such "problematic" readings of Gabriel have themselves been cast as a critical

[8] Here I diverge from the view that "The Dead" is only narrowly dialogic, and that the narrative responds "preeminently to the protagonist's voice, only infrequently allowing subsidiary characters to affect its tonality" (Kershner 151).
[9] Best understood as "areas of linguistic influence surrounding characters in a novel" (Kershner 19).
[10] Though Norris, too, has noticed this pattern, I disagree with her reading of it. While she sees these "back answers" as responsive to and disruptive of certain class and cultural values – such as "prosperous and happy domesticity, social harmony, and refined culture" – I am wary of interpretations that claim these voices uniformly on behalf of a progressive ideologies or causes (480).
[11] See Melissa Free 299n for the ways in which critics have tabulated these "rebuffs." She also provides a useful overview of symptomatic interpretations of them; see also Norris and Vincent J. Chang.

problem, evidence of an ungenerous bias against a character whose very sin, in readers' eyes, has been his lack of generosity.[12] To clarify, then, I am not singling out Gabriel for punishment, so much as remarking on the extent to which the *story* singles him out: both in the way it talks about him,[13] but also in the way it makes him talk. In the course of these conversational set pieces, it becomes clear – as it did with Hemingway's Cohn – just how broadly he deviates from the diegetically-determined rhetorical norms.

The first of these conversations occurs early in the story, when Gabriel, following Lily to the cloak-room, attempts a bit of pleasantry:

> –Tell me, Lily, he said in a friendly tone, do you still go to school?
> –O no, sir, she answered. I'm done schooling this year and more.
> –O, then, said Gabriel gaily, I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?
> The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:
> –The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you. (202)

Though the exchange begins with Gabriel's "friendly" inquiry, it ends with Lily's "bitterness"; in this sense, it is paradigmatic, since nearly all of Gabriel's conversations are characterized by similar disjuncture. Here, Lily's choice of words is especially revealing. According to the OED, "palaver" connotes not only "unnecessary, profuse, or idle chatter," but also "talk intended to cajole, flatter, or wheedle" – just the sort of "talk," in other words, with which Gabriel has been (however "gaily") plying Lily. In this sense, it may not be too much to suggest that Lily's "bitterness" is at least partly directed at him, and that her response may thus qualify as a doubly "back answer": at once correcting Gabriel's misconception about "the men that is now," and consigning him to their company. But even more revealing than Lily's response may be Gabriel's lack of

[12] See Free, especially p. 277-284, for examples of this sort of critical "misprision."
[13] Free suggests that the "story's narrative technique…negatively distinguish[es] Gabriel from his fellow revelers," by "relentlessly trespassing on his – and most only his – private thoughts" (279). By this logic, however, any novel focalized through a single character is guilty of a similar transgression.

one. For the first time, but not the last, he is rendered temporarily speechless: unable to reply in words, he instead "coloured, as if he felt he had made a mistake" (202). Indeed, the narrative voice, as if colluding in his embarrassment, segues to a character description – giving Gabriel, as it were, time to regain his composure. To make up for his error, and to differentiate himself from those men interested only in "what they can get," Gabriel decides to "give": to make Lily the present of a coin for "Christmas time."[14] Yet it is clear that this financial transaction cannot compensate for his failure to sustain a verbal one.

His encounter with Molly Ivors may serve as an even better *mise-en-scène* of Gabriel's difficulties with dialogue. Teased by Molly about his recent contributions to an anti-nationalist newspaper, Gabriel is again unnerved – a fact telegraphed through a series of clichés: he "colours," once again, "tries to smile," and not for the first time, "knit[s] his brows" (188). As Anthony Burgess has pointed out of "The Dead," "where cliché occurs, cliché is intended," and in this light, the recourse to an already-used trope may signal Gabriel's paucity of language resources at the moment (206). This time, however, he cannot "buy" his way out of his difficulties, cannot "risk a grandiose phrase" or gesture with Molly, as he did with Lily. The result is to finally force an unguarded response from Gabriel:

> –O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!
> –Why? asked Miss Ivors.
> Gabriel did not answer for his retort had heated him.
> –Why? repeated Miss Ivors.
> They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:
> –Of course, you've no answer. (216)

[14] I am not the first to notice this: Free, too, notes that Gabriel, to differentiate himself, "abandons small talk and gives to, rather than takes from, the young woman whose unexpected behavior disarms him" (284).

Here, what is worth remarking is how thoroughly Gabriel fails to keep up his end of the conversation: he enters into debate only to retreat; he offers a "retort," only to clam up. His reticence leads Molly to conclude, quite rightly, that Gabriel "has no answer" – as apt a summation of his discursive behavior as any we receive within the story. He may be Molly's intellectual and social peer, but rhetorically, he cannot match her. What is interesting is that this asymmetry – the *form* of their conversation – may tell us as much about the speakers' compatibility as its content. In this sense, the lopsidedness of Gabriel and Molly's exchanges – like the parallelism of, say, Strether and Maria's – can be seen as an important metric in the text, a structural index of rapport.

All of this is not to suggest that Gabriel is not extraordinarily sensitive to discursive issues; in fact, like James's and Hemingway's characters, he is an extremely self-conscious speaker, and continually deliberates over matters of style and register. In questioning Lily, for instance, Gabriel tries at least to affect a certain sensitivity for what Bakhtin would call the listener's "apperceptive background" (DI 282). And he works even more strenuously on his after-dinner speech – "integrating in advance," to borrow Tzvetan Todorov's phrase, the reactions of his audience:

> He then took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they would recognize from Shakespeare or from the Melodies would be better…He would make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand…He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up the wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure. (203-4)

On the one hand, this passage testifies to just how concerned Gabriel is, not only with this particular speech, but with his speech and its reception, more generally. In his consideration for his "hearers" – or what Bakhtin calls the "specific conceptual

horizon…the specific world of the listener" – Gabriel shows himself continuously willing to adjust his verbal and intellectual coordinates (DI 43). Yet despite attempts to "integrate" his audience he seems almost inevitably to alienate them: to ask the wrong question, choose the wrong pitch, tell the wrong joke. What, then, are readers to make of these rhetorical misfires?

Among the most common critical explanations for Gabriel's poor conversational record has been that he cannot tolerate the speech of female interlocutors.[15] There may be something to this: for if Gabriel pretends to be the injured or "discomfited" party, it is clear he harbors lingering resentments against both partners – dismissing Lily as "the girl in the pantry," and demoting Miss Ivors "the girl, or woman, or whatever she was" (204, 217). Yet I would argue that such hostility is more byproduct than cause of his strained exchanges, and that he may be less threatened by women, per se, than by their comparatively high capacity for other-oriented talk. Gabriel, as has been seen, seems excessively affected by other peoples' words, both psychologically and physiologically. He chronically "blushes" and "knits his brows" during conversation; pages after speaking with Lily, he is "still discomposed by the girl's bitter and sudden retort"; and though it has presumably been years since his mother's death, her "slighting phrases…still rankled in his memory" (178, 187). Considered cumulatively, these comments, along with those to Molly, suggest that Gabriel is discomfited not by any particular "phrase" or "retort," but by the business of retorting – of *having to retort* – more generally.

[15] Jean Paul Riquelme's view is representative here: "Women speak in response to Gabriel's provocations throughout the story in ways that he neither anticipates nor intends, and their speech causes him discomfort" (126). See also Norris and Kershner, who takes a similarly negative view of Gabriel's "expectation of the dialogical position of women: that woman should be silent or at least provide perfect counterpoint to his own interior monologue" (144).

In short, Gabriel's problem is not that he can't talk, but that he can't talk back*:* cannot engage in the sort of reciprocal, almost Jamesian intercourse of which women, in the narrative economy of "The Dead," are generally the initiators and experts. (Men, by contrast, to judge by Mr. Browne, Freddy Malins, and Bartell D'Arcy, are far more likely to lapse into overly familiar, "sharply" spoken, or simply "rude" speech (182, 199, 212).) In this sense, it is not fair to say, as Gabriel does of himself, that he has "poor powers as a speaker"; instead, it may be more accurate to describe him as a poor *responder* (203). It is no accident, after all, that Gabriel's most "successful" rhetorical moment is the delivery of his anticipated and planned-for speech, for it is his one real occasion for monologue in a dialogue-rich world. Yet it is clear that he treats even this speech occasion less as a collaborative venture than a competition, one that can end alternately with success, or with "mistakes" or failure. Thinking of the audience for his postprandial address, Gabriel worries that "he would fail with them, just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry" (179).[16] And in his nervous concern with "his" speech, he does not truly listen to anyone else's – as Ellmann, among others, has noted.[17] While the balance of Joyce's characters may speak for the purposes of identifying common ground, Gabriel, by contrast, approaches conversation as an opportunity to self-particularize.

Framed in theoretical terms, part of the problem may be Gabriel's faith in what Bakhtin calls a "unitary language," a belief that for Bakhtin is inevitably misplaced, given that

[o]nly the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally

[16] That he conflates these two speech acts is further underscored by the fact that before beginning his chat with Lily, he "looked up at the pantry ceiling," and toward the guests milling about – making it clear that he sees this salvo with Lily as a test, or dry run for the more high-stakes performance to come (177).
[17] Ellman notes, for instance, that Gabriel "does not listen to the words" of his Aunt's song, "he only watches his wife listening" ("Backgrounds" 178-179).

> unqualified world with the first word, could have *escaped* from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege…(279)

That Gabriel (much like Stephen Dedalus) harbors a fantasy of "escape" has been persuasively documented by Vincent Pecora.[18] Yet if Gabriel entertains such verbally 'escapist' fantasies, the text repeatedly undercuts them, through its marked emphasis not only on actual "dialogue," but on what Bakhtin calls the "internal dialogism of the word." As Kristina Clark and Michel Holquist have pointed out, Bakhtinian utterance may best be understood as a war zone, the place "where struggles between centrifugal and centripetal forces are fought out in miniature" (291). In fact, even the story's most "centripetal" moments reveal evidence of discursive centrifuge. In addition to conscientious quotation (from Browning, from Shakespeare) and self-citation ("if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age"), Gabriel also registers less obvious influences (232). Worrying over his speech, for instance, "an idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say…Ladies and gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us…" (219). The only trouble is that this idea may not be "his" as much as Lily's: for his turn-of-phrase ("the generation which is now…") seems strangely indebted to Lily's ("the men that is now…"). Without attributing to Gabriel any conscious cribbing, it seems possible that Lily's idiom may, in Bakhtin's words, "overlap and infect" his own (DI 320). And that what Gabriel thinks of as purely his speech may in fact be more multiply authored.

Significantly, the text furnishes further support for this possibility: still stung by Lily's "retort," Gabriel responds by looking immediately at the "headings he had made

[18] See Pecora for a more extended discussion of the "desire to escape at all costs" that characterizes "The Dead," and indeed, much of *Dubliners* (233).

for his speech" – a gesture that implies her words may have unconsciously interpenetrated his (179). Subtle though this one instance of overlap may be, it only hints at the extent to which Gabriel's discourse is inflected not only by other characters, but by the author as well. As Richard Ellmann has pointed out, "There are several specific points at which Joyce attributes his own experiences to Gabriel," and I would suggest that he "attributes" to the character some of his own words, as well (JJ 246). A case in point may be the wording of Gabriel's final reverie: "his soul swooned softly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe…" (256). According to Ellmann, "'swooning' was a word, and an act, of which Joyce was fond" (JJ 132n). It seems possible, then, that Joyce has put "his" word in Gabriel's mouth – just as he would assign it to Stephen, who experiences a "swoon of sin" in the second chapter of of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Ellmann JJ 132n). At the same time, Joyce himself is borrowing from – issuing "rejoinders" to – a very long line of predecessors. One could even speculate that he retrieved his "swoon" from yet another source: Dante's *Inferno*. Given Joyce's well-documented fascination with the poem's fifth canto,[19] there's no doubt he would have been familiar with the famous swoon in the final *terzina*, when Dante's pilgrim – overwhelmed, as Gabriel himself is, by a tale of romance – "cadde come corpo morte caddì": "falls as a dead body falls" (V.142). By disclosing, however covertly, the intertextual orientation of this highly lyrical passage, Joyce suggests the extent to which even the most seemingly monologic moment is always already dialogized.

It is not, then, that the discursive situation within "The Dead" is so different from the one on view in *The Ambassadors* or *The Sun Also Rises*, which similarly – if far more

[19] In her study of Dantean elements in Joyce, Mary T. Reynolds refers to his "deep absorption in the poetry of Canto 5" (84) and notes that its final phrase appears in *Finnegans Wake* as "let drop as a doomsbody drops" (85).

deliberately – divulge language's "interindividual" standing: the vocal mingling of character with character, character with author, author with other author. What has changed, however, are diegetic *attitudes* toward this situation, its valence within the text and the affective response it appears to inspire. Thus, if verbal overlap was actively cultivated by the characters in James's and Hemingway's novels, it is plainly antithetical to Gabriel's desires, which revolve instead around the achievement of private, exceptional speech. While waiting for Gretta to leave the party, for instance, he "long[s] to be alone with her," and imagines a moment

> [w]hen the others had gone away, when she and he were in the room in the hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly:
> – Gretta!
> Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him… (245)

It is significant that Gabriel's fantasy does not include the sound of Gretta's voice, but focuses exclusively on the "striking" quality of his own. Unlike, say, Strether, who avidly anticipates Maria Gostrey's "impressions and conclusions," Gabriel takes no pleasure in imagining or awaiting a romantic other's response (AM 86). In this sense, his erotic fantasy seems to bespeak a more fundamental and existential one – that he might still plausibly transcend the reach of other voices; that he might find some space or "room" in which his own voice could be supreme. It is only after his climactic confrontation with Gretta that he is finally disabused of the illusions – romantic and rhetorical – under which he has been laboring. By telling him about Michael Furey, then, Gretta provides what may be the story's definitive "back answer." For what it forces Gabriel to acknowledge is not only the particulars of his wife's romantic past, but the sheer fact of its past-ness: the existence of a narrative that precedes and exceeds his. As Todorov reminds us, "it is

impossible to avoid encountering the discourse previously held upon [an] object" – the fact that it has "always already been said" (62). And here, Gabriel must face up to the fact that this "previously held" discourse – that of the dead – may be far more powerful than his own.[20]

II. "The living and the dead"

In this light, then, it is possible to suggest that one of the "lessons" of "The Dead" is to disallow the fantasy of autonomous speaking – or writing. To think that one can ever be the "single author" of one's speech is, the text implies, to be at best profoundly deluded. Pecora, for one, discerns this dilemma at the heart of both "The Dead" and *A Portrait*, in which, he claims, Joyce's use of indirect discourse enacts "Stephen's most intimate reflections: are my words my words, my thoughts my thoughts?" (Pecora 235). Similarly "The Dead," with its emphasis on both deliberate and inadvertent citation, would seem to impart an almost poststructuralist message: that, as Pecora writes (and as De Man, or Derrida, or even Bakhtin might have written) nobody is ever the "the sole owner and producer of the language and the intentional structures he or she uses" (Pecora 235). Alternatively, given Joyce's documented familiarity with Freud's writings, one might just as easily frame this message in psychoanalytic terms, and discern in Gabriel's loss of discursive control a paradigm of Freudian parapraxis.[21] The problem, however, is that such a reading reduces to a neurotic symptom a phenomenon that may be meant to telegraph a more broadly historical rather than psychologically-delimited condition.

[20] Cf. Kershner, who sees Gretta, rather than Michael, as Gabriel's primary discursive competitor; as he argues, "the two are speaking different languages, and Gretta's is the more powerful" (141).
[21] To cite one example, Ellmann reports a conversation between Joyce and Paolo Cuzzi, a friend of Italo Svevo's, on the subject of *Freud's Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in which he touched specifically on "slips of the tongue and their significance" (JJ 340).

Indeed, it is worth noting that a similar lesson to the one seemingly conveyed through the story's dialogic structures is also delivered at the level of theme. Invested as Gabriel may be in the delineation between the "new generation" and the one that is "now on the wane," it is not one that "The Dead" – a story explicitly about the porous boundaries between living and dead – will ultimately sustain. It is not surprising, of course, that Gabriel should find such a binary reassuring, since to delineate a "now" from a "then," a new generation from an old, is to insulate one's self from a line of antecedents and forerunners, those "dead and gone great ones, whose fame the world will not willingly let die" (204). Yet while Gabriel may declare his refusal to "linger on the past," it becomes clear that the past continues to linger on him: in the form not only of Michael Furey, but of a frightening horde of both "the living and the dead" (233). Hence the many readings of "The Dead" as a drama of self-loss. The final paragraph, by this logic, can be seen to enact the fear of usurped individualism: of self-hood overrun not only by diegetic others, but by the author himself. Gabriel's discourse begins to merge with Joyce's and lose its specificity, until, like the snow, it has become almost "general."

Yet in its final pages, the story also does something of an about-face. Many critics have remarked on the stylistic shift that takes place near the story's close, and noted in particular the way in which "the distinctness of Gabriel's individual voice is submerged in the concluding passages of free indirect style" (Riquelme 125). But even as Joyce seems to dramatize this theme of dispossession – of being, or having one's discourse, dispossessed – he himself makes what, in the story's final pages, could be described as a signal gesture of *re*possession. Compared to the previous portion of the story, the final section is conspicuously single-voiced: vocalized by a speaker that is putatively Gabriel,

but which now starts increasingly to resemble Joyce's. (Not to mention, Leopold Bloom's: "Yes, yes: that would happen very soon," Gabriel thinks – a phrase which forecasts Bloom's own idiom: "Be near her ample bedwarmed flesh. Yes, yes" (U 4.239).) If Joyce, then, spends the forerunning part of the story cultivating polyphony – suppressing a recognizably authorial voice, for the sake of amplifying others'[22] – in the final pages, he seems to assert it over the preceding din.

Alternatively, it is just as possible to read the final passages as *Gabriel's* bid for lyrical supremacy: his attempt to author a poem, or "song," more powerful than even Michael Furey's.[23] Even as we're told that his "own identity was fading into a gray impalpable world," it also seems to be somehow buttressed by this reverie, with its self-consciously elevated rhetoric (225). In this way, it may be possible to read the concluding paragraph, replete with snow imagery, as an expression of Gabriel's desire to overwrite – or white out – the historical palimpsest with which he has recently been confronted. And to read the final passages, more generally, as the fulfillment of a wish: the projection of an ideal of subjectivity that may belong more to Romanticism than Modernism, and more to poetry, than the novel. Whether we attribute this wish to Gabriel, or Joyce – or both – may be of less consequence than the fact of its textual presence, and the evident longing for an expurgated lyrical voice that it implies. If, as Bakhtin has suggested, "single-voiced discourse is the dream of the poets; double-voiced discourse the realm of the novel," it seems possible that the final passages of "The Dead" work to dramatize this poetic "dream" (DI 434). Or, put another way, that they give full expression to some

[22] David Lodge sees this as a Bakhtinian strategy, whereby "the author, like a ventriloquist, is a silent presence in the text, but his very silence is the background against which we appreciate his creative skill" (36).
[23] I am grateful to André Aciman for this suggestion.

fantasy of single-voicedness – equally or dually attributable to Gabriel or Joyce – that had until this point gone unarticulated or unrealized.

Such a possibility runs counter to the common wisdom about Joyce, the arch-polyphonist. But it may also have become too easy to see Joyce as the champion of historically disenfranchised voices. Recent critics have tended to focus almost exclusively on the subversive aspects of the story's vocal pluralism; Jon Thomson, for one, considers it a tool "to de-privilege the dominant forms of authority in fin-de-siècle Dublin" (80). And it's worth noting that Bakhtin's texts have been subjected to similarly idealized readings.[24] In fact, closer scrutiny of both author and theorist reveals their sustained attention to centripetal forces; and in Joyce's case, perhaps, some nostalgia for the "poetic" form, which, unlike the novel, admitted of the author's voice alone. Indeed, the lyricism of the story's conclusion makes us aware, as we perhaps haven't been in the previous, more stylistically muted and "prosaic" portion of the story, that as readers of narrative we are always dealing with distinct if interpenetrating planes of discourse. By so radically shifting the emphasis from fictional voices to a conspicuously authorial one, Joyce draws attention to the discursive hierarchy that is an inescapable if often invisible premise of novelistic prose, and at the top of which sits the author and supreme discourse-generator. In usurping Gabriel's voice, and implying that he in turn may borrow Lily's, Joyce dramatizes what is for Bakhtin the defining feature of novelistic composition: in this sense, "The Dead" doesn't just feature heteroglossia, it is to some extent also *about* it. Yet the surge of lyricism at the story's conclusion suggests that for

[24] Exemplary of this attitude is Hannon, who claims, apropos of Faulkner, that "dialogization ensures the representation of suppressed voices of dissent and confrontation…" (6).

Joyce, at least, polyphony alone does not tell the whole of either the novel's or the modern novel's story.

Of course, Joyce's subsequent work confirms that he was far from interested in promoting a revival of monologism or authorial omniscience. Regardless, what "The Dead" ultimately conveys is the understanding that ideals of expressive autonomy continue to exert a singular pull, even within the most seemingly decentralized of modernist texts. Indeed, Franco Moretti, one of the critics most sensitive to the oscillations between many- and single-voicedness in modern fiction, has argued in *The Modern Epic* that some of the 19th century's most famously polyphonic works trend surprisingly in the direction of monologue. Writing of *Moby Dick*, for instance, he describes the novel as the "story of a lost polyphony," noting both the "reduction of polyphony within the plot," and "a second reduction, at the level of discourse," thanks to "the monologic device" first of Ishmael's voice, and finally of Ahab's, which comes increasingly to dominate all others (62). The accumulated evidence of "The Dead" suggests it is possible to read Joyce's text in a similar light: as the story, if not of a "lost" polyphony, than of polyphony at some level resented, resisted, or contested.

III. "No man is himself": Cumulate Subjects in The Sound and The Fury

What Gabriel Conroy comes with some difficulty to discover in "The Dead" – that he is not the sole author of his speech, or himself – is something that within the fictional world of Faulkner's novels tends to be presented as a given. Faulkner himself was particularly emphatic on this point. As he once told an audience, in response to a question posed during his residency at the University of Virginia:

> …to me, no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him... (FIU 84).

Though the purpose of Faulkner's response was to explain his use of "the long sentence," it may serve as well to elucidate the typical state-of-being in his novels, as their style. Even a casual reader of Faulkner's work will recognize the relentlessness with which it forecloses on the sorts of distinctions – between "is" and "was," self and other, "now" and "then" – that his characters, like Gabriel, habitually insist upon. In *As I Lay Dying*, for instance, Darl will fall back on the past-present binary to syllogistically confirm his mother's absence: "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it cant be is. Can it?" (101). That the deceased Addie will speak contemporaneously with the novel's other characters is just one indication of the futility of such logic. Like Thomas Sutpen or John Sartoris, Addie Bundren is a character whose function in the novel is, among other things, to affirm, as Faulkner famously wrote in *Requiem for a Nun*, that "the past is never dead. It's not even past." Framed in more positive terms, such figures could equally be said to express "the persistent Faulknerian themes of the interconnectedness of all times, peoples, and actions" (Bunselmeyer 330).

Of all of Faulkner's novels, *The Sound and the Fury* may go the furthest in dramatizing these themes, not only at the level of plot, but in the construction of its "monologues," each of which turns out to contain a congeries of voices. The pattern has not escaped critical scrutiny. Writing of Quentin's section, for instance, André Bleikasten notes that it may qualify as more "polylogue" than monologue, since "the speech attributed to him can hardly be called his, for it is not any more than Benjy's the

discourse of a single person…many voices, past and present, are heard, and within this polyphonic ensemble Quentin's own enjoys no special privilege" (*Splendid* 86, 95). Along similar lines, Stephen Ross observes that "so much do voices dominate Quentin's consciousness that his mind seems like a room jammed with chattering people," and Arnold Weinstein notes, more broadly, that the novel succeeds in conveying the "stereophonic" quality of any single mind (Ross, *Inexhaustible* 252, Weinstein 322). Viewed through this lens, then, Faulkner's work would appear, like Joyce's, to teach the same unimpeachably polyphonic lessons.

Yet even as *The Sound and the Fury* works to dispel the illusion of autonomy, its characters – particularly Quentin, and to a lesser extent, Jason – struggle to maintain it. Like Gabriel, both Compson brothers approach conversation primarily as a site of conflict, confrontation, and *agon*. But what manifested in "The Dead" as an aversion presents, in *The Sound and the Fury*, as a more pathological condition: a fear, in Quentin's case, of contamination by the other's words; and in Jason's, as the cooption of his own words by another. Put another way, if Quentin is interested – not unlike Gabriel – in escaping the "loud world," Jason may be trying to out-match it; he is less concerned with the incursion of other people's voices, than with broadcasting his own. What these locutionary strategies have in common, however, is that all can be seen to promote certain illusions of the speaker's autonomy and "exceptional" status – illusions visibly contradicted by their lived realities. That Quentin, in particular, is invested in sustaining the fiction of his own alienation, even in the face of his manifest "interconnectedness," is a testament to how seductive this idea may be both for individual speakers, and for writers – the artist figure he metonymically represents. Indeed, the possibility that

Faulkner himself might retain some "monologic" sympathies is hinted at by the novel's conclusion, which, like "The Dead," is marked by the sudden manifestation of recognizably authorial speech.

As the novel makes clear, its fictional subjects are even less individuated, and more cumulate, than has been commonly acknowledged. Moreover, as I will argue, the evidence of this manifest intersubjectivity emerges not only on the level of characterization or theme, as previous critics have recognized, but more surreptitiously, on the level of language. Even as characters in the novel appear to diverge – ideologically, intellectually, affectively – their idioms, by contrast, continue to overlap. While scholars have commented extensively on the form and function of voice in Faulkner's work,[25] this particular phenomenon – of discursive correspondence between and among characters – is one that remains comparatively under-examined. On the one hand, this pattern of what we might call involuntary homology among the novels' speakers has clear implications for our reading of it, since it suggests that Faulkner's text may stage the obsolescence of a certain mode of autonomous subjectivity, at least as the Compson brothers envision it. But it may also have implications for the reading of modernist narrative, more generally. By challenging the assumption that fictional utterances must originate with a single, discrete speaker, the novel also undermines the usefulness of interpretive paradigms predicated on notions of ownership, attribution, and possession.

[25] Ross's *The Inexhaustible Voice* (1989) remains the definitive study of "voice" in Faulkner's fiction; see also Bleikasten and Matthews.

IV. Quentin's "Loud World"

In his essay on Faulkner, "The Last Novelist," Kenner argues that American modernists conceived of language largely as a "code," rather than, in the mode of early 20th-century European novelists, as a "heritage." What distinguishes modernist literary production in America, he suggests, is precisely

> the assumption…that language is something arbitrary, something external both to the speakers who use it and to the phenomena they hope to denote. Its norms are not imposed by history, they are elected, and if they turn out to be misleading us we can elect new ones. Frederic Henry is doing something like that when he equates such words as 'sacred, 'glory, and 'sacrifice' with discredited politicians. (*Homemade* 213)

This assumption – "that a language may be less a heritage than a code, and a code moreover that we are free to change" – has, Kenner acknowledges "been suspected in other times and places, but never so much as in America has it been felt in a whole people's bones" (*Homemade* 213). It is a compelling thesis, and one that harmonizes well with my reading of James and Hemingway's fiction in the previous chapter, in which I propose that a perceived lack of linguistic heritage emerges both as a theme (particularly in Hemingway's work, as well as in James's nonfiction writings) and, more significantly, as a possible explanation for the idiosyncratic expressive regimes of the novel's characters. One way of making sense of the strangely vague and exploratory conversations that emerge in *The Ambassadors* and *The Sun Also Rises*, in other words, is as an attempt at vetting new verbal standards; at assembling and testing some new codex of spoken forms, one un-indebted to previous historical "norms."

Yet illuminating as Kenner's theory may be for an understanding of American modernist writers, it does not seem to account for the full range of "assumptions" about language – spoken language, in particular – that surface in their fiction. Faulkner, for

instance, may perceive himself as a writer to be liberated from inherited norms, but analyses of his novels suggest he does not necessarily grant his characters a similar freedom. Unlike Frederic Henry, for instance, there is no evidence that Quentin Compson feels "free to change" language, though this does not mean he does not recognize it as "arbitrary." That Quentin may experience language more as monolithic "history" than as manipulatable "code" is forcefully attested to, for instance, by the sense of helplessness he feels in the face of his sister's "unvirgin" status. While Stephen Dedalus, say, comes independently to the conclusion that "paternity may be a legal fiction," or God, a "shout in the street," Quentin needs his father to tell him that "virginity" is a word, and a concept, "invented by men" (U 9.844, U 2.386, SF 78). Similarly illustrative is the form and shape of his monologue: though Quentin is capable of beautiful neologisms, his section of the novel reflects a preference for repeating the words of others, rather than inventing his own. A typical excerpt of his stream-of-consciousness, for instance, features no less than three other voices:

> The displacement of water is equal to the something of something. Reducto absurdum of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weight more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit*. (90)

Here, Quentin recalls words from several incongruous sources: Dilsey, T.P., his freshman-year physics class at Harvard. Like, say, Stephen or Leopold Bloom, Quentin does not bother enclosing these thoughts in quotation marks – an indication both of the banality and regularity of this sort of discursive traffic[26] but also its degree of interpenetration with Quentin's own thoughts.

[26] Though stream-of-consciousness represents an innovative formal technique, its content, as Moretti has demonstrated apropos of *Ulysses*, is often humdrum and commonplace; Bloom's monologues, for instance, follow the rhythm of "two or three stimuli, one commonplace…" (*Modern Epic* 150). See p. 149-167.

The extent to which Quentin may be overmastered by what Barthes calls "the discourse of others" – rather than, as in the case of Bloom, an opportunistic recycler of it – is further indicated by the disproportionate time the chapter devotes to hearing, an activity that seems more involuntary than it does deliberate (Barthes 186). As critics like Ross have noted, the section begins with him "hearing" his watch, Shreve's slippers, the clock; and ends, suggestively, when the clock's "last note sounded" (*Inexhaustible* 76, 178).[27] Yet the sheer proliferation of both newly perceived and recollected sounds in the chapter, coupled with the record of his attempts to silence them (as with Caddy: "you shut up you shut up you shut up are you going to shut up") implies that such listening may be an unwelcome compulsion, rather than proof of aural receptivity. If Benjy's section can be read as an extended "trying to say," one could classify Quentin's as a trying to *not* hear, to not let others (people or things) "say" (Bleikasten, *Splendid* 83). This effort culminates in the chapter's concluding passages, when Quentin confesses to his father that he would like "to isolate [Caddy] out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity…" (176). It seems clear, however, that Quentin's real ambition is to isolate himself, as much as (or more than) Caddy, whom he is using as a placeholder for his own desires. (Just as Faulkner, famously sound-phobic, could be using Quentin as a conduit for his own.[28])

Quentin's suicide may be the most acute narrative consequence of this longing for silence, since it connotes for him "that sense of water swift and peaceful above secret

[27] For more on Quentin's listening habits, see Ross, "The 'Loud World' of Quentin Compson." *Studies in the Novel* 7.2 (Summer 1975), p. 245-257.
[28] Faulkner was famously sensitive to sound; he prohibited his daughter from owning a phonograph, and drove at least one local restaurant to the "practice of unplugging the gaudy jukebox whenever Faulkner entered" (F 476).

places, felt, not seen not heard" (136). But his isolationist fantasies are reflected in his language as well as his behavior, and manifest most strongly in his documentable preference for monologic forms of expression. It may not be a stretch to say that Quentin specializes in nonreciprocal communications, like the suicide notes he "wrote…and sealed" for Shreve and his father, or the one-sided conversation he carries on with the young Italian girl, who may or may not "spika" English (81). As the chapter makes clear, Quentin consistently favors silent or socially "subordinate" interlocutors – like Deacon, or the little girl, or the man on the mule on whom he bestows a coin, in a gesture very much reminiscent of Gabriel's with the "caretaker's daughter," Lily (86):

> "Hey, Uncle," I said. "Is this the way?"
> "Suh?" He looked at me, then he loosened the blanket and lifted it away from his ear.
> "Christmas gift!" I said.
> "Sho comin, boss. You done caught me, aint you."
> "I'll let you off this time." I dragged my pants out of the little hammock and got a quarter out. "But look out next time. I'll be coming back through here two days after New Year, and look out then." I threw the quarter out of the window. "Buy yourself some Santy Claus." (87)

Like the gift of the bread to the "little sister" he meets in the bakery, this gesture is at once unsolicited and un-answered. Most importantly, it assures him of having the last and most definitive word, as his other conversations in the novel reveal he generally does not.

Indeed, the exchanges Quentin does have or recalls having had during the course of the chapter are almost uniformly contentious. Ross has pointed out that "all of Quentin's major experiences, as remembered on his last day, take the form of verbal confrontations: arguments…with Caddy, with Herbert Head, with Dalton Ames, with his father" (252). And the implication, I would argue, is that conversation is not just associated with confrontation, in Quentin's mind, but is actually *synonymous* with it. It is

a hypothesis which his observations throughout the day appear to corroborate. Looking through the window of the watch repair shop, for instance, he imagines each of the clocks "contradicting each other," each "with the same assertive and contradictory assurance"; later, listening to the young boys fishing at the bridge, he reports that "they all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient…" (85, 117). The equivalence between speech and conflict seems so strong that Quentin can even confuse the fantasy of "shooting Herbert" with "shooting his voice" – a phrase so ambiguous it allows readers to imagine both Quentin figuratively "shooting" his own voice "through the floor," or alternatively, Herbert, metonymically reduced to his voice, being "shot" (105, 111-112). Far from the benevolent force it was in James, then, or the powerful index of worth it remained in Joyce, the speaking voice in Faulkner's text has become an instrument of violence. It is worth noting that Faulkner himself was notably ambivalent on the subject, by turns "honor[ing] the speaking voice" in his novels, and excoriating it in other personal writings (Matthews 28). "'What the hell can I do?'" Faulkner wrote in a letter to Malcolm Cowley. "'Goddamn it I've spent almost fifty years trying to cure myself of the curse of human speech, all for nothing…'" (SLWF 234). He expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to Hemingway: "I have believed for years that the human voice has caused all human ills and I thought I had broken myself of talking…" (SLWF 251-2).

It is a conviction Quentin – who has largely "broken [him]self of talking" – seems at least partly to share. Indeed, the negative connotations that accrue around "human speech" in his chapter make it possible to see his abstinence from it as a strategic, even self-defensive maneuver. As John Mepham argues in his account of modernist speech

representation, "stream of consciousness and interior monologue" should be classified not just as "literary techniques," but also as "psychological strategies," adopted in response to new historical realities. More specifically, he argues, "they are what happens when the framework of intersubjectivity…the framework which makes verbal communication and mutual readability among people possible, are for whatever reason absent" (*Psychoanalysis* 118) On the one hand, *The Sound and the Fury* would appear to illustrate perfectly the situation Mepham describes – one in which the conditions enabling "verbal communication and mutual readability among people" have broken down, or becomes "absent." Yet Quentin's gravitation towards the subvocal may have less to do with historical contingencies than with personal ones. Like Mepham, readers of Faulkner have frequently considered how the characters' soliloquized chapters might reflect their psychological states: Bleikasten sees Jason's and Quentin's sections, for instance, as illustrative of "how alienation works within the recesses of a mind" (*Splendid* 173). Yet it seems equally possible to see the two brothers' confinement to their own consciousnesses not simply as a symptom of some preexisting condition (much as Benjy's silence is the product of congenital muteness) but also as its *cause*. Put another way, Quentin's abstention from meaningful intercourse – his insistence on reporting and rehearsing past dialogue, rather than engaging in it – may indeed derive from some underlying sense of "alienation." But it might equally catalyze and sustain it. If, as Nancy Armstrong has argued, "the modern individual could only define him- or herself as such in opposition to an engulfing otherness…that obliterated individuality," then this kind of staged dichotomy – between internal silence and an external, "engulfing" loudness – is for Quentin perhaps a self-sustaining fiction (25).

That it *is* a fiction is made evident by the number of voices that populate what is putatively his consciousness. But even as the distinctions between Quentin's voice and those of competing egos erode, as they do especially in the section's concluding pages,[29] it is worth noting that inquits – those speech tags identifying speakers – remain to the very last, albeit in somewhat vitiated form. And their vestigial presence suggests just how committed Quentin may be to the notion of authorship, of ownership over one's language. Even when all other formalities have been abandoned, the differentiation between subjects appears to remain, for Quentin, of paramount significance:

> and I don't believe I am serious and he I think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldn't have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and I wasn't lying I wasn't lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth… (176)

A striking example of this phenomenon – the improbable persistence of speech tags in otherwise unconventional discursive environments – can be found in "The Bear," though there, the space that elapses between speakers raises different questions, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Like the habitual suppression of antecedents in Faulkner's work, the retention of speech tags when all other dialogue formatting conventions have been foregone raises certain questions, since both habits seem to "belong" to so many of Faulkner's speakers. In particular, the lingering presence of inquits implies that the question of "who is speaking?" retains importance for Faulkner's speakers, and that its obfuscation – however great a source of interest for narrative theorists – is for the novel's subjects a source of concern.

[29] When asked why he began to "omit capitals on the names and on 'I' in the last part of Quentin's section," Faulkner responded, "Because Quentin is a dying man, he is already out of life, and those things that were important in life don't mean anything now" (FIU 18).

Jason is, if anything, more invested than his brother in logics of ownership and attribution – if not, like Quentin, for the purposes of safeguarding his voice, than in the hopes of publicizing it. Especially revealing of his self-promotional agenda is the exchange with Dilsey he has later in the novel: "Did you hear me?" Jason said. "I hears you," Dilsey said. "All I been hearin, when you in de house" (278). If Quentin is anxious about hearing, one could say that Jason is infinitely more concerned with *being* heard.[30] In the case of Caroline Compson, this priority has assumed such prominence that it seems to have completely occluded her ability *to* hear, or to pretend any interest in the words or responses of others: "Dilsey, she called, without inflection or emphasis or haste, as though she were not listening for a reply at all. Dilsey" (267). Jason may be no more receptive to other peoples' speech, but he is at least still desirous of their recognition of his own. Particularly revealing, here, is his habit of self-citation and attribution: "Like I say blood always tells" (238), "Because like I say blood is blood and you cant get around it," (243) "Well like I say they never started soon enough with cutting…" (263), "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (180). As Ross has recognized, this pattern of "incessant 'I says' serves as one of many symptoms of egotistical self-assertiveness" (84). But it reveals something about Jason's philosophy, as well as his psychology: his belief that these words – that words in general – can belong to him, and that language in general be owned and laid claim to.

The irony, of course, is that the very phrases Jason claims as "his" tend to be the most clichéd, and thus, the least attributable to him. In this sense, his treatment of speech,

[30] It is perhaps for this reason that "his" section of the novel creates the most powerful impression of being spoken, even though it is "strictly speaking pure and uncommunicated *interior* discourse," since "many of Jason's characteristic verbal mannerisms…evoke a strong sense of communication, as if he were speaking out loud" (Ross *Inexhaustible* 77).

like Gabriel's, precipitates the Bakhtinian insight that the language we think of as most "ours" may not be. Yet far more interesting, in both cases, is the speakers' persistent belief that it *is*. Put another way, more significant than the truth content of Jason's authorship claims is the fact that he persists in making them, that he thinks it necessary to make them. In this way, it becomes possible to see Jason's habit of possessive speaking as a symptom of his fear of *dis*possession: of his suspicion that one's words, without such prophylactic measures, would be subject to theft and cooption – that is, to precisely the kind of circulation that the novel reveals to be taking place.

V. "He smell hit," "I sees hit"

In fact, a close analysis of the novel suggests that challenges to the characters' autonomy are even more systemic and deeply embedded than previous studies have suggested. Many critics, of course, have previously mapped similarities between, say, Quentin and Benjy, or Quentin and Jason. Daniel Singal, for one, suggests the brothers share "the calamity of being a Compson in a modern world," though they react to it differently: "Quentin by clinging to his inherited identity, Jason by violently repudiating his" (Singal 133). Bleikasten goes even further, arguing – apropos of the brothers' similar hostility to "others"– that "Jason turns out to be in many ways Quentin's homologue" (151). Yet if scholars have discerned these sorts of thematic continuities, fewer have recognized the symmetries that emerge on the level of language, among instances of character thought and speech. Bleikasten, again, is one of the few to acknowledge the prevalence of such locutionary coincidence; speaking of the novel's first two sections, he notes that "linguistically, there are obvious similarities between the two monologues…

especially when Quentin records 'present' actions and perceptions, he often uses strings of one-kernel sentences strongly reminiscent of Benjy' speech" (92). But he does not attest to the far more diffuse pattern of "similarities" among the novels' putatively differentiated speakers – similarities that challenge not only the characters' ideals of autonomy, but the interpretive conventions of speaker "differentiation" and "identification" so crucial to reading practices.[31]

An indication of how endemic such linguistic synchronies may be emerges in the opening passages of the novel's second section, when Quentin reports: "Through the wall I heard Shreve's bed-springs and then his slippers on the floor hishing" (77). Though the sentence's content may be specific to his life at Harvard, its structure cannot help but recall the opening line of the novel, and of his brother's chapter: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting" (3). Both begin with the same adverbial phrase ("Through the…"), followed by a report based on sensation ("I heard…", "I could see…."), and a concluding, aspirated gerund ("hishing," "hitting"). And while Quentin's formulation is clearly marked by more precise diction ("bed springs"), there is actually not as much distance between their respective vocabularies as may initially appear: earlier, Benjy alludes to his own "slipper," and to the "hissing" – if not "hishing" – of the fire Jason builds (73, 72). Without overstating the importance of such parallels, it nonetheless seems possible to suggest that Benjy and Quentin's idioms have more in common than the novel's conventions – its careful delineation of "speakers," the implied privacy of characters' thoughts – would seem to make possible. In fact, there is a surprising degree of sameness to be documented among the novel's ostensibly distinct speakers. When Benjy, for instance, reports that "we went through the

[31] The terms are Ross's; see Chapter 2 of *The Inexhaustible Voice* for further explication of them.

rattling leaves," (6) or notices Caddy's "book-satchel swinging and jouncing behind her," (6) or, while watching a fire, observes "T.P. squatting in his shift tail in front of it, chunking it into a blaze" it is not necessarily easy to delineate the "idiot's" thoughts from his highly intelligent brother's (28). Conversely, some of Quentin's comments come surprisingly close, in spontaneity or naïveté, to Benjy's: "Her fingers closed about them, damp and hot, like worms" (127), "my nose could see gasoline" (173), "A sparrow slanted across the sunlight" (79). There are general differences: Quentin favors the past perfect, Benjy, the present or past progressive. But even this distinction doesn't hold up; thus Benjy can report "I leaned my face over where the supper was. It steamed up on my face," and Quentin, "Then the curtains breathing out of the dark upon my face, leaving the breathing upon my face" (24, 174).

Perhaps most suggestive in this regard is the surprisingly wide circulation of a phrase that, within the diegesis, is consistently associated with and even in some sense "attributed" to Benjy, despite his muteness. Early in the novel, Benjy learns of Damuddy's death by smell: "I could smell it," Benjy thinks, and he repeats the phrase twice for emphasis: "I could smell it," "But I could smell it" (34). Intuiting what has happened, T.P. reports that "He smell hit," just as Dilsey will recognize when "he smellin hit": phrases that, while reflective of the speakers' idiolects, come so close to Benjy's in their syntactical construction that they almost seem to qualify as jointly authored (34, 288). Later, Quentin recalls his brother' realization-by-smell, in T.P's words: "Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit*" (90). And Jason, too, eventually recalls the episode, reflecting that Benjy "cannot hear it unless he can smell it" (174). What is striking, though, is that only a page before, Jason has already adopted the

phrase for himself: having filled his car with gasoline – a smell he loathes – he has washed his face and hands, "but even then I could smell it" (172). A short time later, he reports, "I turned out the light and went into my bedroom, out of the gasoline, but I could still smell it" (172). Though the phrase itself is unexceptional; and though its submersion into these longer sentence dilutes it, there is no denying this unacknowledged instance of verbal symmetry between the two brothers. Nearly as striking is that Reverend Shegog, during his sermon, produces his own iteration on this formula: "I sees hit, Breddren! I sees hit!" (296). Indeed, one starts to find the phrase surfacing inter-, as well as intra-textually, as when Bayard Sartoris, near the beginning of *The Unvanquished*, reports, "Then I began to smell it again" (UNV 10).

There are differences, of course, between these instances of "smelling" and "seeing" it, or "hit." What is more interesting than any single instance of this expression, however, is the cumulative effect of its reiteration. For in distributing so widely a phrase theoretically associated with one character, Faulkner implies that not only this construction, but constructions more generally may be less characteristic of any single speaker than of a larger group, region or culture. (Though I would point out that, like James, Faulkner was not replicating existing dialects, so much as creating a literary one specific to the diegetic space of his novels.) The extent to which the novel's community of speakers may share locutions in common is evidenced by something as banal as interpellative formulations; both Caroline and Dilsey – and indeed, speakers throughout his work – use the same, seemingly redundant summons: "You, Luster!" "You, Jason!" Then, too, there is the imperative order to "hush," issued at least once by nearly every character over the course of the novel. Ross, noticing this pattern, has argued that

"Faulkner seems more concerned with typical speech habits than with how a particular utterance sounds" (75). But this shift in focus, from "particular" utterances to "typical" ones (or, in Saussure's terms, from *parole* to *langue*) would seem to have even broader implications than he implies. In fact, this change in emphasis may necessitate a corollary change in critical approach: since the question becomes no longer who is speaking in a fictional text, but rather, whether it *matters* who is speaking. In a world where a white Harvard student "talks like a colored man" and a black preacher "sounds like a white man," and where an aging matriarch speaks like the household servant, how can speech, the novel implicitly asks, act as a reliable index of identity? (120, 293) And the answer, increasingly, is that it cannot. In this sense, Faulkner's longtime reader and sometime friend, Phil Stone, was prescient in offering the insight (intended as a criticism) that "all the characters [in his novels] talked like William Faulkner" (F 465).

Even more suggestive may be the extent which not just voices, but qualities, become progressively undifferentiated as the novel proceeds. With increasing frequency, Faulkner assigns the same, highly particularized epithets to at least two characters – often, in what seems like meaningful proximity. At the start of the novel's fourth section, for instance, he describes Dilsey's paunch as "almost dropsical" (265) then notes that Benjy's "skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too…." (274). The Reverend Shegog's voice is described as "inflectionless," only shortly after Caroline calls to Dilsey, "without inflection" (293, 267). Both the Reverend Shegog and Benjy are respectively "emptied" or "empty" (284, 284). And then there is "Ben's gaze empty and untroubled," which mimics that of the statue of the Confederate soldier, which "gazed with empty

eyes" (SF 320, 319).[32] Both descriptions, in turn, recall Jason's evocation of Caddy's gaze: "she looked at me then everything emptied out of her eyes and they looked like the eyes in statues blank and unseeing and serene" (163). Then, there is the fact that several characters share the same names – Jason, Quentin, Maury – a practice that may be as much an index of intersubjectivity as it is of heredity.

Indeed, the attribution of a single characteristic or name to more than one fictional subject hints at the potentially disconcerting possibility that Sharon Cameron raises in *Impersonality*: namely, that especially in modernist texts, literary "character does not seem to be an autonomous or independent entity…rather, [characters] share traits we might have thought exclusively the property of one or the other" (181). Based on the tendency for such "traits" to cluster in the novel, one could go so far as to speculate that Faulkner treats them as infectious, as though one character could be "contaminated" with the qualities of another. The Compsons' decision to change Benjy's name would seem to stem from the related superstition that negative qualities, in particular, might be shared, or at least communicated between name-sakes. But it is Dilsey who lends this idea the greatest support. When Luster tells her that the Compsons are "funny folks," and that he's "Glad [he] aint none of them," she corrects him: "'Aint't none of who?' Dilsey said. 'Lemme tell you something, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em'" (276).

The implication is not only that identity – like language – may be more "inherited" than "freely chosen," to return to Kenner's terms. But more specifically, that identity is a product of proximity and familiarity, more than the relatively nebulous criteria of race, family, or history. It is worth noting that this idea almost directly

[32] Singal also notes this doubling, but reads it as proof of the significance of Confederate imagery (143).

contradicts Walter Benn Michael's thesis that American identity in the early 20th Century had become an "ambition," something to be invented, earned, and selectively bestowed (3). Here, the opposite seems true. Identity is not a function either of "blood," as Jason and Caroline would have it; or of carefully policed nativist conventions, as Benn Michaels suggests. Instead, it is the almost involuntary result of shared experience: of something as banal as propinquity and routine. Thus, while the Easter Sermon is generally regarded as the apotheosis of intersubjective experience in the novel, the prevalence of both verbal and characterological sharing in the novel suggests that subjectivity isn't just something overcome in exceptional or utopian moments. In fact, its contravention may be the default state of affairs, despite the generalized resistance of the novels' subjects to accept that. In this sense, the novel may offer less a "critique of subjectivity itself," as Arnold Weinstein has suggested, than a critique of the personal or cultural attachment to an ideal of subjectivity in its most romantic and self-contained forms (243).

At the same time, however, Faulkner does not disavow the enduring power of this ideal. Like "The Dead," *The Sound and the Fury* ends with a surprisingly monologic flourish: a return of "Faulkner's rhetoric," which "previously held in check…bursts forth in full flower" (Bleikasten, *Splendid* 187). If the first three sections, then, have historically been "cast as soliloquies," the fourth seems to represent a different, largely authorial order of subjectivity (Lester 143). In its emancipation from any particular character psychology, the section seems to reflect a fantasy of literary autonomy – the sort of autonomy that Faulkner claims, at least, to have achieved during the composition of the novel. As biographer Jay Blotner has noted, "the writing was apparently an

experience of unparallelled intensity for him," as Faulkner would confirm in the introduction to the novel:

> "One day I seemed to shut a door….between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can make myself a vase like that which the old Roman kept at his bedside and wore the rim slowly away with kissing it." (Introduction 709)

What Faulkner describes is his achievement as an artist of those interrelated desires – for privacy, independence, autonomy – that he assigns to (but leaves unfulfilled in) his novel's characters. The image of the "shut…door" is particularly suggestive, since it in many ways bespeaks a Quentin-like desire to "isolate" himself, and his creations, from "the loud world." Practically speaking, this sort of isolation would become an increasingly elusive goal for Faulkner, as he assumed the burden of caring for family members "most of whom," as he put it, "I don't like and with none of whom I have anything in common" (F 438). But in his own narrative, Faulkner would always maintain that *The Sound and the Fury* allowed him an unprecedented measure of artistic (if not personal) independence. The difference, he claimed, was that during the novel's composition, "I believed then that I would never be published again…I had stopped thinking of myself in publishing terms" (F 220). Not only did he write the book, then, "with a sense of liberation from any practical constraints," but with a more general sense of liberation from any *response* (F 212). However accurate or apocryphal his assessment of the novel's production, what is most striking is Faulkner's insistence that he wrote the novel not with an eye to public reception, but with a sense of indifference to it. Thus the "non-response" that was such a painful reality for James (and would be for Faulkner, as well) may in the earlier stages of his career also have served as a salutary fiction (Edel

663). And thus Faulkner succeeded in retroactively constructing for himself the sort of expressive scenario of which Quentin, in particular, could only dream.

Chapter 3
The Paradoxical Voice: Faulkner and Woolf's Implausible Speech

Near the beginning of *Absalom, Absalom!,* as Mr. Compson recounts to Quentin the series of improbable events that culminated in Rosa Coldfield's engagement to Thomas Sutpen, he imagines the impression Sutpen must have made on the much-younger Rosa. For her, he surmises, Sutpen must always have been

> that ogre-face….seen once and then repeated at intervals…like the mask in a Greek tragedy interchangeable not only from scene to scene but from actor to actor and behind which the events and occasions took place without chronology or sequence and leaving her actually incapable of saying how many separate times she had seen him for the reason that, waking or sleeping, the aunt had taught her to see nothing else. (AA 49)

The figure is in many ways an instructive one for readers of Faulkner's novel, whose multifarious speakers appear over the course of the narrative, to adopt, if not an "interchangeable" mask, than what we might think of as an equally interchangeable or invariable *voice*. Not only do the novel's diegetic speakers – and its extradiegetic one – make use of nearly identical idiom; they also appear to draw from the same rhetorical inventory. Thus, for instance, the "ogre-face" surfaces not only in Mr. Compson's imagination, but in Quentin's and Rosa's, who allude on separate occasions to Sutpen as an "ogre-shape," and the subject of an "ogre-tale" (8, 15) In this sense, the excerpt above would seem to constitute something like what Paul de Man describes as an "allegory of reading": a trope *of* reading, and one that can also generate a reading. In other words, Mr. Compson's metaphor might serve to illuminate not only the frightening physiognomy of a single character, but to the similarly monstrous (because monstrously similar) aspect of the entire novel. Like the actors in a "Greek tragedy," the narrators of Faulkner's novel

appear to share among themselves a single stylized prop: a voice that improbably remains the same "not only from scene to scene but from actor to actor."

This aspect of the novel has hardly gone unremarked by commentators, for whom the undeviating sameness of character speech has become something of a commonplace. Gerald Langford provides an early and authoritative account of this phenomenon when he notes that "[n]o matter which narrator is speaking the style throughout the book remains uniformly poetic and intricately structured" (21). Stephen Ross argues similarly that while many "have emphasized differences among the narrators, finding each discourse to be motivated by the psychic needs of the storyteller," any distinctions they may find are overshadowed by the "the overwhelming consistency of an oratorical Overvoice" (*Inexhaustible* 220). Along comparable lines, Peter Brooks speaks of the "transindividual voice" that, like Ross's "oratorical Overvoice," pervades Faulkner's text, which he dubs a "duet for four voices" (294, 351). And John T. Matthews, further anatomizing the "collective voices" of the novel, confirms that they all display the same, highly unlikely combination of "baroque prolixity…nightmarish breathlessness, and…Latinate polysyllabism" (99).

Given the widespread recognition of vocal homogeneity in *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, there have been surprisingly few attempts to consider its implications, either within the novel, or, even more significantly, beyond it. Far more frequent have been attempts to rationalize it. In a recent article, for instance, Jeanne Follansbee dismisses the use of "similar diction and syntax to represent each person's speech" as less a deliberate aesthetic technique, than at least partly a byproduct of Faulkner's compositional method: "the result of [his] practice while writing to move portions of the novel from one narrator

to another" (84).[1] And Ross seems to similarly curtail the potential resonance of this feature when he suggests – albeit persuasively – that the characters' monotonous and long-winded speeches might reflect the cadences of Southern oratory (*Inexhaustible* 212). In so doing, Ross and Follansbee are representative of other critics who seem to delimit the significance of this textual phenomenon by situating it within what Milan Kundera has referred to as the "miniature context" of an author's biography (269). By contrast, my goal in this chapter will be to explore what Faulkner's staging of figural speech might tell us not just about this novel, but about the modernist novel, and its uses of dialogue, more generally.

To this end, I'd like to consider the invariability of character voice in *Absalom, Absalom!* alongside a parallel instance of the phenomenon that arises in a roughly contemporaneous work: Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel, *The Waves*. Although there is no extant evidence that Faulkner ever read the novel, significantly, Woolf herself gives us some reason to believe he had. As Mark Hussey reports, "Woolf…noted in her diary on June 1, 1937, that William Faulkner had 'most intelligently (&highly)' praised *The Waves*," even though "no mention by Faulkner of the novel has been traced'" (Hussey 356). It is therefore at least possible to speculate, if not confirm, that Faulkner may have had Woolf's narrative in mind as he constructed his own, which like *The Waves*, is organized around a series of putative – and putatively differentiated – speeches that not only don't seem to have been spoken, but which convey the strong impression of having *not been spoken* by the same speaker. Such similarities are clearly reflected in critical assessments of Woolf's novel, which dovetail remarkably with those of Faulkner's. As

[1] As Pamela Dalziel points out, there is a similar critical tendency to "reconcile" perceived narrative contradictions, like discursive ones, by "attributing 'inconsistencies' to the narrators' limited viewpoints or (usually as a last resort) to Faulkner's carelessness" (277).

Eric Warner put its, the six characters in *The Waves* – like those in *Absalom, Absalom!* – "all speak the same language" and "all employ the same 'poetic' devices of parallelisms, repetitions, metaphorical passion, elisions…often sharing the same key phrases or words"; in short, "[a]n undifferentiated high style unites them all" (79-80, qtd Hussey 70). Like Faulkner, then, Woolf "makes no attempt to distinguish the style of one speaker from that of any other," and thus, creates the similar impression that her novel's fictive speakers are less fully embodied subjects than "characters manqué" (Graham 95).

At first glance, then, these two texts might just appear to take to more radical extremes the tendency discerned in the previous chapter, through an analysis of Faulkner's earlier work, *The Sound and the Fury*, and Joyce's "The Dead": the willingness of early 20th-century authors to collapse distinctions among character idiom, and in so doing, challenge the principles of linguistic differentiation that have been a hallmark not only of the realist novel, but, as Hugh Kenner argues of Joyce's work, the modernist one as well. What further distinguishes *The Waves* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, is that the refusal to differentiate among figural voices is coupled, in each of these novels, with an equally pronounced insistence on attributing them – on *appearing* to differentiate them. In other words, both texts present as compositionally distinct utterances that would otherwise – were it not for formatting and punctuation – read as indistinguishable. Indeed, there is very little talk in these novels that goes un-attributed: Woolf presents the entirety of the novel's nine episodes as direct speech, allocated to one of six speakers; and Faulkner – though a larger portion of the text derives from an omniscient source – assigns the vast majority of it to one of the four character narrators. This reliance on direct discourse is especially striking given how proportionately *less* it

featured in the authors' previous works, which offer, by contrast, some of literature's best known examples of free indirect and fully internalized discourse: Mrs. Dalloway's stream-of-consciousness, Benjy's interior monologue, Addy Bundren's posthumous soliloquy. And in each case, it is often only the presence of certain textual features – primarily, the use of quotation marks, and the regular occurrence of speech tags – that recall attention to the putatively "spoken" status of what might otherwise appear to qualify as internalized discourse.[2] There is, then, a curious paradox at the heart of both novels. If these novels convey the general sense of having made "the demarcation between characters' voices…less rigid," much in the manner of the texts discussed in the second chapter, structurally, they still insist – conspicuously and continuously – on precisely this kind of demarcation (Thomas, CCN 82). In this sense, these narratives might actually be said to dramatize *two* paradoxes: by presenting as speech what is manifestly not spoken; and by assigning to distinct speakers a voice that gives every sign of belonging to all.

The question is what to make of this paradoxical presentation of speech, and the novels' oscillating investments in at once disambiguating and conflating character voice. In contrast to the proprietary attitudes toward speech discussed in the previous chapter – and which emerged from a comparative analysis of *The Sound and the Fury* and "The Dead" – the interest in pairing voices with 'owners' appears here to originate less with fictional subjects than the authors themselves. Thus, if the monological impulse evident in those earlier texts seem motivated by the "psychic needs" of their speakers – by characters like Gabriel, Quentin, or Jason, who sought to safeguard the illusion of their

[2] This fact is widely noted among Woolf's commentators, in particular; see J.W. Graham, who notes how "rigorously" Woolf "follows two conventions for rendering direct speech: the use of 'said' to indicate a speaker, and the use of quotation marks to set off the speech itself" (95).

own verbal sanctity – in these, the demarcation of characterological utterance becomes a far more obvious event within these novels, making it difficult to read as anything other than the work of some supra-diegetic agency. No longer explainable with reference to character psychology alone, then, such a pattern presents itself as the work of some organizing intelligence, the product of explicit and highly deliberate *design*.[3] (That this design, in turn, can be discerned in two texts has the effect of amplifying the significance of what, considered singly, might more readily be dismissed as idiosyncrasy.) Indeed, this sort of systematic contradiction seems to raise questions both for theorists of narrative, and of modernist narrative in particular. Why, given the homogeneous quality of these figural utterances, go through the motions of differentiating them? And why represent as speech language so clearly coded, by its high degree of stylization, as non-spoken?

On the one hand, it would be possible to position the novels' highly stylized talk as the natural outcome of a larger literary historical trend: the telos of dialogue's anti-realist trajectory during the 19th and 20th centuries. While the Victorian novel evinced the "growing demand for realism" among contemporary audiences and placed an attendant pressure on writers to produce mimetic and "true-to-life" speech, the 20th century witnessed significant changes in the literary representation of dialogue, as I discuss at greater length in the introduction (Chapman 10, 3). Thus, if realist dialogue-writing reached its apex, as many have argued, in the work of Dickens, novelists of the early 20th century, as Bronwen Thomas has demonstrated, not only "introduce new speech varieties," but began to "experiment with dialogue in a more overtly self-conscious way"

[3] That these techniques do represent deliberate choices is further substantiated by what we know to be the highly self-conscious construction of these works; as Graham notes, for instance, *The Waves* was Woolf's "most laboriously wrought book" (103).

(81). Indeed, at the risk of overstating the modernists' "break" with narrative tradition, their construction of dialogue seems often less indebted to immediate fictional predecessors than to older and non-novelistic modes of representing speech. The structure of talk in *The Waves*, for instance, has frequently been compared to that of the chorus or soliloquy[4] (Woolf herself referred to her "dramatic soliloquies"), while James and Hemingway's dialogues, discussed in the first chapter, appear at times to owe more to the classical dramatic technique of *stichomythia* than to more recent literary custom (WD 156). Similarly, some have suggested that the expressive strategies on display in both *Absalom* and *The Waves* resemble those of mythical or Biblical speakers more than novelistic ones, since they display a similar proclivity for declamatory monologue, a tendency, as Lennard Davis puts it, to "break into speeches rather than engage in speech" (172).

By this logic, one could conclude that Faulkner and Woolf, in keeping with the familiar account of modernist practice, were intent on disrupting the mimetic presentation of character, which so crucially depends on the perceived verisimilitude and "appropriateness" of their speech.[5] In other words, by "breaking up…the connection between voice and presence" – as the texts, despite their meticulous habit of attribution, seem constantly to threaten to do – they could be seen to mount a critique of not just the realist project, but the Western metaphysical one (O'Donnell 2).[6] If, as Ross has argued, apropos of Faulkner's work, mimetic voice has traditionally served in fiction as "an index

[4] Critics have often resorted to generic reassignment to make sense of *The Waves*; see Hussey p. 348-362 for a summary of the ways the text has alternately been positioned as drama, lyric, and "anti-novel."
[5] Ross cogently describes the mutually reinforcing role of speech and character in sustaining mimetic illusion: "character governs appropriate speech, and character in turn devolves from speech" (85).
[6] See Matthews for more on the ways in which Faulkner's work "challenges the consequences of the 'metaphysics of presence'" (Matthews 30).

of personal identity," than a manifestly *un*mimetic voice, of the sort on display in these texts, would seem to function antithetically to abstract or occlude identity. In this light, the novels' implausible or "unspeakable" discourse, to use Ann Banfield's term, could be seen as a corrective, a "remedy," as literary historian Jonathan Rée puts it, "for the maladies of ontology" (Rée 1049).

Rather than attempt to assign this feature of the novels such a diffuse and totalizing agenda, however, this chapter will argue that Faulkner and Woolf's paradoxical deployment of character voice might in fact represent a more targeted critique of literary convention. My specific contention will be that these novels, in so distorting the structure of novelistic conversation, call attention to its status *as* a structure – one with a particular history and ideology, and which has served to reproduce the genre's preference for and orientation around the fully particularized subject.[7] By making use of those formal devices most commonly used to differentiate among characters – quotation marks, speech tags, proper names – even as they showcase their *failure* to differentiate, Faulkner and Woolf appear to be at once vividly highlighting and radically questioning the role of the individual as the organizing principle of the novel. Put another way, these novels preclude dialogue from functioning as it normally does in fiction, "to denote individuality or even eccentricity" (Fogel 56). And in so doing, in mishandling dialogue, they call attention both to the ways direct speech *has* been used in fiction, and to the various, other ways that it might. In this sense, the presentation of character voice in *The Waves* and *Absalom, Absalom!* constitutes at once a travesty of and a commentary upon conversation as it had been previously instantiated in the novel.

[7] A long tradition of novel theory rests behind this assertion; see Ian Watts for an authoritative account of the "primacy of individual experience in the novel" (11).

I. Quotation and Accountability

In suggesting that these novels deploy dialogue for rhetorical purposes, I am to some extent diverging from existing theories of fictional speech, which, as discussed in the introduction, have stressed its primarily subordinate functions in the novel: "to further plot, to develop character, to describe setting or atmosphere, to present a moral argument…or to perform any combination of these purposes" (Page 55). Among literary theorists, Bakhtin is one of the few who has recognized and devoted attention to the capacity of quoted speech to express authorial commentary or critique. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (which appeared shortly before the publication in 1936 of *Absalom, Absalom!*) he grants direct discourse a more variegated range of aesthetic or poetic functions. Even in texts where character speech – or "represented or objectified discourse" – appears singularly uniform, there is always, he notes, the possibility of a divergent voice, since "the author may…make use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own. In one discourse, two semantic intensions appear, two voices" (189).

It has been a frequent practice, given the homogeneous texture of the discourse in *Absalom* and *The Waves*, to read the discourse as the authors' own, rather than as "someone else's" – and as a result, to elide its doubly intentional status. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, each of these novels not only contains this second level of "intentionality" in its quoted discourse, but actively invites its recognition. This is not to suggest that Woolf and Faulkner were exceptional in choosing to exploit dialogue as a vehicle of critique; the difference, as I'll show, was their target. Flaubert, for one, was a

pioneer in the art of ironic or doubly intentional quotation, though he is far more frequently cited for his mastery of free indirect (rather than direct) discourse. In his novels, it is generally the content of a character's utterance that does the satirical work, and the object of fun is generally the speaker him- or herself. As Stirling Haig explains,

> citation was always one of Flaubert's satirical moves: he thereby displayed, 'showcased' stupidity. The procedure is prophylactic. The quotation marks enclosing bits of Homais' speech are like forceps with which the narrator aseptically handles infectious asininities, the italics like a dye-stain identifying the diseased tissues of gangrenous speech. (Haig 18)

What is especially striking in Haig's account of Flaubertian style is his observation that the quotation marks in *Madame Bovary* function as "forceps," a means by which Flaubert safely 'handles' character speech, so as to prevent its contamination with his (or his narrator's) own. Even more striking is the proximity of Haig's image to one Daniel Ferrer evokes in his study of *The Waves*, in which, he notes, quotation marks function as a "sanitary cordon," which may on occasion become permeable, with the result that "[t]he interstitial narrative is no longer safe from contamination by the subjectivity of the monologues" (92). Like Haig, then, Ferrer presupposes both the prophylactic quality of quotation marks, and more suggestively, the *need* for such prophylaxis in the first place: the perceived necessity of preventing not only cross-character contamination, but the spread of 'asininity' – or even just "subjectivity" – from character to narrator. Literary historian Jonathan Rée expands on this line of thinking in his analysis of oral citation practices, where he compares "air quotes" to "warning signs," meant to alert auditors that "the speaker is alienated from the words in question and wishes it to be known that they are being used deprecatingly" (Ree 1042). It is for this reason, he adds, that "they are sometimes called 'scare quotes'": monitory signs, indicating the presence of dubious

language ahead (Rée 1042).

"Forceps," "sanitary cordons," "warning signs": it is suggestive that these three commentators seem to have drawn from the same category of imagery to describe quotation's role within 19th- and 20th-century literary and verbal culture. That all three take for granted the need for "protection" is similarly telling: indicative both of how polluting a quantity we have come to consider the verbal output of another – and how precious a commodity, perhaps, we have come to regard our *own*. Indeed, as Thomas points out, it was during the Victorian period that the "notion of speech as private property" first emerged – and, perhaps not coincidentally, the moment in which the use of quotation marks first became, after a long period of lackadaisical and inconsistent punctuation, "ludicrously fussy" (Thomas 81). Though Rée is more circumspect about the onset of what he calls "quotation anxiety" – seeing it instead as a kind of existential condition – he agrees that its apotheosis coincides with the advent of modernity: "the age of the quotation mark," which, as he whimsically describes it, witnessed "a fall from a sunlit realm of joyous verbal freedom, into a squalid, loveless world where the poison of possessive individualism has spread even to people's relations to their own words" (Ree 1053). Contributing to this rise in verbal possessiveness might have been a heightened awareness of how great a degree of linguistic variation was possible, and how radically the discourse of others might differ from one's "own." As Raymond Chapman has pointed out, the 19th century, at least in England, was "a time when people became increasingly aware of forms of speech different from those of their immediate circle":

> Greater mobility and the spread of communication brought more familiarity with other regional and social groups. The complexity of spoken English became apparent, at the same time that the importance of a certain type of pronunciation

> became more important for social prestige. The understanding between author and reader in the matter of dialogue became more discerning and more demanding. (9)

The implication, Chapman implies, was a heightened vigilance on the part of Victorian subjects: a new concern both with the proper delineation and citation of speech, both in conversation and in print. To recognize a socially 'prestigious' type of speech, after all, is to recognize the existence of – and possible threat posed by – a type that is less so.

If quotation practices in 19th-century literature reflect these twinned impulses towards possession and protection, however, the use of quoted speech in Faulkner and Woolf's novels suggests a self-conscious break from such traditions. Indeed, by putting up the "sanitary cordon of quotation marks" around discourse that is so obviously already 'contaminated,' *The Waves* and *Absalom* seem to short-circuit the kinds of prophylactic or possessive functions quotation had historically been made to serve (Ferrer 92). At the same time, by so meticulously citing – and thus appearing to ensure proper 'possession' of – character speech, the texts seem to dramatize not just quotation's failure to "cordon" off, but the persistence of the conviction that it *should*. In this sense, Woolf and Faulkner appear to deliver a kind of facsimile of differentiation, designed less to 'showcase' any particular character – as, say, Flaubert's quotations in *Madame Bovary* did Homais – than the kinds of compulsively atomistic conventions that have governed the presentation of speech and self within the novel.

In staging speech non-possessively – that is, in such a way that the possibility of ownership is obscured – these texts would seem to oppose not only linguistic tradition (in which speech is insolubly linked to subjectivity), but literary theoretical tradition, which has long relied upon a rhetoric of speakerly 'responsibility.' Epitomized by the question Gerard Genette poses in *Narrative Discourse* – "Who is speaking?" – this line of thought

presupposes a subject who originates or is "responsible" for any given utterance in a text. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes would make the degree of speech's assignability a primary criterion of textual plurality, a work's status as *writerly* as opposed to *readerly*; thus, he explains, "the more indeterminate the origin of the statement, the more plural the text" (41). Such ambiguity assumes a more negative valence in the work of Peter Brooks, who decries the *style indirect libre* as a "technique of irresponsibility," used to "avoid and prevent direct attribution of what is spoken and reported (194-5). If free indirect discourse has been associated with ideologically dubious activity, then, direct discourse of the kind foregrounded in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Waves* would appear, at least, to qualify the novels as paragons of accountability (Brooks 196). And yet both, in assigning the "same" speech to multiple speakers, seem more accurately to parody this logic of responsibility, and its usefulness in understanding discourse within a fictional (and thus, not reality-bound) text. More than a prophylactic use of quotation, in which utterances are kept safely apart, one could say that Faulkner and Woolf's texts model a more parasitic one, in which even carefully 'cordoned' utterances play host to other echoes and influences. By at once publically distinguishing speech even as they compromise its distinctness, these novels make clear how thoroughly they discourage readings that do not admit of a more dynamic and variegated concept of 'responsibility.' Instead of a means of authorial distantiation, quotation in these texts becomes an opportunity for further insinuation and inflection.

II. "Grandfather Said": Compulsory Attribution in Absalom, Absalom!

Faulkner's own unabashedly "irresponsible" approach to quotation is perhaps best illustrated by one of the changes he made to *Absalom, Absalom!* during revision. In the manuscript, the omniscient narrator recounts the bulk of the second chapter, before ceding narration to Mr. Compson near the end. In the published novel, by contrast, Mr. Compson commences narrating much sooner. To make this change, Gerald Langford reports, "Faulkner simply introduce[d] quotation marks five pages earlier in the book than he had done in the manuscript. In turning a passage of omniscient narration into oral discourse he made no changes to give the telling a colloquial tone" (Langford 21). While one hesitates to read too much into this single act of revision, the casualness with which Faulkner seems to have re-allocated discourse in the novel is telling. Indeed, it appears to epitomize a more diffuse unconcern with maintaining even the appearance of difference among novelistic speakers. It is not unusual, for instance, to find the same phrase verbalized by multiple characters; thus, for instance, the narrator alludes to Henry as "the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride," while Rosa Coldfield will speak similarly of Judith, just a few pages later, as "the daughter who was already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride" (7, 10). (Later, Mr. Compson refers yet again to Judith as "who had been widowed before she had been a bride" (167).) Indeed, from the beginning, the novel underscores the continuity – even complicity – among its diegetic speakers and its omniscient one. When then narrator refers to "that air of children born too late into their parents' lives," Rosa seems to 'overhear' the thought, and repeat it in her own account, just a few lines later: "'Because I was born too late. I was born twenty-two years too late…'" (15). If *The Sound and the Fury*, by contrast,

minimized and submerged homologies among character speech – requiring that the overlap between Quentin and Benjy's speech, or Benjy's and Reverend Shegog's, to be actively discerned by a reader – *Absalom, Absalom!* puts such synchrony fully on display. Moreover, *Absalom* permits Quentin an awareness of this phenomenon that he did not enjoy in the earlier novel, allowing him to register and repeatedly protest the resemblance between, say, Shreve's voice and Mr. Compson: "*He sounds just like Father,* he thought […] *Just exactly like Father if Father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back*" (AA 147-8). The implication is that such incidents of "likeness" are now sufficiently prominent to attract the attention of the novel's characters, as well as its commentators. And that what emerged as a latent feature in *The Sound and the Fury*, must here be reckoned as an undeniable part of the narrative reality.

As noted above, most critics have not hesitated to remark on this feature of Faulkner's novel. What is striking, however, is how frequently it has been seen as an insolubly negative symptom. Like Quentin, many have been similarly perturbed by the extent to which the characters sound "like" each other, and ultimately, as Phil Stone complained, "like William Faulkner" himself (F 465). For Ross, as mentioned above, the speakers' monolithic style reflects the excesses and pervasive influence of Southern oratory (212). Follansbee goes further in suggesting that it qualifies the novel as a cautionary tale, a "fascist fable" about the "corrosive effects of monologism in the south" (86). As she sees it,

> [t]his interchangeability of voices in *Absalom* underscores the novel's insistence on a single story, told from the point of view of the planter class and its descendants, while the totalizing aesthetic perspective works to neutralize the fragmentation of white elite power in the social sphere. (84)

In interpreting the speakers' "interchangeabilty" as evidence of their social and intellectual conformity, Follansbee concurs with Ross in treating the uniform texture of character voice as cause for lament. And in fact, Faulkner's own commentary might seem to support such a desultory interpretation of the novel's style. Speaking to students at the University of Virginia, he noted the role of speech in catalyzing and consolidating social conformism:

> I think that there's too much pressure to make people conform and I think that one man may be first-rate but if you get one man and two second-rate men together, then he's not going to be first-rate any longer, because the voice of that majority will be a second-rate voice, the behavior of that majority will be second-rate. (FIU 269)

In light of Faulkner's observations, one could readily conclude that the speakers' homogeneity does indeed constitute an ominous sign: a case study of what occurs when individuals cannot withstand the "pressure to…conform," and when the "voice of [the] majority" successfully colonizes and monopolizes the voice of any "minority."

Yet closer analyses of both the nature and organization of discourse in the novel may not support such an apocalyptic reading, and in fact, suggest that Faulkner might be dramatizing something more nuanced than the dangers of dogma. In particular, the novel's delineation of character utterances – through the use of textual practices like quotation and italicization – would appear to compromise or at least complicate interpretations that emphasize only their homogeneity. (As does Bakhtin's insight that "monotony of language" does not preclude the presence of textual polyphony.)[8] Even more significant a complicating factor, however, may be the characters' own

[8] See *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* especially Chapter Five, for further explanation of this counterintuitive point. Though "[i]t might even seem that the heroes of Dostoevsky's novels all speak one and the same language, namely the language of their author," Bakhtin argues that superficial, "linguistic" differentiations are less significant than the "*dialogic angle*" from which discourse is presented (182)

commitment to vocal disambiguation. We see this tendency manifest most visibly, perhaps, in the gestures of attribution that punctuate the speakers' accounts, that are particularly concentrated in Quentin's narrative, in the seventh chapter:

> …and Grandfather said how he sat there with the firelight on his face and the beard and his eyes quiet and sort of bright and said – and Grandfather said it was the only time he ever knew him to say anything quite and simple… (200)
>
> …he did not mean shrewdness, Grandfather said. What he meant was unscrupulousness only he didn't know that word because it would not have been in the book from which the school teacher read. Or maybe that was what he meant by courage, Grandfather said.) (201)
>
> Grandfather said even he – all of them – could tell that the architect was not apologizing; it was fine, Grandfather said, and he said how Sutpen turned toward him… (207)

What is noteworthy in these passages – which are representative of the chapter as a whole – is not just the high frequency of the speech tag, "Grandfather said." It is the impression that Quentin inserts this inquit *more* than is necessary merely to establish the speaker or source of narrative authority. Given their superfluity, the phrase's recurrence suggests there may be something compulsive, or even compulsory, about Quentin's acts of attribution. In fact, a closer analysis suggests that this tic may be just one manifestation of what is arguably a far larger attributing habit within the novel. One could readily link Quentin's overuse of speech tags, for instance, to another equally prominent pattern within the novel: a trend toward might be called dual indexing, which is characterized by the speaker's habit of including pronouns *alongside* – rather than instead of – their antecedents, which are included in subsequent parentheses: "his (Quentin's) father's youth" (6), "it (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin)" (15), "She (Miss Rosa)" (39), "he (Henry)" (72), "she (Judith)" (99), "*it (my body)*" (111) "*her (Clytie)*" (126) "*her (Miss Coldfield)*" (138), "he (Sutpen)" (204), "he (Wash)" (232), "he

(Grandfather)" (265), "he (Bon)," (299), "he (the lawyer)" (309). This kind of double nomination or appellation – the insertion of both the pronoun and the (often proper) noun it renames – is practiced by all of the novels' speakers, including the omniscient one. In fact, the pattern is even present in less pronounced and mannered form in earlier novels, where characters often doubly interpellate each other: "You, Luster!", or "You, Marengo!", are common refrains in *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Unvanquished,* respectively (SF 269, UNV 27).

Of course, one could argue that this tendency is simply the product of necessity: in a story with so large a cast of characters, and so byzantine and uncertain a plot, *not* clarifying one's referents, after all, runs the risk of rendering your narrative impenetrable. And yet as with Quentin's inquits, this tactic does not seem designed exclusively – or even primarily – to clarify. At times, the second index is openly or obviously superfluous ("It (the wedding) was in the same Methodist Church" (37)). Then, there is the fact that these instances of double-naming seem to serve – like the broader pattern of parenthetical asides – less to enlighten, than to accentuate or exaggerate, and in the process, to elevate the mechanics of telling to more prominence than the story being told. That Faulkner significantly amplified this feature during revisions, as a survey of his changes to the manuscript reveals, strongly suggests that he intended the apparent mannerism to be meaningful. [9] And given its prominence in the text, I would suggest that the practice may telegraph a more manifest concern with disambiguating, with preserving the kinds of distinctions between subjects that the novel pretends but ultimately fails to sustain. As in *The Ambassadors*, the widespread distribution of what appears to be a highly

[9] See Langford; a comparison of the manuscript copy with that of the published novel reveals that Faulkner systematically inserted these kinds of parentheticals into the text during revision.

idiosyncratic feature seems designed to convey an attitude or set of priorities that transcends any one speaker. Indeed, it might be possible to see this attributive habit as a kind of corrective response to the loss of vocal singularity registered by Quentin's comment. In this sense, when Quentin credits his grandfather for "saying," or when he or one of the other characters takes pains to name the sources or subjects of their discourse, one could that they are manifesting, however unconsciously, the kind of "quotation anxiety" that Rée identified as a protypically modern symptom (222).

In this light, it seems especially significant that characters favor quoting the speech of others, rather than paraphrasing it. The irony, of course, is that in most cases the speakers did not witness – and thus, have no knowledge of – the conversations they claim to recapitulate. Yet the purely speculative status of these exchanges does not lessen the significance of the fact that they are being presented, at least ostensibly, *verbatim* – as direct emissions, complete with quotation marks and speech tags. Even more striking than their differentiation, however, is the narrator's emphasis on their individuation: despite the interchangeability of their own voices, when they, in turn, represent speech they go out of their way to recreate verbal idiosyncrasies. Both Shreve and Quentin, for instance, seem to almost exaggerate the distinctiveness of Wash Jones's idiolect – "Well, Kernal, they mought have whupped us but they aint kilt us yit, air they?" Shreve imagines him saying – and Quentin similarly imbues Wash's granddaughter's speech with idiomatic difference ("Who is it? Light the lamp, Grandpaw") (225, 233). Even Sutpen, in their renderings, speaks in a manner obviously distinct from the present-day narrators: *"*Ah, Clytie. Ah Rosa – Well, Wash. I was unable to penetrate far enough behind the Yankee lines to cut a piece from that coat tail as I promised you'" (233).

In the aggregate, what these speakerly habits seem to demonstrate is how radically the *characters'* narrative tendencies – and particularly, their means of representing discourse – diverge from and even oppose Faulkner's own. On the one hand, this proclivity for differentiating speech might seem to merely continue certain of the trends documented in *The Sound and The Fury* – say, Quentin's re-hashed and fully tagged conversations, or Jason's habitual gestures of self-attribution ("like I say," "what I say"). Yet the manifest status of these verbal tics seems to imply that they have an aesthetic, more than primarily 'psychological' significance within the novel, revealing the presence *within* Faulkner's novel of a narrative design inimical to his own. Though their approach may seem no more than Faulkner's to be emblematic of the principles of what Ian Watt calls "formal realism," it does lavish far more attention on differentiating characters' and their speech than the narration that contains it. If the novel, as Watt has argued, has been "distinguished from other genres…by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment," then one could argue that it is *speakers'* narratives, more than Faulkner's, that qualify as more traditionally 'novelistic' (18). In this sense, Faulkner seems to at once dramatize and ironize one of the central conventions of the form, assigning to his diegetic narrators the kind of individuating impulse that he himself makes it a point to elide.

III. "It might have been either of them": Quentin and Shreve's Compound Telling

If the novel, at first glance, could arguably be seen to endorse the characters' attributive tendencies – since, like Quentin, Rosa, Mr. Compson, or Shreve, Faulkner

does allocate speech to precise speakers – a closer reading reveals the extent to which it casts doubt on the logic of individuation structuring their discourse. It does so, most explicitly, in the later portions of the narrative, which increasingly thematize the decreasing salience of attribution as both a compositional paradigm and an interpretive one. This implication reaches its apotheosis in the concluding chapters, as Quentin and Shreve sit talking together in their dorm room:

> They stared – glared – at one another, their voices (it was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and dead but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too) quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath. (243)

Though Quentin and Shreve are often positioned in the novel as amateur historiographers, in this passage, they seem to qualify less as writers of history than of fiction, "creating between them…people who had perhaps never existed at all anywhere." And significantly, what their activity seems to allude to or enact is a mode of authorship so collaborative, it no longer makes sense to acknowledge individual contributions – since "it might have been either of them and was in a sense both." In this emergent paradigm, voice is no longer valued for its "difference" – whether in "tone or pitch" or "turns of phrase and usage of words" – but for its combinatory potential, its capacity to merge with other discourses, the "rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking." In this sense, the writer, at least as metaphorically incarnated by Quentin and Shreve, emerges less as an *auteur* than a *bricoleur,* less a "maker" of speech than a skillful re-compositor

of it. In this sense, *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to precipitate – through the mechanism Quentin and Shreve's telling – a kind of shift in novelistic aesthetics. If discourse can no longer be understood as the product of a single author – or, in turn, if speech can no longer be seen as originating with a single speaker – then quotation, as conventionally practiced in the novel, is rendered moot.

In this way, one could say that *Absalom, Absalom!* narrates the obsolescence of its own methods. Of particular interest is the way Faulkner progressively stages the erosion of ontological and verbal distinctness, and in the process, reveals its consequences for the novel. In *Absalom'*s later chapters, it becomes increasingly clear that the names and identities the speakers have made it such a point to cite are of diminishing value:

> Where there were now not two of them but four, the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more or less than twins (236)
>
> Not two of them there and then either but four of them riding the two horses through the iron darkness and that not mattering either: what face and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed… (237)
>
> Because neither of them was there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago, and it was not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither… (280)

By thus 'compounding' identity – conflating "two" and "four," consubstantiating Quentin and Shreve with Henry and Bon – the novel indicates its refusal to recognize or value precisely the kinds of distinctions (among 'faces,' 'names,' and especially, 'blood') that the Sutpen narrative is fundamentally *about.* If Shreve and Quentin, unlike Henry and Bon, are not linked by an actual instance of "miscegenation," the novel's emphasis on their "compound" or *mixed* status nonetheless assumes a distinct ideological importance

within the novel, serving to repudiate the very logic of segregation – of differentiation – that structures the drama within it.

Significantly, this compounding process is telegraphed by the characters' discourse, as well as that of the omniscient narrator. Particularly noteworthy is the sudden decline in the kinds of differentiating gestures catalogued in the characters' speech above. In the eighth chapter, for instance, the incidence of indexical or deictic markers seems to drop significantly – as does the perceived need for them:

> (neither of them said 'Bon.' Never at any time did there seem to be any confusion between them as to whom Shreve meant by 'he') (249)
>
> it was not Bon he meant now, yet again Quentin seemed to comprehend with no difficulty or effort whom he meant. (251)
>
> but he didn't need to say that either, any more than he had needed to specify which he he meant by he, since neither of them had been thinking about anything else. (253)

The fact that Quentin and Shreve stop specifying "[w]hich he he meant by he" needn't suggest that they now enjoy a complete and perfect understanding of the Sutpen narrative. But rather, that they perceive themselves to enjoy a kind of intimacy that can, significantly, only be achieved through the loss of a measure of singularity – the kind of ontological conflation documented above. However much Quentin, in particular, tries to retain a sense of his own discursive autonomy ("I'm telling," he tries to assert at one point), the novel itself repeatedly confirms that "it did not matter…which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing…" (253). In this sense, the novel reveals the dialogic ethos underlying its apparently monologic surface: wherein meaning obtains not from unilateral utterances, but from the "marriage" or "coupling" of

expression and reception. Rather than present verbal synchrony as a sign of conformity, then, Faulkner's novel at least entertains the idea – endemic, as we have seen, in James's fiction – that it might stand as proof of intimacy.

Whether such intimacy is actually achievable, or, as I suggested in the conclusion to the first chapter, ultimately untenable, *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests it is far more promising to conceive of speech as a co-production than something for which one can ever reasonably assign 'responsibility.' If Peter Brooks has suggested that one of the defining features of the novel is the *difficulty* of determining "who is speaking" – since, at any given moment, "Faulkner seems to call upon both the individual's voice and that transindividual voice that speaks through all of Faulkner's characters" – more central may be the message that this is the wrong question to ask, because, as was suggested in the previous chapter, it doesn't *matter* who is speaking (Brooks 294). Instead, what the novel presents us with is a radically de-particularized narrative situation, in which anyone – or everyone – can tell and anyone and everyone can listen; in which the hierarchy of narrator and auditor has been essentially collapsed. Again and again, the novel confronts readers with the fact that the identity of the speaker is of secondary or tertiary interest, compared to the contents of their speech. In place of a 'possessive' model of discourse, then, *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to model instead what we might call a *promiscuous* one, in which language may mix or enjoy intimate ties with more than one speaker.

Indeed, one of the central lessons of *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to be that narrative is taking place irrespective of – even independent of – any particular narrator. Or better, has already taken place, since as the narrator explains, "it has all been said before" (283). In the second chapter, Quentin reflects on "the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet

mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833…" (23). The implication is not only that the story has already been told, but that this story never feasibly "belonged" to any individual to tell. Upon Sutpen's appearance in town, for instance, "the stranger's name when back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen*" (24). In interpolating the terminology of Attic drama, Faulkner not only frames the story as a myth or "legend," or the townspeople as a Greek chorus, but perhaps more significant, gestures toward powerful alternatives to novelistic modes of telling. Like a myth, Sutpen's narrative is oral, not written; it does not originate with a single author; and its significance does not obtain from any one version or recital. Indeed, as we see, the story outstrips the capacities of any one narrator, and proceeds according to a momentum of its own. It is Shreve – the one character who did *not* grow up with the story – who is repeatedly overwhelmed by what he perceives to be its ungovernable force: "'Wait then,'" Shreve will repeatedly plead with Quentin, "for God's sake wait'" (175).

Further attesting to the marginal status of the individual speaker are the proliferating instances in the novel of voices operating, if not exactly independently, than outside normal locutionary or conversational constraints. Like the final portion of *The Sound and the Fury,* which in referring to the Reverend Shegog's voice as "it," appears to emancipate it from its speaker, *Absalom, Absalom!* continually foregrounds instances of vocal behavior so extreme – or of such extreme duration – as to be uncanny. Indeed, the novel is rife with instances of vocal automatism: Mr Compson's voice "speaking on

while Quentin heard it without listening" (102), or Rosa Coldfield's, which "would not cease" (4), or the impression conveyed by Bon's letter, of "the dead tongue speaking after the four years and then after almost fifty more, gentle sardonic whimsical and incurably pessimistic, without date or salutation or signature" (203).

Perhaps even more substantive evidence of the vitiated status of the individual in the narrative economy, however, arrives on the level of imagery. De-individuating events pullulate throughout the novel, from the explicit conflations of character – of Quentin and Shreve, Henry and Bon – to the more submerged trend toward clustering subjects and objects. In the first chapter, for instance, we find people organized in a "clump," a "crew," a "large following," a "mob," and "regiment" (28, 28, 36, 44-45, 63). As the text proceeds, such instances of agglomeration become increasingly frequent:

> they (men) were all of a kind throughout all of earth which he knew (232)
>
> all the voices, the murmuring of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beyond the immediate fury (232)
>
> all boy flesh that walked and breathed stemming from that one ambiguous eluded dark fathered and so brothered and perennial and ubiquitous everywhere under the son (240)

Of course, such totalizing gestures – the grouping together of "all" the men, or voices, or "boy flesh" – are hardly unique to Faulkner. Indeed, one could as readily trace this kind of 'massifying' tactic through earlier modernist fiction like *Heart of Darkness*, which make a similar habit of presenting people as part of hordes, crowds, and in Conrad's case, increasingly abstract – and ideologically charged – agglomerative arrangements. Here, however, the phenomenon seems to be part of a greater movement in the novel toward de-particularizing, spreading out idiosyncratic experience or events over huge swathes and expanses. Through such systematic acts of generalization, Faulkner's novel seems to

offer an alternative vision of the novel's organization, a schema in which occurrences and utterances are no longer necessarily subordinate to – experienced *by,* voiced *by* – a single fictional 'subject.' This may be powerfully illustrated by Faulkner's allocation of what seems like a characteristically 'authorial' brand of omniscience among all his characters – who all, despite their piecemeal and incomplete understanding of events, speak with which can only be described as a knowing, even a gnomic tone.

In this light, Faulkner's novel becomes much less persuasive as a story about the triumph of forceful individualism (as critics like Follansbee would have it) than as an allegory of its insolvency. By enacting the failure of attribution as both a literary convention and a critical paradigm, *Absalom, Absalom!* seems also to enact the failure of individualist logic that underlies it, and that has historically shaped both the structure of the novel, and our reading of it. It is a logic, significantly, that seems to find its paradigmatic expression in Sutpen's "design," which is as relentlessly singular and self-oriented as Faulkner's is compound and multiply-encompassing. The differences between his narrative design and Faulkner's can hardly be overstated. [10] In seeking to "accomplish his allotted course to its violent…end," at the expense of others or external contingencies, Sutpen maintains the very priorities that the novel reveals – in its own formal structures, themes, and plot – to be obsolete (7). Indeed, it is the exceptional and anachronistic status of Sutpen's attempted design that, within the economy of the narrative, may make it such an object of fascination, and even, nostalgia. Though *Absalom, Absalom!* may gesture toward a less particularizing and personalized direction

[10] For more on the contrast, see Robert W. Hamblin's essay in *Faulkner and the Artist* (ed. Donald Kartiganer) "Longer Than Anything: Faulkner's Grand Design" (1996).

for the novel, the text also inscribes – in the shape of the Sutpen story – the persistent, centripetal tug of personality on and in it.

IV. He Said, She Said: The Pretense of Speech in The Waves

If anything, *The Waves* is even more self-conscious about its de-particularizing tendencies, allowing several of the characters an expanded capacity to reflect on the kinds of ontological and vocal blurring that in *Absalom, Absalom!* (apart from Quentin's comment) go largely unperceived by the novel's subjects. [11] Thus, for instance, Woolf's speakers routinely *worry* about their idiosyncrasy and singularity, on the one hand, and their sameness and lack of distinctness, on the other; in this way, Woolf effectively thematizes the paradox that her novel also performs. In so doing, she also foregrounds to a greater extent than Faulkner did the rhetorically complex and highly mediated quality of supposedly direct speech. Thus, even as *The Waves* presents a larger percentage of its total discourse *as* speech, it also more radically diminishes its plausibility. Unlike Faulkner's novel, Woolf's doesn't provide what Dorrit Cohn calls a "moment of locution," or what Ross dubs a "narrating scene" – some context to help substantiate the claim of fictional speech that it is part of a communicative exchange (Cohn 13, Ross 169).[12] She also heightens the expressive impossibility of her characters' utterances, not only through her choice of tense, diction, and figuration, but through the incidence of what I would call co-locution: those moments, more pronounced but otherwise similar to those instances in *Absalom, Absalom!* when multiple speakers can be 'heard' to articulate

[11] For more on the analytical dimensions of Woolf's soliloquies compared to Faulkner's, see Ross, who argues that characters in *The Waves*, for instance, engage in "explicit introspection," whereas the Compson brothers in *The Sound and the Fury* "express but do not analyze their own thoughts or emotions" (167, 168)
[12] Here, I diverge from Ross who argues that Woolf's novel *does* provide us with such a scene – in contrast to, say, *The Sound and the Fury* (169).

an identical or near-identical utterance. Thus, for instance, Neville can conclude that "it is the first day of the summer holidays," and within two pages, both Susan and Rhoda can reiterate the phrase (43, 45). In general, if *Absalom, Absalom!* made some effort to support the illusion that its characters are actually speaking, to actual others, *The Waves* does not hesitate to disclose the *ersatz* quality of talk in the novel – its status as pure pretense. Thus, as Ferrer points out, Woolf "never allows us "to take the word *said* literally," but instead "places us from the beginning outside the conventions of realism" (65, 66).

Yet even as she discards so many of the "conventions of realism" in rendering character speech, Woolf conspicuously retains others – in particular, the speech tags, quotation marks, and proper names that are an even more regular feature of this novel than Faulkner's (Ferrer 13). Significantly, these are the very features that have historically been most fundamental to the rendering of fictional dialogue. As Lennard Davis, among others, has demonstrated, it was during the eighteenth century that novelists first

> developed a fairly conventional method of transcribing conversation, or what linguists call 'direct discourse' – that is, a method to indicate the opening and closing of direct speech with quotation marks (or in the continental tradition only the opening of the conversation with a dash), and to indicate the speaker by tagging or interrupting the speech with 'he said' or 'John replied.' (Davis 172)

The question, of course, is why Woolf should choose to make use of such 'conventions' in rendering speech, when the speech itself is so unconventional – or, put another way, to retain in her self-consciously innovative text what Nathalie Sarraute referred to as "symbols of the old regime." In short, why preserve the apparatus of the realist novel in a text that is so obviously uninterested in realism?

Though critics have frequently raised this question in some form, most have tended to respond in one of two ways: either by recovering realist tendencies in the novel – including differentiated speakers – or by declaring their absence.[13] In the latter camp are those who claim the novel's "undifferentiated style" is indicative of its "radically a-novelistic" agenda, and hold up as proof of Woolf's own comment that the "six characters were supposed to be one" (Graham 95, qtd Lee 612).[14] More intriguing, however, may be those who read the novel in the opposite direction, attempting to transmute Woolf's "torrent" of prose into a vocally individuated and character-driven fiction (WD 160). Mark Hussey notes that Kathleen McCluskey has been particularly assiduous in "illuminating how Woolf associates particular devices and styles with individual characters" (Hussey 357). More recently, Allison Hild has argued along similar lines that "clear and highly differentiated characters do emerge" in *The Waves*, since, "after all, Woolf carefully sets off passages with quotation marks, and labels each shift of speaker with an attached name" (70).[15] But perhaps most symptomatic of this critical desire to recover subjectivity may be the pedagogical experiment conducted by an instructor, Renée Dickinson, who asked her class to read Woolf's novel aloud. The result, she reported in *Virginia Woolf Miscellany,* was that the students "were more able to distinguish clearly the six characters and to follow their development because the

[13] As Allison Hild notes, critics have "frequently debated Woolf's mode of speech in the novel" (70). See Hussey p. 348-362 for a synoptic account of this debate.
[14] Hussey points out that "the idea…that the six are aspects of a single being has been common in critical discussion of *The Waves* from early on" (358). Representative of this position is Naremore, who endorses the idea that the discrete soliloquies "often seem more like one pervasive voice with six personalities" (152). Many others have come out in support of this kind of "single character" or "single personality" theory, concluding, as Hermione Lee does, that the novel's "emphasis on rhythm overwhelms distinctions of character" (Hussey 359, Lee 164).
[15] Ariane Mildenberg likewise takes Woolf at her word when she suggests that the novel be read as a "gigantic conversation" (72, WD 153). Though Woolf herself entertained the possibility that *The Waves* could end in such a fashion, Graham notes that there "no sign in the manuscript of any attempt at conversation in which every life has its voice," nor is there much evidence in the published novel (109).

characters were separately and aurally determined for them" (31). As one student reported, "'I felt that reading it aloud, with varying readers assuming a character… [captured] the idiosyncrasies and distinctions of the individual voices of humans'" (31).

In general, these approaches are representative of the primary ways critics have worked to resolve the contradiction inherent in the novel's form: either by insisting on a single speaker, or by recovering many. More striking, however, is the near-unanimous insistence on treating voice in the novel as a "problem" to be solved, rather than elaborated and explored. In fact, *The Waves* seems to reward neither compliance with Woolf's quotation marks (as Hild or Dickinson imply) nor readerly defiance of them, as would seem to be mandated by the "single character" hypothesis. What the novel does do, though, is require readers to *notice* them: and to acknowledge their status as rhetorical structures, capable of powerfully shaping reader response and experience. It is in this sense, then, that I would suggest that Woolf may be interpolating into her text certain novelistic conventions for the sake of both publicizing, and to some extent, parodying them. Among Woolf's commentators, H. Porter Abbott comes closest to such a hypothesis when he proposes that the "continuation" of character in *The Waves* might represent "a kind of nineteenth century baggage…that she couldn't help but carry on even as she sought to jettison it" (Abbott 397). Yet I would argue that the constructs which persist in *The Waves* read less like accidental 'baggage,' than like something deliberately 'carried on' – and indeed, carried over from her extensive theorizing about fiction in the years preceding the text's publication.[16] More than a heritable condition,

[16] As Hussey notes, Woolf's "essays, together with [her] examination of women's writing in *A Room of One's Own*, indicate how profoundly she was considering the nature of fiction in the years immediately preceding the inception of *The Waves*" (353)

then, character might instead be understood as a kind of voluntary affliction, one Woolf knowingly and readily takes on.

Particularly revealing, in this light, may be Woolf's use of inquits – which, despite the range of possible speech-tagging options, remains doggedly invariant; the first line of every soliloquy is punctuated by the phrase that he or she "said."[17] While speech tags in fiction – as William Flesch has noted of their presence in poetry – are generally "unstressed" or "hush[ed]," Woolf's repetitious use of them has the effect of *un*hushing them, and in the process, of calling attention to their "subliminal assimilative power": their capacity to assimilate or render natural what literary historians maintain is a highly unnatural textual phenomenon (163).[18] In this sense, Woolf's refusal to "relieve the monotony of constant 'he-saids' by resorting to elegant variations" – and her insistence on using them to tag something that doesn't satisfy the novelistic criteria of speech – seems to qualify as an act of stylistic disobedience, a way of self-consciously opposing the novel's prodigious naturalizing apparatus (Page 27). More than "foregrounding and ridiculing the banality of the he-said she-said formula," as Thomas suggests of later 20th century writers like Henry Green, she is highlighting the existence and even, the covert *power* of this formula (Thomas 84). Put another way, the prominence of such speech conventions in Woolf's novel could be seen to reflect their prominence in the novel as a genre – and, in turn, the prominence of the individuating agenda they promote. Following Fredric Jameson's conception of modernist fiction, then, *The Waves* might even be seen

[17] See Mark Lambert, who in his study of quotation use in Victorian fiction, attests both to the "variety of speech tags and the "variety of possibilities of their deployment" (8).
[18] See Chapman, Page and especially Davis, who documents conversation's status as not just a historical but ideological construct; in particular, he examines "how these sets of signs and arrangements on the page, which actually look and sound almost nothing like real conversations, got to be accepted as the rule for conversation rather than the exception" (163).

as an attempt to elucidate the novel's "unconscious": its bias in favor of individual particularity, of which speech and punctuation conventions are both telling and largely overlooked symptoms.

V. Toward a Non-Idiosyncratic Voice

The possibility that Woolf both perceived such a bias, and that she chose to problematize it in her novel, is supported not only by analyses of the text itself, but also by surveys of her personal and critical writings. Both Woolf's diary and essays reflect what Hermione Lee called her "lifelong argument about egotism," as evidenced in her frequent, deprecatory comments about the "damned egotistical self" (WD 22, Lee 587). Repeatedly, she would reproach this tendency in herself ("For if the mind runs loose it becomes egotistic; personal, which I detest") and in the work of others – especially male others (67). As she wrote in *A Room of One's Own*, about the experiencing of "taking down a new novel" by the hypothetical author, Mr. A,

> [a]fter reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a dark, straight bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I.' One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. Back one was always hailed to the letter 'I.' One began to be tired of 'I.' (AROO 98)

One finds similar riffs on the theme of first-person pronoun fatigue throughout Woolf's writing, and it has been widely documented in commentaries of her work. Graham, for one, usefully summarizes Woolf's "growing dissatisfaction…with what she called 'psychology'; her desire to break free from 'personality' as the subject of her fiction; and her determination to achieve in her fiction the impersonality she associated with poetry" (105). (The fact that she would eventually jettison the narrating 'I' she initially developed

in *The Waves* is particularly suggestive in this light.[19]) Like Faulkner, then, but in far more explicit fashion, Woolf can be seen to use the novel to challenge a primary tenet *of* the novel: the idea it should be organized around individual experience, that it should by default privilege "psychology," "personality," or idiosyncrasy.

At first glance, this may seem like a surprising assertion, given the association of modernist authors, and particularly Woolf, with the representation of subjective experience. Yet it is precisely in light of this reputation – the presumed focus of modernist fiction on "a character's individual psyche" – that the emphasis on *externalizing* discourse in the form of quotations assumes such significance (Wagner-Martin 106). Not only does it imply some desire, on Woolf's part, to eschew the kind of interiority she had often foreground in her previous work: it also serves to disallow the kinds of ambiguity that other discursive techniques are designed to accommodate. As Molly Hite has noted, one of the more surprising features of *The Waves* is that, when compared to "the subtleties of Woolf's free indirect discourse in *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, in *The Waves* there is no doubt about whose point of view is presented at a given point" (xxxvii). In *The Waves*, then, one could say that discourse is manifestly *un*-free. It is as if, by so definitively answering the question of "who is speaking?," Woolf – like Faulkner – hoped to provoke in readers a different, less subject-centered line of questioning.[20]

On the one hand, it would be possible to argue that Woolf's search for impersonal or a-psychological modes of representation culminated in the works she produced after

[19] See Hite p. xli and Graham p. 98-102 for accounts of Woolf's initial attempts to include a narrator in *The Waves*; see also *The Waves*: *Two Holograph Drafts*. Ed. J.W. Graham. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1976.
[20] In this sense, I concur with David Herman in suggesting that "Woolf 's representations of talk require a rethinking of modernist narrative construed as a foregrounding of inner experience (*Woolf* 75-76).

The Waves – in *The Years*, for instance, where as Lee points out, "There is no 'I,' no inward 'stream of consciousness'" and in which ideas found their "most generalized and decentered" expression (Lee 627). Or perhaps in *Between the Acts*, whose composition prompted a more explicit reconsideration of her choice of pronoun:

> …'I' rejected: 'We' substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? 'We'…the composed of many different things…we all life, all art, all waifs and strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole – the present state of my mind? (WD 279)

Yet it is in *The Waves*, which features multiple "I's," that we might find the most exhaustive exploration of the ways novelists might present speech without it necessarily being compelled or circumscribed by a single personality. During the writing of the novel, Graham notes, Woolf often felt that her method "trapped her in the personality of her characters," since it meant that all feelings had to be "rendered as felt by a character…rather than as a feeling generated in the reader by the narrator itself" (Graham 106). Yet the actual text suggests the opposite: that feelings may be "felt" – and speech might be spoken – by *more than* one character. Indeed, Woolf seems to have had precisely this kind of inter- or extra-subjective ambition in mind while composing the speakers' discourse. The challenge, in creating these "dramatic soliloquies," was to "keep them running homogeneously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves" (WD 156); elsewhere, she elaborates on this idea, noting that

> [w]hat I want here is presumably unity…Suppose I could run all the scenes together more? – by rhythms, chiefly. So as to avoid those cuts; so as to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end…that indeed is my achievement; if any, here; a saturated, unchopped completeness; changes of scene, of mind, of person, done without spilling a drop. (WD 160)

By at once creating "lonely soliloquies," and "keep[ing] them running homogeneously in and out," Woolf seems at once to be exaggerating the novel's anatomizing tendencies,

and overriding them – or better, demonstrating a way in which they might discursively be surpassed (Lee 587). Like Rhoda, then, Woolf seems to believe she "must go through the antics of the individual," in order to expose them *as* antics, behaviors that might be variously exorcised or overcome (W 164).

In this sense, *The Waves* appears to point the way, perhaps more explicitly than any of the other texts previously considered, toward a mode of representing speech non-pragmatically, as something other than a discrete "act" performed by a single speaker. Instead, perhaps drawing on her experience of talk within Bloomsbury, she presents discourse as a kind of communal practice or property.[21] And it is an attitude that she seems similarly to impute to her characters, and particularly to Bernard, who like Quentin, is positioned as first among characterological equals. Yet unlike Quentin, who is bothered by the possibility of such verbal sharing or "likeness," Bernard is untroubled by it – by the notion that, as he puts it, "when we sit together, close…we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (9). If anything, Woolf's characters seem to worry as much about their distance from others, as their uncomfortable proximity. Thus Bernard, for instance, can avow the rather Woolfian mantra, "I do not believe in separation. We are not single" (48).

Yet if Bernard, at first glance, would seem to emerge as Woolf's likeliest spokesman, the character best able to conduct her "argument about egotism" or critique of "personality" through the text, he might also emerge as her foil (Lee 587). [22] Indeed, a

[21] See Lee p. 265, who notes that Woolf prized Bloomsbury's lively and participatory conversations, which "were often compared to 'orchestral concerts,' with Virginia Woolf as conductor" (265).
[22] Many readers have seen the writer Bernard as Woolf's textual surrogate, and indeed, he espouses many of her ideas, and even idioms. Asked about her current novel, for instance, Woolf once reported herself to have joked, "Oh, I put in my hand and rummage in the bran pie" (WD 33-34). In *The Waves,* this figure becomes Bernard's, when he reflects, "Every hour something new is unburied in the great bran pie" (54).

closer reading of the novel reveals that he personifies some of the very tendencies that Woolf most excoriated in the novel – and distilled, most famously, in her 1924 essay, "Character in Fiction," later republished as "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Such tendencies surface in the episode in in the novel during which Bernard converses with an unnamed fellow traveller on the train. "As we exchange these few but amiable remarks, about country houses," Bernard explains, "I furbish him up and make him concrete":

> He wears a large ornament, like a double tooth torn up by the roots, made of coral, hanging at his watch-chain. Walter J. Trumble is the sort of name that would fit him. He has been in America, on a business trip with his wife, and a double room in a smallish hotel cost him a whole month's wages. His front tooth is stopped with gold. (W 48)

In isolation, this brief description might seem unexceptional. But to readers of Woolf's criticism, particularly "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," the episode is suggestive – since Bernard's method is in fact strikingly similar to the one Woolf will witheringly attribute to Arnold Bennett, and to the Edwardians more broadly, who "have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things" (CE 432). In his similar reliance on physical and material detail – by dwelling on "Walter J. Trumble's" clothes, physiognomy, and immediate environs – Bernard seems to be guilty of precisely the literary crimes Woolf accuses Bennett of having committed in *Hilda Lessaways.* (The analogy between Bernard and Bennett, as presented in Woolf's critique, is strengthened by the fact that both are "caught" in the act of describing a stranger they encounter in railway carriage). Even Bernard's term of art – "furbishing" – is unpromising, indicating, as it does, Bernard's position on the wrong side of novelistic history. In 1922, Willa Cather put forth her call for the novel *demeublé,* which as Elaine Showalter argues, advocated for "an unfurnishing and stripping down of the overstuffed house of fictional realism": "how

wonderful it would be," Cather wrote, "if we could throw all the furniture out the window, and along with it, all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre…." (Showalter 293). And in *Mimesis*, Eric Auerbach confirms that this sort of demonstrable "harmony between…person and….milieu" was in fact a primary criterion of nineteenth-century European realism (470). In the Georgian lexicon, then, one could say that a disproportionate emphasis on "milieu" or material 'furbishing' became something of a diagnostic: an acid test for the kind of formal realism that the modernists would often proclaim themselves concerned to revise, if not reject.

It is in this sense, then, that we might read *The Waves* less as part of Woolf's "comprehensive critique of character," as Abbott has argued, than as a critique of the characteris*tic*: of the kind of highly particularized and idiosyncratic subject that the novel has recognized – and taught us to recognize – *as* character (396). It is a possibility Hite hints at when she concedes that whether the novel's speakers qualify as "characters" depends on the (highly contingent) criteria used to define the term. As she explains,

> [i]f the usual conventions of characterization applied, we would have to either hypothesize that Jinny had a secret life with many volumes of poetry and a thesaurus, or to conclude that her diction and phrasing fail to fit her character. The latter is closer to the case, of course...but only if to be a character, one must display 'characteristic,' individuated speech mannerisms. (Hite xlvi).

By not displaying "characteristic,' individuating speech mannerisms," then, Woolf's characters challenge our understanding *of* character. It is yet another act of stylistic disobedience on Woolf's part, and a way of realizing the ambition she describes in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," to, in a sense, *unfurbish* character, to create characters less defined by their superficial idiosyncrasies than by their immaterial, and potentially

shareable properties. That her subjects' speech seems to touch, or overlap, during those aforementioned moments of co-locution is just one of the ways, then, that Woolf realizes a view of self as less fully differentiated than at least intermittently permeable.

At first glance, it might be difficult to conceive of character being portrayed non-characteristically. But an examination of Woolf's own variant figurations of subjectivity might shed some light on how this apparent paradox might be resolved. On the one hand, Woolf had a habit of referring to identity as something fixed, solid, and above all "sharp": in her diary, she speaks deprecatingly of her "sharp absurd personality," and longs for those moments when "one's angularities and obscurities are smoothed and lit" (WD 119, 138). And *The Waves*, Bernard laments, along similar lines, "there is always somebody, when we come together, and the edges of meeting are still sharp, who refuses to be submerged" (W 155). Significantly, however, she will also associate identity with images of fluidity, rather than fixity. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," for instance, she describes the "impression" produced by her fictional subject as something diffuse: "It came pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning" (CE 425). And in *The Waves*, Bernard will similarly liken identity to a "persistent smell," which instead of 'pouring out,' "steals in through some crack in the structure" (W 83). Far from being a sharp-edged solid, such images suggest that selfhood might alternately be reimagined as effervescent, a gaseous compound that could be combined or admixed, resulting in the alchemical production of something (or someone) else altogether. Indeed, it is a possibility that Bernard, in keeping with his multivalent position in the novel, seems at once to once shrink from and celebrate. "How painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another," he reflects, but two pages

later, he seems to rejoice at the sensation of 'admixture': "The entirely unexpected nature of this explosion – that is the joy of intercourse. I, mixed with an unknown Italian waiter – what am I? There is no stability in this world" (W 83, 85).

In short, if subjectivity was previously 'solid' in fiction, *The Waves* suggests it has increasingly melted into air. But Woolf's real innovation was to demonstrate that speech must evolve to reflect that. Instead of a technique of individuation, Woolf manages to turn dialogue in the novel into a vehicle of amalgamation: a device used to 'mix' selves – to reflect their admixture – rather than to sustain the illusion of their difference. In so doing, she simultaneously challenges not only the presentation of characters, per se, but the relationship *among* them: what Alex Woloch, writing of the 19th-century realist novel, calls "character space." If historically, speech has been one of the many tools used to facilitate "asymmetric structure of characterization" that Woloch discerns in the novel, whereby characters are sorted into "major" and "minor," than Woolf's refusal to variegate speech, and in turn, individuate character, has the effect of obstructing the formation of such "asymmetric" or hierarchical relations (31). The result is a startlingly even characterological field that is radical in its refusal to accommodate minorness. "The equal status of six major figures," Hite notes, "is a generally unregarded way that *The Waves* unsettles the familiar habits of reading" (xxxix). Through the creation of an undifferentiated, even *democratized* voice, Woolf is able to supplant the competitive model of character relations Woloch claims for the novel, and replace it with a collective and symmetrical one. In so doing, she provides a definitive critique of – even as she calls attention to – the novel's default organizational logic, its orientation, as Woloch describes it, around the "one" at the expense of the "many.

Chapter 4
The Choral Voice: Neorealism's Imagined Communities

Toward the end of Elio Vittorini's 1941 novel, *Conversazione in Sicilia*, the protagonist, Silvestro, joins several new acquaintances – including Calogero, a knife-grinder; Porfirio, a draper; and Ezechiele, a saddle-maker – for drinks in Colombo's tavern. As they drink, Calogero initiates a kind of group cheer:

> Qui l'arrotino gridò di nuovo: - *Viva!*
> E l'uomo Porfirio di nuovo domandò: - *Viva* che cosa?
> - *Viva! Viva!* – l'arrotino gridò.
> - *Viva!* – gridò un ubriaco.
> - *Viva!* – grido un altro ubriaco.
> - *Viva!* – mormorò umilmente l'uomo Ezechiele.
> - *E viva, viva, viva!* cantarono dalla panca i mesti uomini che si dondolavano. (301)[1]

At first glance, the passage seems to do little more than testify to the sense of drunken camaraderie among the bar's patrons, as does the description of the similarly communal outburst earlier in the chapter: "- Ah aaah! Ah aaah! Ah aah? – cantarono gli uomini della panca. – Ah, Ah! – dissero i due seduti vicino al braciere" (299).[2] Indeed, given the convivial barroom context, one could readily argue that such moments qualify primarily as "reality effects," designed – as fictional dialogue has frequently been[3] – to heighten the reader's impression of verisimilitude.

Yet a closer analysis may complicate this reading. On the one hand, there's the fact that *Conversazione in Sicilia*, as the reader soon realizes, is not especially concerned

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[1] All translations of Vittorini's work are Alaine Salierno Mason's, unless otherwise noted: "Here the knife grinder cried again: *'Viva!'* And the man Porfirio asked again: *'Viva* what?' '*Viva! Viva!'* the knife grinder cried. '*Viva!'* cried a drunk. *'Viva!'* cried another drunk. '*Viva!'* the man Ezechiele murmured humbly. '*And viva, viva, viva!'* sang the melancholy men swaying on the bench" (146).

[2] " Ah aaah! Ah aaah! Ah aah?*'* sang the men on the bench. 'Ah! Ah!' said the two sitting closer to the brazier" (143).

[3] For more on the use of dialogue an *effet de reel,* see the entry on "Speech Representation" in *The Routledege Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory's* (559).

with realism. Even more suggestive, however, is the proliferation of similarly collaborative verbal events, not only in Vittorini's text, but within neorealist narrative, more generally. From novels like *Conversazione in Sicilia* and Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falò*; to nonfictional accounts such as Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo*; to films including Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta,* Giuseppe de Santis's *Riso Amaro,* and Vittorio de Sica's *Sciuscià,* choral structures and tendencies surface within postwar Italian texts with striking frequency. On the one hand, this movement toward choral modes of expression might seem to represent the reemergence, within *neorealismo*, of the kind of *coralità* long associated with *verismo*, typified by the "village chorus narration" of Giovanni Verga's 1881 novel, *I malavoglia*.[4] Yet what distinguishes the texts mentioned above from such nineteenth-century predecessors is the choral quality, not of their narration, but of their *conversation.* Specifically, in the case of the fictional texts, there is a noticeable tendency toward opening the discursive field to an expanded and (in some cases) seemingly unlimited number of potential speakers; in the case of film, a noticeable habit of both widening shots, and crowding them, including in the frame an increased number of diegetic subjects and points-of-view. Thus, while Verga's novel, for instance, might claim to speak on behalf of many, these narratives – many (though not all) of them classified under the critical rubric of neorealism – incline instead toward featuring the speech *of* many.

When I suggest, then, that the arrangement of voice in certain neorealist narratives might be understood as "choral," I do not mean to imply that the characters are literally

[4] The phrase is James Wood's, but allusions to "Verga's choral narrative voice" are commonplace (Parks 142). For a rebuttal to this "choral hypothesis," see Giovanni Carsaniga p. 68-69.

speaking in unison, in the manner of an Attic chorus (though they may occasionally do that). Rather, I use the term more figuratively, to describe the allocation of speech to an unusually large company of speakers, who are nonetheless situated in a single, relatively delimited geographical space and time. That these voices strike the reader as more synchronic than divergent makes it difficult to characterize these texts as polyphonic, in the Bakhtinian sense; more than polyphony, they seem to be showcasing something closer to polyvocality, or vocal plurality – the continual addition of supplementary voices to an existing discursive framework. At least in certain cases, then, it can almost seem as though neorealist fiction is proceeding according to some principle of maximum inclusivity: a commitment to incorporating as many voices – and by extension, as many speaking subjects – into the allotted diegetic space.

My particular focus will be on two novels – Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* and Pavese's *La luna e i falò* – which, despite their modernist tendencies, nonetheless represent crucial contributions to the neorealist canon.[5] I will also examine several films that similarly epitomize the narrative trend toward pluralizing voices and gazes. My rationale for considering cinematic examples alongside literary ones is not only the "unprecedented cross-fertilization" that took place between the two media during the postwar period (Re *Neorealist* 106). There is also the fact that "coralità" is a term that has been even more frequently applied to films of the period than fiction. One constant, in criticism of both mediums, has been the near-universal interpretation of choral mechanisms as mimetic ones – as a means of reproducing the voices of an existing class

[5] Lucia Re, for one, describes *Conversazione in Sicilia* as "far from neorealism in most respects"; similarly, she notes that though *La luna e i falò* "cannot be ascribed to a hypothetical canon of the neorealist novel," it must still be seen as an "attempt to come to terms with the imperatives of neorealism" (*Neorealist* 109, 112).

or group (which is, almost inevitably, a disenfranchised or impoverished one). Thus, for instance, Brian Richardson interprets the " 'we' voice" of Ignazio Silone's *La fontamara* as "a naturalistic method of indicating a collective sensibility of the Fontamara peasants": as he puts it, "their life is shared, and so is their story" (144). And writing of *Roma*, *città aperta*, film critic Carlo Trabucco influentially argued shortly after the film's release that it was "veramente corale e rappresentativa di tutta una popolazione le cui benemerenze oscure e ignote è bene siano state fissate con un senso obiettivo e privo di retorica." [6] These comments only exemplify the more widespread critical assumption that choral techniques must, by default, index concrete (and generally underprivileged) social groups: Fontamara's "peasants," Rome's lower-class "population." (Even outside the Italian tradition, chorality has frequently been seen as a fictional mode for representing the masses; writing of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, for instance, Raymond Chapman alludes to the "powerful choric effect of Hardy's peasants" (242).) That collective modes of expression have so often been associated almost exclusively with characters of the lower class reminds us – as theorists including Aaron Fogel, Lennard Davis, and Bronwen Thomas usefully have – that "the very forms of representing speech in literature carry ideological meanings" (Thomas FD 663).

What I would like to suggest in this chapter, however, is that chorality may qualify less as a naturalistic technique than a theatrical one, used not to reflect an existing social group or community, so much as to project or enact an imaginary one. By distributing speech among a conspicuously heterogeneous group of speakers, both Vittorini and Pavese dramatize a kind of vocal parity and plurality for which there

[6] "truly choral and representative of a whole population whose hidden and unknown merits have been well recorded with an objectivity lacking in rhetoric" (trans. Sitney 30). Originally published in "Il festival cinematografico – Città aperta," *Il Popolo*, 25 Sept. 1945

doesn't seem to be a concrete social or historical referent. Or much of a literary one: both texts assign more discourse more "proportionally" than has conventionally been the norm within the novel.[7] In so doing, they put forward a model of character relations that differs significantly from the one that Alex Woloch, as noted in the previous chapter, discerned in the 19th-century realist novel: one based on the notion of collaboration, rather than competition; and on the democratic, rather than radically "asymmetrical" distribution of narrative attention. Put another way, compared to the highly "possessive" attitudes toward speech manifested in the texts considered in previous chapters, characters in Pavese and Vittorini's novels treat speech as something highly participatory. Considering their historical context, one could even argue that the texts might be modeling precisely the kind of vocal and ideological diversity that had been precluded under the fascist regime.

To suggest that neorealism would be compatible with this kind of aspirational agenda might, at first glance, seem counterintuitive. But much of the recent scholarship in the field confirms that postwar cultural production in Italy could be seen to serve fantasmatic and even mythopoetic ends – no less, in some cases, than the Fascist-era texts whose "unreality" they claim to counteract. Angelo Restivo, for one, draws on Benedict Anderson's theories of nationalism to suggest that "neorealism can be looked at as…an attempt to create an imagined community to replace the (equally media-constructed) imagined community of the fascist period" (Restivo 24-5). The impetus for this "attempt," as he explains, was

> the profound disarray that Italy found itself in at the end of the war, a disarray marked precisely by the collapse of a coherent national narrative that could be

[7] See Fogel for further discussion of the "abstract proportional model" of dialogue, especially the introduction, p. 1-38.

> taken as meaningful by Italians. Thus, neorealism functions not only to imagine a new Italy for Italians, but also a new Italy to be exported to the world: and in this regard, we must look not simply at 'representations' of postwar Italy within the films but also, more importantly, at the enunciative strategies of the films. (25)

Though Restivo is speaking specifically of neorealist cinema, his observations might just as readily apply to fiction, which in many cases appears as engaged in verbally articulating the nation (through the synecdoche of the region, town, or "paese") as film was in visually 'enunciating' it. It is a possibility that Italo Calvino seems implicitly to endorse in his preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, when he suggests that neorealism had always been characterized by an essentially imaginative or 'expressive' impulse: "[l]a carica esplosiva di libertà che animava il giovane scrittore non era tanto nella sua volontà di documentare o informare, quanto in quella di *esprimere*" (vii). The result, he suggests, "il vero nome per quella epoca italiana, più che 'neorealismo' dovrebbe essere 'neo-espressionismo'" (Calvino *Sentiero* xi).[8] Neorealism's expressionistic dimension receives further scrutiny in Ruth Ben-Ghiat's work, which examines the revisionist impulse of many postwar writers, who were driven to 'rewrite' or 'reshape' their literary output during the 1930s, and to 'reinterpret' their relationship to the regime, more generally.[9] Though Pavese, unlike Vittorini, was an avowed anti-fascist,[10] it is significant that both would take as their subject, in these novels, acts of both literal and figurative revisiting. And in each case, it is the text's dialogic structure that may provide the best showcase for this kind of imaginative activity: a platform on which the authors can be

[8] All translations from *Il sentiero* mine, unless otherwise indicated: "the explosive sense of freedom which animated young writers derived not so much from their urge to document or inform, but from the urge to *express*"; "…the better name for that epoch in Italy would be not 'Neo-realism,' but 'Neo-expressionism.'"
[9] For more on neorealism's "rewriting" of "fascist-era cultural production," and "reconstructions of the Resistance," see Ben-Ghiat (664, 662). See also Steimatsky.
[10] As Ben-Ghiat demonstrates, Vittorini was actually on good terms with the regime, despite their well-known censure of the *Americana* anthology (665n).

seen to enact the heterogeneity that stands in opposition to the "artificially unifying parameters of Fascist nationalism" (Re *Neorealist* 110).

In suggesting that Pavese and Vittorini might deploy dialogue for rhetorical purposes – rather than, say, characterizing, plot-advancing, or realism-enhancing ones – I am also suggesting that we might view them as the inheritors of the tradition of modernist speech representation explored at length in the preceding chapters. Bolstering such a hypothesis is the fact that both authors were dedicated scholars, translators, and disseminators of 19th and 20th-century American and (to a lesser extent) British literature.[11] As a result, it has become almost commonplace to remark on their works' indebtedness to that of certain Anglophone writers, including modernists like Faulkner and Hemingway. Introducing the English translation of *La luna e i falò,* Mark Rudman notes the similarity of Pavese's barn-burning sequence to the one in *The Hamlet* (vii). And writing of *Conversazione in Sicilia,* Alberto Moravia has remarked that "il dialogo di queste conversazioni siciliane, così contrappunto di ripetizioni, alternato a note di agro realismo…ci ricorda Hemingway"; he even goes so far as to suggest that "senza Hemingway e i suoi prodotti affini è molto probabile che questo dialogo Vittorini l'avrebbe scritto in maniera diversa" (71-72).[12] Yet this attention to particular thematic or stylistic similarities may, paradoxically, have had the result of obscuring more submerged

[11] The scholarship on this topic is considerable. For a concise synopsis of the American literary influence on postwar Italian writing, see Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema,* p. 25-26. See also Donald Heiney's *American in Modern Italian Literature* (1964) and *Three Italian Novelists* (1968), and more recently, Ferme (1998) and Smith (2008). Though he concedes the importance of American literature to neorealist production, Calvino also hints that there has been a tendency to overstate it; in his preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, he alludes to "quegli scrittori degli Anni Trenta di cui tanti critici ci rimproveravano d'essere gli allievi diretti o indiretti" ["those thirties-era writers of whom critics accuse us of being the direct or indirect descendants"] (*Sentiero* viii).

[12] "the dialogue of these Sicilan conversations, juxtaposing, as they do, repetitions with a strain of bitter realism, recall Hemingway"; "without Hemingway and his similar output, it's likely Vittorini would have written his dialogue in a different way."

parallels between neorealist and modernist style, more generally – particularly in regards to their handling of dialogue. My goal in this chapter, then, is not to document the influence of the "American model" on postwar Italian authors (Re 110). Instead, I hope to explore how certain neorealist writers (and filmmakers) might be seen to at once extend and emend modernist strategies for deploying character voice in fiction.

In fact, there are distinct continuities between the dialogic paradigm I delineate in this chapter, and those I examined in previous ones. Like *The Ambassadors* and *The Sun Also Rises*, *Conversazione in Sicilia* and *La luna e i falò* explore language's role as at once an index of and conduit to community. Yet unlike James and Hemingway's texts, the structure of conversation in Vittorini and Pavese's seems driven not by self-consciously verbalizing characters like Strether and Jake, so much by the authors themselves. By extension, talk seems invested in these novels with less personal than social aspirations: conversation, these texts imply, might not just engineer intimacies between characters, but build broader coalitions. At the same time, the thematization of dialogue in both texts – and the way it makes its material presence felt – would seem to align them more directly with those in the previous chapter. Yet if the discursive structure in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Waves* conveyed a critique of "the novel" – namely, its bias in favor of individualism – here, it seems designed to telegraph more ideological than aesthetic concerns.

In particular, the treatment and organization of speech in Pavese and Vittorini's novels reflects a marked deference to – or respect for – the speaking voice. The corollary impulse, within film, might be the "trust in the thing photographed," which David Forgacs has claimed Fellini discerned in Rossellini's work, or what Angela della Vacche

calls, more specifically, "neorealist cinema's reliance on physiognomy" (53).[13] In a cultural moment and environment in which "rhetoric" was both omnipresent and widely deprecated,[14] it is possible that the human voice – or, in cinema, the human *gaze*, and by extension, the human face[15] – could have been seen as an antidote, a guarantor of maximum expressive transparency (6). As Monika Fludernik has demonstrated, readers and critics alike continue to reflexively imbue direct discourse with a "specious authenticity" (29). And it is this fantasy of speech's "authenticity" – or what Meir Sternberg calls the "direct speech fallacy" – that may at some level have animated the work of neorealist writers, in search of some maximally "authentic" and incorruptible mode of expression (Sternberg, POV 84). It could be for this reason that direct speech and speakers are vested with so much authority in these texts – that spoken testimony concludes Pavese's novel, or that "conversation" is the more dominant mode in Vittorini's novel than narration. Direct discourse, such emphases imply, may be the most unimpeachable representational strategy there is.

That dialogue may be perceived as rhetorically 'pure' does not, of course, mean that it is; on the contrary, the privileging of character speech in these texts could be seen as a short-hand, indicating their authors' commitment to ideologically correct values of democracy, pluralism, and populism. But the perception of voice *as* pure – the fantasy of voice's purity – may nonetheless survive in the narrative universe. It seems like no coincidence, then, that both authors composed works at various points in their career that

[13] A suggestion that Forgacs introduced during a lecture on "Neorealism and Photography" at New York University on February 1, 2012.
[14] As Sitney notes, in his discussion of *Roma, città aperta*, "the accusation of rhetoricity was a serious aesthetic condemnation" (42); see also Ben-Ghiat, who fascinatingly traces this "rhetoric of antirhetoric" through both fascist and antifascist cultural production (637).
[15] See Michel Chion, who similarly links the default "privilege accorded to the voice over all sonic elements" in cinema to the elevation of the "human face," which is "not just an image like the others" (6).

placed an even greater emphasis on oral discourse – Vittorini's *Le donne di Messina* or Pavese's *Dialoghi con Leucò,* which make use, to varying degrees, of a dialogue or "interview" structure (Re *Neorealist* 113). For the very appeal of these narrative forms might be their extensibility, their ability to accommodate a potentially infinite number of voices. It seems particularly significant, in this light, that Calvino has theorized neorealism itself in similarly capacious terms: as less a movement than "un insieme di voci, in gran parte periferiche, una molteplice scoperta delle diverse Italie, anche – o specialmente – delle Italie fino allora più inedite per la letteratura" (*Sentiero* viii).[16] Indeed, one could argue that neorealism could be defined not only as a collection *of* voices, but by how much narrative space it grants *to* voices, especially to those other than the author, narrator, or protagonist's own. Thanks to the attention devoted to the *questione della lingua* in Italian thought, the language in which writers choose to write – and in which characters "speak" – has always been recognized as immensely important. What these novels suggest, however, is that it is not only how one speaks but *how many* speak that is of potentially equal significance.

I. "Una galleria discontinua": Vittorini's Curatorial Vision

The importance attached to speech in *Conversazione in Sicilia* is inscribed not only in the novel's title, but in Vittorini's conception of it, which he once described as a "suite" of dialogues (qtd CS 50). In a 1937 letter to Eduardo Sanguinetti, he revisited the idea, comparing the text's structure not to a musical composition, but to a visual and spatial one:

[16] "It was many voices combined, mostly voices from the provinces, a many-sided revelation of the different Italys that existed, a revelation also – and in particular – of the Italys that had been least explored by literature" (Colquhoun 10).

> il libro agisce proprio come 'conversazione,' tra l'*a parte* del monologo a voce alta e il dialogo aperto, con uomini, con fantasmi, con statue, configurandosi come una galleria discontinua, dove, nella stanza dell'episodio, si interroga e ci si interroga – due atteggiamenti che sono qui uno – e in cui la risposta, per quanto verbalmente si articoli, sempre è segno: indizio allusive, interrogante esso medesimo, chiuso in eco e in enigma. (CS 50)[17]

In analogizing his novel to a "suite" or "gallery," Vittorini underscores the novel's composite nature, its status as a verbal assemblage of dialogic and monologic episodes. Put another way, his comments highlight what could be called the *curatorial* impulse at work in the novel, the interest – equally attributable, perhaps, to the novel's protagonist, as its author – in drawing "discontinuous" components together into a single, highly wrought aesthetic structure. There is certainly a precedent for such activity in Vittorini's own career: as the editor of *Americana*, a seminal collection or "gathering" (*raccolta*) of American literature that included selections translated by him, Pavese, Moravia, Eugenio Montale, and others,[18] he was intimately familiar with the work of adjoining at times vastly divergent texts and voices. Other works of his showcase a similarly anthological or combinatory aesthetic. *Uomini e no*, as Re notes, is a "highly composite and heteroclite text, a mosaic of many voices and styles" (*Calvino* 13).[19] Repeatedly, then, one sees this purposeful juxtaposition of "voices" in his work. And what it implies is that he doesn't want to invisibly reproduce voices, so much as to draw attention to them, to *put them on display*. Or, perhaps, to "manifest" them, given that his work, as Calvino once put it, "ha intenzione e funzione di programma, di manifesto" (*Vittorini* 9).

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[17] "The book operates just like a conversation, alternating between an "a" part, or externalized monologue, and direct dialogue, with men, with ghosts, with statues, configuring itself like a discontinuous gallery in which, in the room of the episode, he both interrogates and is interrogated – two attitudes that here are one – and in which the response, to the extent that it is verbalized, is always a sign: an allusive trace, interrogating itself just the same, enclosed in echoes and enigmas."

[18] See *Americana: Raccolta di narratori.* Elio Vittorini, Ed. Milano: Bompiani, 1941 (2 vol).

[19] That Vittorini ultimately considered the novel a "failure, because he was unable to 'orchestrate' the different voices and stylistic levels in order to achieve what Bakhtin called a 'dialogical tension' among them" only confirms the importance of synthesis to his compositional method (Re, *Calvino* 13-14).

I say all this in part by way of countering the surprisingly common critical assertion that dialogue in *Conversazione in Sicilia* – despite the novel's plainly allegorical dimensions – remains "uncannily natural" (Re, *Neorealist* 109). Overriding the realism of discrete phrases, however, is the overwhelmingly synthetic quality of the novel's verbal environment: its evident made-ness, the impression of its being a deliberate, even didactic dialogic installation. The obviously orchestrated quality of the novel's conversations is revealed not only through the range and incompatible registers of the voices incorporated into the text, but also by the inclusion of a protagonist who is in many ways engaged in a similar act of conversational engineering – one whose efforts, in other words, appear to reproduce and thus dramatize Vittorini's own. That Silvestro's actions are in some ways intended to be analogous to that of a writer's – that he is similarly invested in the creation and curation of dialogue – is supported by this behavior throughout the novel, beginning with his journey on the train. Having embarked upon the return trip to Siracusa, he is insistent about initiating conversation – not, as in the case of James's characters, with any particular interlocutor, but with any interlocutor whatever. When his opening gambit, "Non c'è il formaggio come il nostro" ["There's no cheese like ours"] is ignored ("nessuno mi rispose" ["no one responded"]) he repeats the phrase, five times in the space of two pages, until it provokes a response (139). One could argue that such repetition – a common feature of Vittorini's prose – is inserted for rhythm, rather than sense; or that Silvestro repeats it in order to broadcast his own Sicilian identity, to his ability to discern what is "ours" ("il nostro") and what is not (just as Hemingway and James's subjects, for instance, used language to determine a speaker's status as "one of" the group). But it is also possible to suggest that Silvestro, here, is

simply driving toward dialogue: intent on inciting a conversation where none would be naturally occurring.

In this way, he succeeds in fomenting the first of the novel's many discussions, with a speaker who, though nameless, is described as "uno di quei siciliani, il più piccolo e soave" ["one of the Sicilians, the smallest and most gentle"] (139, 10). Significantly, the content of this discussion is at least partly fallacious, as readers know: Silvestro has not, as he claims, ever lived in America, and therefore does not possess the knowledge and experience of its customs that he pretends. The implication is that the truth-value the words exchanged is of secondary importance, compared to the fact that they are *being* exchanged. Questioned about American eating habits, for instance ("Mangiano tutti in America la mattina?"), he reflects, "Avrei potuto dire di no…ma non potevo parlargli male di un America dove non ero stato, e che, dopotutto, non era nemmeno l'America, nulla di attuale, di effettivo, ma una sua idea di regno dei cieli sulla terra. Non potevo; non sarebbe stato giusto" (144).[20] Not only would this disclosure disabuse his interlocutor of his illusions – it might also derail their discussion. It is just one of many instances in the novel when Silvestro will tell people what they want to hear, as when he allows his new acquaintances, later in the novel, to believe that he too shares their despair at the "mondo offeso" ["the wronged world"] (311). Indeed, Silvestro can frequently be seen to take the path of least conversational resistance – to adopt an acquiescent voice – for the purposes of precipitating or protracting conversation. Like James's Strether, then, there is a sense that Silvestro is in pursuit of a kind of phatic communion, and is willing to

[20] "Does everyone in America eat in the morning?" "I could have told him no…but I couldn't speak ill to him of an America where I had never been and that, after all, wasn't even America, was nothing real, concrete, but this idea of the reign of heaven on earth. I couldn't do it; it wouldn't have been right" (13-14).

compromise or agree to his companion's propositions for the sake of prolonging their exchange.

Indeed, the distinctive feature of Silvestro's dialogic behavior may be its *lack* of distinctiveness: if anything, his locutionary habits are chameleonic, shifting to accommodate the variant needs of other speakers. At times, he assumes the interrogator's role; at other's, he is a largely compliant or even silent conversational partner. During his introductory conversation with the knife-grinder, for instance, he immediately shifts to emulate his enigmatic gestures and whispers:

> Mi guardò e mi strizzò l'occhio, luccicante negli occhi e nero in faccia, e disse: – Ah! Ah!
> – Ah! Ah! – dissi io, e strizzai l'occhio a lui.
> E lui si chino al mio orecchio, mi parlò nell'orecchio. E io ascoltai le parole sue al mio orecchio, ridendo, 'ah! ah!', parlai nell'orecchio a lui, e fummo due che si parlavano all'orecchio, e ridevamo, ci battevamo le mani sulle spalle. (279)[21]

He will similarly take up his interlocutor's cues during the conversation with his mother's patient, choosing to exchange looks – rather than words – with a patient who "doesn't want to speak" (244). And at times, he will even camouflage his voice completely, as he does most noticeably during the episodes in the bar, excerpted in the introduction. This full range of discursive activity is illustrated during the earlier train ride, when Silvestro engages in serial acts of over-hearing, talking about the overheard speakers, and then, finally, with them. Those two speakers – who, like the "piccolo Siciliano," are assigned epithets ("Coi Baffi" and "Senza Baffi") rather than proper names – speak in dialect, but he reports their exchange in standard Italian, as if from the position of a third-person narrator, alternating between reporting their speech ("E si raccontarono di quel barbiere a

[21] "He looked at me and winked, his eyes glistening and his face black, and said, 'Ha ha!' 'Ha ha!' I said and winked at him. He bent toward me and whispered in my ear. And I listened to his words in my ear, laughing 'ha ha!', and I whispered in his ear, and the two of us each whispered in the other's ear, and laughing, slapped the other on the back" (125).

Lodi…e Coi Baffi disse che una volta aveva fermato quel suo barbiere e l'aveva tenuto dentro tre giorni, e Senza Baffi disse che aveva fatto lo stesso…."), and commenting on it ("io dalle loro voci sentii ch'erano soddisfatti, commossi di soddisfazione e quasi sul punto di gettarsi l'uno al collo dell'altro nella comune soddisfazione…") (151).[22] The scene reflects Silvestro's interest not only in engaging in conversation, but in recording and narrating the conversations of others. More interestingly, it also reveals his willingness to minimize or deemphasize his own voice in the process, in order to better "listen" to others' ("io dalle loro voci sentii…").

In his willingness to privilege the discourse of others, Silvestro seems in some sense to redouble the priorities of the text, in which narrative is continually subordinated to dialogue. Or, better, made synonymous with it. As Silvestro puts it, "il viaggio era anche conversazione": conversation is the goal of the journey, the narrative's raison d'être. In Vittorni's hands, then, the novel becomes a kind of voice-engineering technology; it may not be too much to say that its primary *telos* is the broadcasting of conversation. The text's many repetitions might actually support this theory, since they reveal a kind of dialogic inefficiency only possible in a fictional world which – like *Absalom, Absalom!*'s – revolves entirely around acts of talking and telling. It is hardly surprising, in light of the novel's voice-gathering priorities, that Vittorini makes such wide use of the catalogue, or *list*. An exemplary instance of which is the mental inventory Silvestro conducts, shortly before leaving the train: "avevo conosciuto l'uomo dalle arance, Coi Baffi e Senza Baffi, il Gran Lombardo, il catanese, il piccolo vecchio dalla

[22] "And they told one another about this barber in Lodi…and Whiskers said that once he had arrested his barber and kept him locked up for three days, and Without Whiskers said that he had done the same…"; "I could hear from their voices that they were satisfied, moved with satisfaction almost [to] the point of throwing themselves on each other's necks in their common satisfaction…" (19).

voce di fuscello secco, il giovane malarico avvolto nello scialle…" (170).[23] Although this list is framed as an act of personal stock-taking – cumulatively, Silvestro credits his encounters with these individuals with moving him from a state of "indifference," to what could almost be called engagement – such list-making might also have broader, ideological implications. As Franco Moretti has argued, the list is a "technique of polyphony," paradigmatic of American authors like Melville and Whitman (*Modern Epic* 64).[24] And in Vittorini's text, it seems to function similarly, as a "technique" of multiplicity: a means of rapidly introducing – or reintroducing – a plurality of subjects, voices, and points of view.

More than even Whitman or Melville's encyclopedic lists, however, a more compelling antecedent for this kind of roll-call might be the epic catalogue, the kind of character-driven inventory one finds in Homer or Virgil (or Dante), and which typically takes place during the hero's voyage to the underworld, or *nekuia*. In the *Odyssey's* eleventh book, for instance, Odysseus engages in serial conversations with the shades both of those he has known, and those known only to him by reputation. And it may be the closest equivalent to the representational strategy Vittorini employs in this text: a means of interpolating testimony from characters whose voices would not otherwise be heard. Thus, for instance, in Vittorini's forty-second chapter, Silvestro has the chance to speak with the ghost of his brother, just as Odysseus is given the opportunity to talk to his dead mother. Not only does this scene represent the moment at which the text crosses

[23] "I had gotten to know the man with the oranges, With Whiskers and Without Whiskers, the Big Lombard, the man from Catania, the little old man with the voice of a dry piece of straw the young malaria victim wrapped in a shawl" (34).

[24] Both authors who, significantly, exerted a major influence on Pavese, in particular. For more on Pavese's "highly charged, personal enthusiasm for Whitman" (on whom he wrote his university thesis) see Smith, especially chapters 2 and 6 (45). Smith also discusses Pavese's intense admiration for Melville, whom he venerated "above all other American novelists"; in addition to *Moby Dick*, which he translated in 1932, he also translated "Benito Cereno" in 1940 (5).

from realism into a kind of hallucinatory lyricism, it also confirms the novel's interest in imagining voices, rather than merely 'reflecting' them. If *Absalom, Absalom!*, for one, suggested that such acts of imaginative projection might be questionable, even irresponsible, here they seem to assume a much more positive valence: allowing not only Silvestro, but also the reader, to "hear" directly from a casualty of the war.

Indeed, the idea that verbal testimony is something that should be actively cultivated or even created – that there may be an ethical imperative to do so – is one of the more distinctive messages to emerge from the novel. Repeatedly, Silvestro will assume the role of knowledge petitioner, soliciting stories from other speakers. When he first arrives at his mother's house, for instance, he addresses her almost entirely in the interrogative mode, posing yes-or-no questions that range from the comparatively trivial to the extremely consequential: "Ne ero pazzo?" (181) "E ci picchiavi?" (182) "Si aveva il maiale?" (187) "Avevamo fame?" (188).[25] The fact that these are leading questions, not open-ended ones, and that his mother responds almost invariably in the affirmative ("Altro che! Non ti ricordi?", "Si, non ricordi?")[26] suggest a situation in which answers are already known, and yet still remain to be *heard* – entered, more officially, into some narrative or historical record (182, 187). Perhaps more significant, however, is his mother's disclosure of previously unknown information – about his father, about his sibling's birth, about his mother's single act of adultery. Without the presence of an interlocutor, the novel implies, these stories would never have come to light. In this sense, Silvestro's pursuit of his own personal, family truths might seem to provide a

[25] "I was crazy about it?" "And you would spank us?" "We had a pig?" "We went hungry?"
[26] "Of course! You don't remember?" "Sure, don't you remember?"

model for the pursuit of broader historical ones, which must be similarly extracted, attested to, put down.

In successfully eliciting from his mother these otherwise unheard stories, then, Silvestro is in some sense an exemplary figure, giving us to understand that some experiences – particularly ones undergone by those at the margins of the penninsula – will remain submerged if not actively solicited. Despite, then, what Calvino has called the "urge to express" ("volontà…di esprimere") or the "frenzy to tell stories" ("smania di raccontare") that was such a common symptom among the war's survivors, this novel suggests that such "expression" – at least in certain quarters – is not something that could be taken for granted (*Sentiero* vii, vi). It is an idea that runs contrary to what Re, too, has suggested: namely, that there was

> the pervasive sense that with the end of Fascism everyone in the country could once again speak freely, expressing his or her opinions without fear of censorship or repression, generated an unprecedented, if transient, phenomenon in modern Italian culture: the development of an oral mode of narration. (Re, *Calvino* 36)

Although Vittorini's novel was composed before the war, and published before its end, it nonetheless seems to anticipate – just as Pavese's novel would retroactively reflect – the increased importance of the "oral mode of narration." Thus, while Vittorini's fictional subjects are not the historical ones Re and Calvino describe, it is nonetheless worth noting that they do not speak either as "freely" or "ubiquitously" as either implies. This verbal obstructedness may be best illustrated by one of Silvestro's mother's patients, whose distinguishing symptom is that, as his wife explains, "non vuol parlare" ["he doesn't want to talk"] (244). His unexplained muteness provides an important counterpoint to the texts' multi-vocality, and a reminder of the ease with which voices may go missing, or become absent.

It seems especially suggestive, then, that Silvestro's solicitousness is to some extent paralleled by his mother's; in her daily rounds, she not only administers injections to her patients, but engages them in conversation. Her *giro,* then, is like her son's at least partly designed for the purposes of information-gathering, and acts similarly as a narrative device for the interpolation of diverse speakers. That no one voice is given priority is made even more evident than it was on the train, thanks to the evident synchronicity among speakers: "Che grande figlio avete!" ["What a big son you have!"] one patient exclaims, and several visits later another comments, "Un grande figlio avete!" ["You have a big son!"] (234, 243). There is even the sense, at times, that utterances don't originate with single unique subjectivity, so much as from a particular place or space. As Silvestro waits outside, during each of his mother's visits, he describes the voices he overhears, but whose origins remain unseen: "dal fondo una voce d'uomo disse" (234), "parlavano lontane da me, tutte e tre le voci, ed erano creature invisibili" (234), "e di nuovo udii…gente che non vedevo"" (237), "eppure le voci degli invisibili parlarono calme come nelle altre case" (239).[27] That these speakers are described as "invisible" is, of course, a powerful evocation of their obscurity. But what is perhaps most interesting about such episodes is the way they highlight the almost *ambient* status of voice in the novel, the apparent ubiquity of certain phrases or sentiments. In this sense, the relative anonymity of the voices Silvestro overhears might attest, more generally, to what we could call vocal autochthony: the idea that voice could be as much the emanation of a place, as of any particular individual.

[27] "from the back a man's voice spoke" (84), "They were speaking far away from me, all three voices; they were the voices of invisible creatures" (84), "and again I heard…people I didn't see" (86), "yet the voices of the invisibles spoke calmly like those in the other houses" (88).

It might be possible to go even further, and suggest that in the aggregate, such instances reveal Vittorini to be less concerned with representing individual voices, than creating the impression of vocal density and diversity, the sense that "there were many voices" ("erano molti voci") behind every edifice (239). Like Silvestro, who appears to converse indiscriminately, Vittorini seems more intent on conveying the *idea* of talk, than the reality of a particular talker; indeed, the cultivated miscellany of speakers seems designed to imply that the novel could, theoretically, feature the speech of any-character-whatever, at least within this designated geographical space. Indeed, given the progressively stylized quality of voice in the novel, it seems possible to suggest that far more important to Vittorini than speech's plausibility, is its audibility. In this sense, while commentators continue to identify Hemingway as the primary inspiration for the novel's dialogue, I would suggest that it is Faulkner who may exert the stronger influence: like *As I Lay Dying*, for instance, *Conversazione in Sicilia* does not hesitate to include "unspeakable" accounts – the testimony of a deceased character, like Addie Bundren or Silvestro's brother, or even, in Vittorini's case, a non-human one.

The purely imaginary status of the novel's "conversations" becomes more pronounced as it proceeds, and may culminate in an overtly oneiric sequence near the end of novel, which also marks the apex of the novel's choral tendencies. As Silvestro walks around town, shortly before his departure, he attracts a growing crowd of interlocutors – including a priest, a barber, a carpenter, some young boys, a couple of beggars, and a murder of crows – all of whom pose iterations of the same question, "perché piangete?"

> Così pure mi venne dietro un barbiere, e mi vennero dietro un legnaiolo, uno straccione, una ragazza col capo avvolto in una sciarpa, un secondo straccione. Mi vedevano e mi chiedevano: Perché piangete? - O chiedevano a quelli che già mi seguivano: - Perché piange? - E tutti diventavano seguaci miei: un carrettiere, un

cane, uomini di Sicilia, donne di Sicilia, e perfino un cinese. – Perché piangete? – chiedevano. (331)[28]

Eventually, the group expands to include even those who are manifestly not present in the town, and he finds himself surrounded by "tutti gli amici dei giorni prima, i siciliani che avevo incontrato e coi quali avevo parlato durante il mio viaggio":

- Vi sono altri doveri – mi disse il Gran Lombardo. – Non piangete.
- Non piangete, - mi dissero le amiche.

E il piccolo amico delle arance anche lui mi disse: - Non piangete.
C'era il catanese, e disse: - Ha ragione il signore. Non piangete. (332)[29]

What makes the scene so striking is not just the improbable display of synchrony among the novel's speakers – not dissimilar to the kinds of expressive overlaps that punctuated Woolf and Faulkner's work. More striking is the evidently manufactured convergence of these *characters*, especially those (like his former traveling companions) whose presence at the scene would be most plainly impossible. By combining in a single episode – assembling on one episodic platform – nearly all of the novel's speakers, past and present, Vittorini seems almost to be orchestrating a kind of grand finale: a closing number, in which everyone returns for one last line, one final reprisal. Though it may seem like an improbable point of comparison, Vittorini's novel is not unlike a musical in its willingness to oscillate between more-or-less realistic diegesis and instances of vocal (or, more specifically, verbal) *spectacle*: the kinds of spectacular moments that, as Laura Mulvey has argued of Classical Hollywood film, serve alternately to fetishize, and to

[28] "In the same way a barber followed behind me and a carpenter, a man in rags, a girl with her head wrapped in a scarf, a second man in rags. They saw me and asked, 'Why are you crying?' Or they asked those who were already following me: 'Why is he crying?' And they all became my followers: a cart driver, a dog, men of Sicily, women of Sicily, and finally a Chinaman. 'Why are you crying?' they asked" (173).

[29] "All my friends of the day before, the Sicilians I had met and with whom I had spoken during my journey. 'There are other duties,' the Big Lombard told me. 'Don't cry.' 'Don't cry,' my sick friends said to me. 'Don't cry,' my women friends said to me. And my little friend with the oranges, even he said to me, 'Don't cry.' The man from Catania was there, and said 'He's right. Don't cry.'" (173)

arrest the flow of the narrative.[30] In fact, Mulvey's theoretical framework may prove surprisingly useful to analyses of the text, in which voices are often imbued with the equivalent of what Mulvey called to-be-looked-at-ness – a *to-be-heard-ness*, a quality of asking to be heard. Like a song-and-dance number, this kind of choral spectacle seems designed primarily for the sake of sensory impact, rather than for the purposes of narrative advancement: it is, in the same sense, "show-stopping."

Perhaps an even better analogy, however, is provided not by Hollywood cinema, but by postwar Italian cinema, which even in the wake of neorealism continued to reflect the influences of neorealist experimentation. With this in mind, the filmic sequence most powerfully evoked by this episode is the conclusion of Federico Fellini's 1963 film *8 ½*, during which the protagonist Guido orchestrates a reunion of his friends, family, and lovers, whom he leads in a celebratory and circular dance.[31] Like Fellini, Vittorini seems to be engaged in a similarly fantasmatic projection of community. In Vittorini's case, however, the impetus may be less psychological than ideological – his intent not to illuminate his protagonist's psyche, so much as the *communal* one, whose exhibition Silvestro is primarily there to conduct and facilitate. That Vittorini chooses to dramatize this kind of collective consciousness "ad alta voce" – as a collection of voices, speaking sequentially and collaboratively, if not simultaneously – tells us something about the importance assigned to speech within the novel, and perhaps, within neorealism more generally.

This sequence, then, offers evidence that *Conversazione in Sicilia* is a novel in which narrative is continually subordinated to spectacle; and semantics, inevitably

[30] See "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
[31] It is a scene that evokes the etymology of the word "chorus," which comes from the Latin meaning "dance," or "band of dancers and singers, etc" (OED).

sacrificed to sonority, to the sonorousness of the speaking voice. We see proof of this kind of sound-privileging throughout the text, as when earlier, Silvestro describes his mother's chronic self-contradictions: every time she leaves a patient's house, he notes, "diceva il contrario della volta prima" ["she said the opposite of what she'd said the time before"] (242). He himself thinks little of lying about his American travels, as previously noted, and in the sequence above, offers an even more plainly contrafactual statement, "Non piango, - io continuai. E piangevo" (332).[32] The comment recalls the kind of baldly illogical formulation to be found, for instance, in Benjy's chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, as when he insists, "I wasn't crying, but I couldn't stop" (20). If there, the contradiction seems designed to convey Benjy's mental addlepation, here, it seems to highlight the comparative unimportance of sense-making in the novel's hierarchy of values. In other words, it is the fact of saying, and not the semantic particulars of the thing said, that is of greatest concern; as in James and Hemingway, making meaning may be only an ancillary goal of conversation. In fact, paradoxical though it might seem, communicative opacity may even *heighten* audibility, as Noa Steimatsky suggests it does in Visconti's *La terra trema,* in which the "incomprehensibility" of Sicilian "may itself contribute to musicality," the "operatic, acoustic spatiality" of language that he implies was Visconti's primary concern (106). Stripped of signification, or signifying potential, discourse becomes a question not of communication, but manifestation: conversation as *manifesto*.

What seems especially distinctive about *Conversazione in Sicilia*, then, is its dual commitment to interpolating multiple speakers and instances of speech while at the same time precluding any sense of asymmetry among them. Once again, it is the catalogue or

[32] " 'I'm not crying,' I continued. And I cried."

list structure that emerges as the organizational paradigm. In the excerpt above, the distribution of discourse seems scrupulously democratic: and the cross-section of represented speakers (a barber, a carpenter, two beggars, a cart driver, a dog, etc) so inclusive as to be utopian. The appeal of seriality as a representational tactic might lie precisely in its elasticity; like the visual inventory that Deleuze attributes to Visconti, the vocal inventory can potentially give attention to any number of subjects or items in a given narrative setting (4). (Significantly, we see a similar technique used in *Le donne di Messina*, in which Vittorini dispenses more radically with organic narrative logic: instead, chapters might be organized around numeric lists ("per prima una macchina…,seconda una Jeep..."), anaphoric ones ("c'è in un treno…c'è in un camion…c'è in stracci grigioverdi…"), and eventually, a sequence of speakers (Cattarin, Vedevo Biliotti, Pompeo Manera, Catalo Chiesa, Elvira la Farina…) (23, 10, 152-153).) In this way, Vittorini's work may represent a solution to the major versus minor binary that, as Woloch argues, was a central problem of the similarly character-rich realist novel. In contrast to the kinds of wildly "disproportionate" models of dialogue that, both Fogel and Woloch variously hint, have come to characterize the novel, one can't help but notice how committed Vittorini's text seems to maintaining a kind of expressive equilibrium: how easily "minor" characters assert themselves, without seeming to threaten the voice of the "major" character, still clearly designated as the protagonist. Instead of the one *versus* the many, then, *Conversazione in Sicilia* – not unlike *The Waves* – puts forward a way of thinking of the one in addition to, rather than in competition with, the many.

Even apart from the explicitly choral episodes, then, the text as a whole seems to epitomize a more *sustainable* approach to staging multiple voices, without instantiating

antagonism among them. Indeed, the fact that the protagonist's voice will recede, and at times, even temporarily disappear, suggests that it is no longer the individual, but the collective that is the unit of concern. In this sense, one of the most compelling precedents for the novel's organization of voice might ultimately be *Moby Dick*, a novel which had reached Italy, through Pavese's translation, in 1932. Like Melville's text, Vittorini's features many brief, episodic chapters, in which different voices, in turn, come to the fore and recede; and like Ishamel, Silvestro becomes an increasingly less prominent dialogic presence as the novel proceeds. While Moretti, as discussed in a previous chapter, has analyzed the play of voice in Melville's novel in agonistic terms – as a contest between Ishmael and Ahab, who gradually wrests discursive control away from all speakers, and thus "imprisons the voices on the Pequod" – it may be possible to conceive this dynamic differently, in terms other than those connotative of violence (*Modern Epic* 61).[33] In fact, no such *agon* is evident in Vittorini's fictional universe. Of course, at the time of the novel's publication, the threat posed to vocal and ideological "polyphony" by an encroaching monologism was all too historically real – yet within the space of the novel, at least, Vittorini seems to allow that a more equitable and ideal distribution of discourse is possible and sustainable.

In this sense, one is tempted to suggest an even more proximate (if non-modernist) American analogue for Vittorini's project: Sarah Orne Jewett's *County of the Pointed Firs*, which for Sandra Zagarell exemplifies the "narrative of community," as opposed to the "'self'-centered narration that has dominated in the Western tradition."[34]

[33] Similar to Moretti, Fogel suggests that vocal dynamics be understood as contests of force, and that novelistic dialogue is often organized around "the principles of radical dissymmetry and coercion" (6).
[34] See Zagarell, who describes the "community narrative," as a counter-tradition in the West, one of the "literary as well as theoretical alternatives to its own preoccupation with the self" (499).

The difference may be that whereas the community Jewett purports to portray is putatively real, Vittorini makes it plain that his is a facsimile: a community that would not – that could not – have occurred naturally, and which is clearly an invention. And yet the fantasmatic status of this vision – its impossible heterogeneity; its encompassing of the dead, the absent, the non-human – does not detract from its force. More interesting than the sustainability or 'success' of this kind of utopian configuration may be the novel's willingness to imagine it.

II. "Che cosa resta?": Pavese's Oral History

If *Conversazione in Sicilia* is intent on performing community, *La luna e i falò* seems more concerned with re-forming one: with imagining the process of communal reconstruction and commemoration. It is a project that, unsurprisingly, assumed a particular urgency in Italy, where the "experience of the immediate postwar was that of history that remained to be written, of meanings that remained to be fixed" (Restivo 10).[35] And compared to Vittorini's novel, Pavese's (published in 1950) deals far more directly with this problem of postwar history-writing as a theme. More than a "gallery" of dialogues, then, the focus of *La luna e i falò* is on the creation of history *through* dialogue – a kind of dialogic historiography. As a result, voices in this novel tend in general to be more plausible than those in Vittorini's; the conversations, more topical and concrete. Compared to *Conversazione in Sicilia*, then, Pavese's text is noticeably more committed to producing at least the *impression* of reality; and its main character, to uncovering information, rather than just promulgating contact.

[35] While in France, Restivo has argued, "the resistance became immediately 'legendary' as life returned to normalcy; for the Italians…the postwar economic, social, and political reorganization was drawn out over a long period of time" (10).

Initially, this might seem an unlikely claim, given that the protagonist – known only by his nickname, Anguilla – evinces so little interest in even his own history. As he puts it,

> C'era una ragione perché sono tornato in questo paese, qui e non invece a Canelli, a barbaresco o in Alba. Qui non ci sono nato, è quasi certo; dove son nato non lo so; non c'è da queste parti una casa né un pezzo di terra né delle ossa ch'io possa dire, 'Ecco c'ero prima di nascere.' (9)[36]

As he later explains, he was drawn to America precisely for its history-less quality, the fact that its citizens are all equally rootless, "una gente tutta bastarda" who, like his former girlfriend, come "di chi sa dove" – "from who knows where" (111). Regardless of his alleged indifference to his own past, however, it becomes clear that he remains fixated on that of the town (also unnamed, but based on Pavese's birthplace, Santo Stefano Belbo) and its inhabitants. Thus, while some commentators may try to frame the novel, much as they have framed *Conversazione in* Sicilia, as a "voyage of self-discovery," it seems far more compelling as a voyage of community-discovery (Borelli 674).[37] The emphasis, from the beginning, is on the region, on the group, on "all of us"; as he puts it, perhaps most tellingly, "Di tutto quanto, della Mora, *di quella vita di noialtri*, che cosa resta?" (136, italics mine).[38]

If the more prominent theme of the novel might seem to be the difficulty – or even impossibility – of producing this kind of collective history, as I'll demonstrate, this is counteracted by what the novel suggests is Anguilla's profound commitment to it. At first glance, any inquiry into "what remains" would seem to be obfuscated by the town's

[36] All translations from Pavese's novel are Mark Rudman's, unless no page number is given (in which case they my own): "I had a reason for coming back to this town, here instead of to Canelli, Barbaresco or Alba. I'm almost sure I wasn't born here. I don't know where I was born. There isn't a house or a piece of land or any bones in this part of the world about which I could say 'This is what I was before I was born'" (3).
[37] See Derek Duncan, who reads *La luna e i falò* in a similar light, as a drama of introspection, and argues that Anguilla that "does not wish to *acquire* an identity but to *re-establish* an identity" (593).
[38] "Of all this, of Mora, of this life of ours, what was left?"

unwillingness to talk about the recent past. Even Anguilla's child-hood friend Nuto – who "knew all the stories" ["sapeva le storie di tutti"] and who serves as the de facto repository of local knowledge – refuses to discuss what has happened since Anguilla's departure; as he learns, "Nuto doesn't like to talk about the Mora" ["Nuto non parla volentieri della Mora"] (Rudman 94, 121; Pavese 104, 137). It is a reticence that, as Ben-Ghiat has noted, is more typical of those who collaborated with the regime, and who after the war, "succumb[ed] to an epidemic of amnesia," in an effort to elide or put under erasure their previous collaboration (661). But here, such reluctance to speak is clearly a more endemic condition. The problem is not, then, as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, that the past won't stay buried – though the periodic unearthing of bodies in the text serves to metaphorically enact that concern, as well. The more pressing concern, in Pavese's universe, is that history may be *too easily* buried – or burned, as turns out to be more specifically the case. Indeed, readers are continually confronted with evidence of lacunae in the town's historical record: "non si capiva più come l'avevano ammazzato…" (38); "chi sa quanti...ce n'erano ancora sepolti nei boschi" (39), "più nessuno se lo ricordava" (65), "i due morti non si poteva riconoscerli" (65), "non si ricordava che cosa facesse nella riva…" (144).[39]

It is against this backdrop of such cultivated silence that the nature and distribution of speech – of what is being said, and by whom – assumes particular urgency. And what an analysis of the text's dialogue reveals are consistent attempts, on the part of Pavese's protagonist, to establish the kind of historical chronicle that the community itself seems unable or unwilling to produce. Like Vittorini's text, then,

[39] "No one knew how they had killed him," "who knows how many were buried in the woods," "no one remembers it anymore," "no one recognized the two dead bodies," "he didn't remember what he was doing on the shore..."

Pavese's emphasizes the crucial role of the outsider – the external interlocutor – in eliciting community narratives and knowledge. That Anguilla is self-conscious of his role as chronicler is made most evident, perhaps, by the seemingly disproportionate amount of time he devotes to the discourse of others. Chapters often begin with scenes of listening or overhearing – a similarly recurrent feature of *Conversazione*. The twelfth chapter, for instance, opens with the account of a discussion among several town members – "il dottore, il cassiere, i tre o quattro giovanotti sportive che pigliavano il vermut al bar," and later, "la maestra" (64).[40] After reproducing much of their conversation as direct speech, Anguilla then relays his own response, but indirectly, and punctuated by his interlocutors' dismissive reactions: "Allora dissi che non ero d'accordo. Mi chiesero come. In quell'anno, dissi, ero ancora in America. (Silenzio). E in America facevo l'internato. (Silenzio)" (65).[41]

From a dialogic point of view, what is significant about this scene is the kind of representational hierarchy it seems to establish. If, as Mark Lambert has argued of the Victorian novel, to quote characters is to confer on them a certain prestige, it's clear that it is not the narrative but the *narrated* voices that are accorded the greater degree of respect here – and that the popular voice is invested with at least as much, if not more, authority as the protagonist's.[42] As a kind of double outsider – a bastard not actually "from" the town, and who, after a long absence from it, is, like Silvestro, frequently mistaken for a "forestiero" – it could simply be the case that Anguilla's voice may carry

[40] "the doctor, the bank cashier, the three or four young sports who drank vermouth at the bar," and later, the "schoolmistress" (55).
[41] "Then I said that I didn't agree. They asked me why. That year, I said, I was still in American. (Silence.) And in America I was interned. (Silence)" (56).
[42] See Lambert, Chapter 1, for more discussion of what direct quotation implies about the author's attitude toward a character and his or her speech.

less weight, as is reflected in the group's dismissal of his opinion: "Più nessuno se lo ricordava. Ricominciarono a discutere" ["No one remembered anymore. They began arguing again"] (65, 56). But significantly, the next chapter begins by again referring – even deferring – to this kind of collective voice: "Si riparlò di questa storia, in paese" ["they had a lot more to say about this in town"] (69, 60). Thus, while Pavese does not necessarily invest this popular voice with an automatic moral authority, what is striking is the extent to which he seems to grant it *narrative* authority.

In this sense, *La luna e i falò* shares, and perhaps even exceeds, the fascination manifested in Vittorini's novel with the voices of others – especially 'popular' others. This deference to a popular or public voice becomes especially evident later in the novel, when Cinto, the young boy befriended by the narrator and Nuto, recounts the violent events culminating in his family's destruction. Rather than summarize the story, Anguilla reports it in free indirect discourse, submerging his own voice in the boy's idiom: "Lui non sapeva, era sceso a Belbo. Poi aveva sentito che il cane abbaiava…" [He didn't know, he had gone down to the Belbo. Then he heard the dog barking…"] (142, 125). More generally, as the novel proceeds, it focuses increasingly on experiences that are not primarily – or even, at times, peripherally – Anguilla's own, and in which he serves as a by-stander or witness, more than participant. In particular, his fixation with recreating events concerning the family at Mora, and the fate of their three daughters, means his own presence in the text will at times recede to the point of vanishing. That the novel ends by eliding his voice altogether – by ceding the floor, in a sense, to Nuto, who spends the last chapter recounting the fate of the family's youngest daughter, Santa, during the war – is a powerful testament to its priorities. If *Conversazione in Sicilia* features the

periodic submersion of the protagonist's voice, *La luna e i falò* witnesses its more definitive disappearance. It may be no accident, then, that the novel refuses to assign Anguilla a proper name[43] – the prerequisite, as Barthes argues, for the creation of a character (68). And in this sense, Pavese's novel seems to anticipate, at least in terms of narrative structure, Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura,* released ten years later, which, despite naming its protagonist, similarly if more radically "disappears" her barely one-third of the way into the film.[44]

On the basis of such evidence, one could conclude that Anguilla qualifies as more of a catalyst for the generation of narrative, rather than as an actual element within it. His catalytic function in the text might be most powerfully illustrated in the way he brings about Nuto's disclosure – the airing of the story of Santina's death that, as far as we know, had not previously been articulated. Though Nuto promises at the novel's beginning that "[o]ne of these days I'll tell you what happened here" ["un giorno o l'altro ti racconto delle cose di qui"] he remains, until its end, incapable of doing so (Rudman 19, Pavese 26). It is not until the final pages that Nuto finally volunteers to tell the story: "Tanto vale che te lo dica, - fece Nuto d'improvviso senza levare gli occhi, - io so come l'hanno ammazzata. C'ero anch'io" (166).[45] This movement from silence to speech – or from reluctance to a willingness to testify – is in some sense the climatic event within the novel; as Calvino described it, "il romanzo consiste tutto negli sforzi del protagonista per cavare a Nuto quattro parole di bocca" ["Above all, the novel consists of the

[43] See Duncan for more on the subject of the protagonist's namelessness.
[44] Given that Antonioni would later adapt Pavese's novel, *Tra donne sole*, as *Le amiche* (1953), there may be grounds for extrapolating such similarities between the two. Rudman, for one, discerns a "Pavesian mood through Antonioni's films" (vii).
[45] "I might as well tell you," Nuto said suddenly, without looking up, "I know how they killed her. I was there myself" (148).

protagonist's effort's to get a few words out of Nuto"] (Pavese 201).[46] And the novel implies that it is in fact Anguilla's "efforts" that are responsible for the story's 'extraction.' Although he never questions his friend directly, it is made clear nonetheless that he has a plan: "Aspettai che si facesse coraggio e si levasse quel peso. Ho sempre visto che la gente, a lasciarle tempo, vuota il sacco" (26).[47] Indeed, the novel itself seems to dramatize the value of this sort of purposeful 'waiting,' by giving narrative "time" to a character who, however initially unable or unwilling to talk, eventually can (73).

Historical narrative, in this light, emerges as at once a dialogic and diachronic phenomenon. In this sense, if the *dopoguerra* was characterized by a proliferation of stories – as Calvino describes it, "ci muovevamo in un multicolore universo di storie" – the novel suggests that their circulation or publication was hardly a given (vii). As in *Conversazione in Sicilia*, it is clear that articulating them was among the primary challenges facing the postwar writer:

> Questo ci tocca oggi, soprattutto: la voce anonima dell'epoca, più forte delle nostre inflessioni individuali ancora incerte. L'essere usciti da un'esperienza – Guerra, Guerra civile – che non aveva risparmiato nessuno, stabiliva un'immediatezza di comunicazione tra lo scrittore e il suo pubblico: si era faccia a faccia, alla pari, carichi di storie da raccontare, ognuno aveva avuto la sua, ognuno aveva vissuto vite irregolari drammatiche avventurose, ci si strappava la parola di bocca. (Calvino *Sentiero* vi)[48]

We could say that Anguilla, like Silvestro, to some extent stands in for the figure of writer, confronted not only with "[le] storie che avevamo vissuto di persona o di cui

[46] The line is excerpted from a critical essay of Calvino's included as an apparatus to Pavese's novel; it was originally published in *Saggi Italiani* 1945-1985 (Milano: Mondadori, 1995).
[47] "I waited for him to cheer up and get the weight off his chest. I've always noticed that if you give them enough tie people will come clean" (19).
[48] This is what strikes me most today: the anonymous voice of the age, which comes across more strongly than my own individual inflections which were still rather uncertain. The fact of having emerged from an experience – a war, a civil war – which had spared no one, established an immediacy of communication between the writer and his public: we were face to face, on equal terms, bursting with stories to tell; everyone had experienced their own drama, had lived a chaotic, exciting, adventurous existence; we took the words from each other's mouths" (Colquhoun 8).

eravamo stati spettatori," but also "quelle che ci erano arrivate già come racconti, con una voce, una cadenza, un'espressione mimica" (vii).[49] And the novel repeatedly affirms that it is *this* "voice" or "cadence," more than the writer-narrator's, that is important. When Anguilla speaks, more often than not, it is in the interest of eliciting others' thoughts, not to "express" or promote his own. It is a lesson that Anguilla himself describes having learned at a young age: ""Fu così che cominciai a capire che non si parla solamente per parlare, per dire 'ho fatto questo' 'ho fatto quello' 'ho mangiato e bevuto,' ma si parla per farsi un'idea, per capire come va questo mondo" (90).[50] It would not be too much to say, then, that speech functions within the text as a *heuristic* device, one used specifically for the exploring historical truths. If, as Calvino pointed out, the novel is organized around "un bisogno di conoscenza" ["a need for knowledge"] then it is conversation in particular that is positioned as a conduit to that knowledge (Pavese 201). And it imbues verbal discourse with a particular power, not inherent to writing. As in *Conversazione in Sicilia*, the best – or only – kind of testimony available may be spoken testimony. The story Nuto tells, for instance, has never been written down; and the implication is that there may be other, similar stories that exist only in incipient form: as unarticulated anecdotes or firsthand accounts.

It is this theoretical privileging of the verbal – the perception of speech as epistemologically superior to writing – that seems especially distinctive of neorealist fiction. In other words, one could argue that a constitutive element of neorealist texts is the consistent elevation of figural voices *in the aggregate* to a position of seemingly

[49] "the adventures that each one of us had endured personally or witnessed," but also "tales which came to us already formed as narratives, with a voice, a cadence, a facial gesture to accompany them" (8).
[50] "That's how I began to understand that you don't talk just to talk, to say 'I did this, I did that, I ate and drank,' but you talk to find an idea, to learn how the world works" (81).

equal or greater authority as the narrative one. This theory finds support in the fact that, as in *Conversazione*, knowledge in *La luna e i falò* appears to be concentrated in the "many" instead of the "one." It may be no coincidence, then, that the novels both make use of the *nostos* plot, since it functions as an alibi for the narratives' real agenda: the multiplication of dialogue, the accommodation of locutionary episodes and events. Both authors, in other words, similarly use the homecoming scenario as an excuse to put their protagonists into a similarly wide range of dialogic situations. More than just "reality effects," then, figural voices might function more as something like 'epistemology effects,' attesting in some way to a narrative's truth.

It is not that a plurality is enough to ensure transparency, or that, if a group or chorus says something, it necessarily follows that it must be true. But it might be a good safeguard. One of the reasons we are encouraged to believe Nuto's testimony, after all, is that he speaks so plainly on behalf of the community. By contrast, any single account – like Anguilla's recollections of Mora – could be too easily biased. When Anguilla catches Cinto selectively covering his eyes during a conversation, for instance, he remembers that it is a game he himself used to play: "così vedevo solamente le cose che volevo e quando poi riaprivo gli occhi mi divertivo a ritrovare le cose com'erano" (38).[51] It is an elegant metaphor for the kinds of selective vision any individual seer, or speaker, is inevitably subject to. The implied lesson – that the best protection against mystification might lie in multiplicity – is to varying extents implied in both Vittorini and Pavese's texts. Yet it might be best exemplified by a novel published five years after Pavese's, and which could not comfortably be called neorealist. If both *Conversazione in Sicilia* and *La luna e*

[51] "that way I saw only what I wanted to see, and when I opened my eyes again I laughed at finding everything the same as before" (31).

i falò reflect, in their organization of dialogue, a shift from a narrative model centered on the self, to one based around community input and experience, Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vità* is even more radically polycentric; as Mauela Bertone argues, the novel "contains no individual who might supply the eight chapters with a plausible, unifying framework" (145). In this sense, one could see Pasolini as realizing the possibility of a protagonist-less fiction implicit in Vittorini and Pavese's texts: producing a novel in which there is no single voice capable of being automatically privileged.

III. Rossellini and Pasolini: Cinema's "Choral" Gaze

The increasing prominence accorded the speaking voice in postwar Italian fiction – and the resulting prevalence of choral and polyvocal configurations – finds an interesting corollary in cinema of the period, which frequently showcases what could be called a kind of collective or choral *gaze*. Before examining discrete instances of this phenomenon, however, it is worth considering the history of *coralità* as a concept in Italian film criticism. The term was frequently evoked in discussions of neorealist cinema, most famously in relation to Rosellini's *Roma, città aperta* (1945). According to P. Adams Sitney, it was Carlo Trabucco who first alluded to the film's "choral" tendencies in a contemporary review for *Il popolo*:

> Delle due parti, la prima, quella in cui non i protagonisti singoli dominano la vicenda, ma è Roma, la città tutta, che vive e trepida, soffre e cospira, resiste e si sublima, questa prima parte è veramente corale e rappresentativa di tutta una popolazione le cui benemerenze oscure e ignote è bene siano state fissate con un senso obiettivo e privo di retorica.[52]

[52] "Of the two parts, the first, in which no single protagonist dominates the action, but Rome, the whole city, which lives and trembles, suffers and conspires, resists and exalts itself, this first part is truly choral and is representative of the whole population whose hidden and unknown merits have been well recorded with an objectivity lacking in rhetoric" (Trans. Sitney 30).

Since Trabucco's commentary, Sitney notes, "the concept of *coralità*…has…become a commonplace in the criticism of the film," encouraged in no small part by Rossellini's own allusion to the concept in a 1952 interview (Sitney 31).[53] As Rosellini contended, his films were distinguished by their "choral quality," as was the "realistic film" more generally, which he saw as "intrinsically choral": [54]

> Non ho formule e preconcetti, ma se guardo a ritroso i miei film indubbiamente vi riscontro degli elementi che sono in essi costanti e che vi sono ripetuti non programmaticamente, ma naturalmente. Anzitutto la "coralità." Il film realistico e in se corale (i marinai di *Nave Bianca* contano quanto la popolazione di *Roma, citta aperta,* quanto i partigiani di *Paisa* e i frati di *Giullare di Dio*). (*Metodo* 88)

By applying the term to his own films, Rossellini seems to invite commentators to search for choral configurations throughout his films, and particularly within his so-called war trilogy. *Paisà* (1946), for instance, has often been cited for its "choral structure," a technique ensuring the "representation of the common people suffering among the ruins of the same country" (Muscio 32). But if Rossellini's films have most frequently provoked references to *coralità*, the quality has been widely discerned throughout neorealist cinema. Gian Piero Brunetta, for one, singles out Giuseppe De Santis for his "taste for wide pans, expansive camera moves" and "storytelling through a collective 'choral' voice," and suggests that "more than any other filmmaker of the postwar period, he believed that cinema should be a choral narrative" (139). And De Santis, in turn, would distinguish a similar tendency in Vittorio de Sica's films, praising his ability to

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[53] As Bondanella confirms: "[m]ost critical discussions of Rossellini's fascist trilogy make use of a critical term, *coralità*, or a choral quality" (*Rossellini* 37).

[54] "I have no formulae or preconceptions. But if I look back on my films, undoubtedly I find elements in them that are constant and that are repeated not programmatically but, I repeat, naturally. In particular, a choral quality. The realistic film is intrinsically choral. The sailors of *La nave Bianca* count as much as the people hiding it the hut at the end of the ending of *L'uomo dalla croce,* as much as the population of *Roma, città aperta*, and as much as the partisans of *Paisà*" (qtd. Bondanella *Rossellini* 37). I use Bondanella's translation instead of the one published in the English version of *My Method*, an anthology of Rossellini's interviews and writings, since there, as Bondanella notes, "coralità" is mistranslated as "human warmth" (*My Method* 37).

create "choral" cinema.[55] Though the term has been deployed more often than it is defined, what is striking is the frequency with which it *has been* deployed, since it implies a critical sensitivity to (even a wishful pursuit of) choral elements, perhaps even in excess of their actual presence.[56]

Even more interesting a critical trend, however, may be the universally positive valence commentators have attached to "choral" techniques; like literary critics, Muscio, Brunetta, and Trabucco similarly perceive them to be an unproblematic way of indexing "common people," or as Trabucco puts it, "tutta la popolazione." (Symptomatic perhaps, of what Restivo describes as a longstanding critical tendency to "adopt an overly simplistic 'reflectionist' position regarding the relation between cinema and history" (4).) Once again, however, evidence from actual texts suggests that choral elements might be used less for mimetic ends, than fantasmatic ones; and that their inclusion is perhaps more "programmatic," and less "natural," than Rossellini allows. If, as Marcus has argued, *Paisà*'s "episodic structure" functions as a "heuristic device," which "allows Rossellini to explore various phases of the Liberation process," one could argue analogously that choral structures allowed filmmakers to "explore" the constitution and dissolution of community in the postwar era (*Paisà* 295). Indeed, neorealist cinema makes use of a range of techniques – from episodic narration and "expansive camera moves," to long takes and wide shots – that cumulatively enhance the impression of collectivity where it might not "naturally" exist. Like certain narrative devices noted

[55] See Inga M. Pierson's unpublished dissertation for a synopsis of De Santis's take on De Sica, who he considered "more sincere and more spontaneous" than his contemporaries, and one of the first directors to create a cinema that went beyond "the egocentrism of a few actors in a sumptuous living room" (qtd 112).
[56] Christopher Wagstaff, for instance, denies the term's relevance to Rossellini's work, arguing that 'a lot of what passes for 'choral' depends on what Pina tends to 'signify' – she is used as a synecdoche for 'the people'" (118). Far more "choral," he claims, are films like *Caccia tragica, Riso Amaro, La terra trema*, and *Il sole sorge.*

above (the homecoming or journey plot, the outsider protagonist) that served as an impetus to literary polyvocality, there are cinematic devices common to postwar Italian film that seem to function similarly, to maximize the number of subjects and points of view capable of being included in a single frame or sequence. Indeed, it can be difficult to identify neorealist films that *don't* feature at least one choral moment, some image of collective action: whether it's the bakery riot in *Roma, citta apertà*, the harvest sequences in *Riso amaro,* the scenes of fishing or repairing nets in *La terra trema,* or the crowds commuting to and from work in *Ladri di biciclette*.

In this sense, then, one could say that Italian cinema of the postwar period often works to engineer scenes of solidarity or consensus. Some films can even be seen trying to convey this impression of collectivity on two tracks at one, providing viewers with scenes in which we both see the group and hear them. De Santis's *Riso amaro* (1949) provides a case in point. The film opens, for instance, with an aerial crane shot of a crowd of "mondine," or female rice pickers, making their way through the fields.[57] The camera then cuts to an on-air report with a journalist, whose broadcast is punctuated by the sound of an all-female chorus, "un coro di mondine," extolling the joys of the harvest in song. The conflation of the two choral events – the one visual, the other auditory – at the film's beginning powerfully dramatizes the kind of collectivity that becomes a central theme of the film. Repeatedly, we witness instances of successful collective action, as when the *mondine* agitate for the rights of the *clandestine*, or non-contract workers ("O via tutte, o lavoro per tutte!"). (That the group – and not the self – is the privileged entity in the film is illustrated by the divergent fates of the films' co-heroines: Silvana is punished from

[57] See Pierson for further discussion of the way De Santis's "trademark crane shots" serve to "foster chorality, to situate the story and/or characters within a larger context while giving the spectator the impression of descending into an articulated sphere of reality" (237).

seceding from the group, while Francesca is rewarded for assimilating to it.) On the one hand, then, the "chorus" would seem to qualify as a concrete entity within the film. At the same time, however, it is also an idealized one, as is telegraphed by De Santis's refusal to synchronize the audio and visual tracks: to associate the sounds of the singing voices with specific singing bodies. There is, then, a sense of ontological *surplus* generated by the film: the impression that there might be more bodies, more voices, than even those we can see. If Classical Hollywood film has historically attempted to "spatialize the voice, to localize it,"[58] the neorealist film seems by contrast to want to un-locate it, to unstick it in space, so as to imply its breadth and even universality, beyond the immediate enunciative site (Doane 36).

Vittorio de Sica's 1946 film *Sciuscià* similarly attempts to create a sense of amplified presence, initially, by alluding to the existence of networks (social, familial, collegial, criminal) of which the film's two young co-protagonists, Pasquale and Giuseppe, are only the visible manifestation. Repeatedly, the film implies that there may be some larger extra- or even para-diegetic body, to which these diegetic representatives belong. This intimation is visually confirmed in one of the film's final scenes, when a hoard of children – a previously unseen group of Giuseppe and Pasquale's friends and fellow child-laborers – crowd the courthouse where the two are being tried. But it is even more powerfully conveyed in an earlier a scene, shortly after the friends arrival at the juvenile detention center where they are being held. As the camera pulls back to reveal the entire, hive-like configuration of cells – each of which, as we know, contains five

[58] The scene might be classified as a variant instance of what Mary Ann Doane terms "voice off" – those moments "when we hear the voice of a character who is not visible within the frame," but whose diegetic existence has nonetheless been established (37). Because the voices heard are never identified with specific characters – but rather seem as though they plausibly could or even *should* be – it might better be described as an instance of "unverified" voice-off.

children – the inmates break into a song of protest, which they continue, in unison, until forcibly silenced. As in De Santis's film, then, we at once *see* the group, and *hear* them, even as the actual bodies remain obscured. In so doing, the scene serves to increase our estimation of both the size of the group, and of the stakes involved. In this way, *Sciuscià* hints at the way in which choral moments might serve as vehicles of melodrama, used to magnify the sense of crisis, by magnifying its scale, or the number of potential sufferers. But it also alludes to the capacity of chorality to leverage moral critique. As in the concluding scene in *Roma, città aperta*, in which a loose agglomeration of young boys gathers to witness Don Pietro's execution and begin to whistle in unison, images of a group's visual and vocal consensus – acts of looking together, and uttering together – both bestows on the group a kind of enhanced power and authority, and arrays it favorably against some depraved institutional force or body.[59]

Like a distorting mirror, then, one could say that such films will occasionally cause groups to appear larger or more powerful than they actually are, often for the purposes of heightening emotional impact, or advancing social critiques. But it is important to clarify that chorality is not something merely engineered by narrative technique, but potentially enacted on the plane of performance, as well. In other words, as the De Sica and Rossellini examples especially highlight, films might convey *coralità* not just through how the camera looks, but by how the *characters* do. In fact, the most powerful manifestations of the chorus in neorealist cinema might arrive in precisely such displays of visual synchrony: those moments when the films direct our gaze not just *at* a

[59] Here, I diverge from Bazin, who argued that within neorealist cinema "the masses are but rarely considered to be a positive social force. When they are mentioned it is usually in order to demonstrate their destructive and negative character *vis-à-vis* the heroes" (22). While this may be the case, especially, in certain of de Sica's films (the angry crowd in *Ladri di biciclette*, the stampeding horde of prisoners in *Sciuscià*) the statement does not reflect the more positive and nuanced role crowds may also play.

group, but at the gaze *of* that group: when we look at a group, looking. If Vittorini and Pavese's novels appear to go out of their way to produce episodes of collective speaking, Rossellini, De Santis, and De Sica's films seem in similar ways to showcase for viewers moments of collective seeing.

Perhaps the most compelling example of this kind of choral or consensual gaze within a film, however, may occur in a film that, while hardly neo-realist, is at once "a tribute to and a rejection of" it: Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962) (Viano 85).[60] The final sequence of the film begins with a shot of Mamma Roma, played by Anna Magnani, looking out her apartment window, toward an unidentified church dome in the distance. Later, having learned of her son, Ettore's, death, Mamma Roma, rushes back to her apartment, attempting to throw herself from the window, but is restrained by the crowd of locals, neighbors and fellow merchants who have followed her into the room. The film cuts from a medium shot of the assembled group, staring fixedly out the window toward the dome, seen from their point-of-view, back to the group. It is a sequence that, as Maurizio Viano has noted, significantly revises Magnani's death scene in *Roma, città aperta*.[61] But the even more significant act of revision may be internal. In the original screenplay, Pasolini ended the film in the following manner:

> *Mamma Roma* (*con un urlo disperato che è insieme un ringhio di belva, un'accusa*) I responsabili! I responsabili! I responsabili!
>
> Sotto la finestra, la distesa di Roma, palazzoni e prati fumiganti, si apre immense e indifferente sotto il sole. (*Prima Sceneggiatura* 53)[62]

[60] See Viano, who argues that *Mamma Roma* "completes the liquidation of neorealism initiated in *Accattone*" (85). See also Re, who notes that Pasolini, like Pavese, did not like to apply the term "neorealism" to his own work, and "preferred to speak simply of realism" (56).
[61] For a comparative analysis of this scene with Pina's death scene in *Città aperta*, see Viano p. 91-93.
[62] "*Mamma Roma* (*with a desperate cry that is both a bestial growl, and an accusation*): The ones in charge! The ones in charge! The ones in charge!/ Below the window, the expanse of Rome, the high-rises and the smoking fields, opens up, immense and indifferent under the sun."

Significantly, however, this last line of dialogue was excised from the final film – and the view described from the window, attributed to the larger group. It is a change that seems designed to underscore the collective rather than merely subjective nature of this critique: it is not just the grieving mother who is indicting those "responsible" – it is the community, the public, metonymically represented by the multiple bodies within the frame. By reprising the singular shot that begins the sequence in what is now a manifestly "choral" register, Pasolini deftly indicates the shift "dalla responsabilità individuale alla responsabilità collettiva," what he calls "questo allargamento della responsabilità da se stessa al proprio ambiente….all'intera società" (*Per il cinema* 2821).[63] The expansion of vision, then, becomes a way to telegraph the "enlargement" of responsibility that the film suggests is a prerequisite for social change.

Compared to the scene of group witnessing that concludes *Roma, città aperta*, what is striking about the one in *Mamma Roma* is that Pasolini presents it as highly contrived, and thus puts forward as staged something that Rossellini portrays as naturally occurring. In contrast to the seemingly spontaneous and haphazard clustering of children into Rossellini's frame, the composition of Pasolini's shot underscores the artifice of such cinematic assemblages – and thus reminds us, as much of his cinema does, of the "autonomy of the individual image" (Bondanella *Italian Cinema* 182). Like the homogeneity of character voice in Faulkner or Woolf's texts, the aggressive uniformity of the characters' gaze in Pasolini's has a similarly defamiliarizing effect: forcing viewers into an awareness of the frame and the group, by extension, as a plainly composed product. In this way, Pasolini signals his refusal to affect the kind of self-effacement that

[63] "from individual responsibility to collective responsibility"; "this enlargement of responsibility from oneself to ones environment…to the entire society."

had been common practice among neorealist directors (Viano 89).[64]And it is in his cinema, then, that the chorus becomes most opaque, perhaps even "felt" in the manner of the camera movements that Pasolini attributes to "the cinema of poetry" (*Empirismo* 184).[65] It is not just a question of the choral tendency being present in postwar cinema, then, but an issue of *how* it is present, or how deliberately it announces its presence.

The question is why Pasolini should want to underscore this tendency – and why the other filmmakers and writers considered above should choose, however self-consciously, to so often arrange voices and gazes in plural, overlapping or simultaneous configurations. Why is it, in other words, that choral elements are such a crucial feature of both the "postwar film idiom," and the postwar fictional one (Marcus *Italian Film* 76)? One possibility is suggested by Deleuze's influential insight that neorealist film inaugurates a "cinema of the seer, and no longer of the agent" (2). In fact, *Mamma Roma* – like all of the films considered above – makes it a point to demonstrate that seeing, like speaking, is a form of agency. By emphasizing the plural nature of optical acts, and speech acts, neorealist texts might therefore strive to enact at least an *idea* of plurality and popular action: a "good" collectivity, to imaginatively counteract the "bad" collectivity of fascism. In this way, they engage in the exploratory and wishful projection of communities that are at once historically situated, and powerfully ahistorical.

IV. Conclusion: Fellini's Fragmented Choruses

If there is a documentable tendency within certain neorealist texts to hyperbolize community, it's important to note that they are not prevented from also imagining its

[64] Viano distinguishes neorealist cinema from the "cinema of poetry" by noting that in the latter, directors "imbue the characters with their vision" rather than "efface their presence with an invisible style" (94).
[65] For Pasolini, the filmmaker's willingness to 'make the camera felt' ("far sentire la macchina") is a defining gesture of the "cinema of poetry" (184). See *Empirismo Eretico* p. 184-85.

failure. Many of the works discussed, after all, end with scenes of a group's dissipation or decline. This counter-tendency, however, might find its fullest expression in the cinema of Federico Fellini, a director who, despite his divergence from the neorealist movement, significantly, began by 'apprenticing' to it.[66] In films like *I vitelloni* (1953) and *Amarcord* (1973), Fellini makes more self-conscious use of choral structures than perhaps any of the directors above; narrative attention in both is divided scrupulously among the residents of a town that is a fictionalized version of his own native Rimini. And yet in each case – as in the more protagonist-driven but still diffusely plural *La dolce vita* (1960) or *8½* (1963) – the emphasis is on staging a community primarily for the purposes of exhibiting its dysfunction. Put another way, Fellini's films appear to formally and dialogically produce groups only to then showcase their collapse. It is a truism, of course, that Fellini's films are full of communal gatherings: parades, processions, pageants, and parties. But less commonly noted is the at least equal attention he devotes to the aftermath of these events. It is no accident, I would suggest, that his films dwell at such length on the moments after a group's disbanding: the empty, trash-strewn plazas that follow the celebrations in *Amarcord* and *La strada*; the characters post-carnival in *I vitelloni,* or on the beach post-party in *La dolce vita.* Fellini is, in some sense, the poet of the morning after. And in the aggregate, such episodes suggest a willingness to acknowledge the aspirational, the impossible nature of the chorus: its non-sustainability, as either a social or as a narrative construct. In contrast to the authors and directors discussed above, he is far more likely to represent collectivity as a symptom of depravity rather than moral authority: the byproduct, alternately, of mass hysteria (*Amarcord*, *8 ½*), or moral lassitude (*La dolce vita*, *I vitelloni*).

[66] See Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini*, Chapter 2, "The Neorealist Apprenticeship."

It is not, then, that Fellini's films are any less likely than Pasolini's or Rossellini's, say, to imagine moments of social cohesion: of coming together, speaking together, or seeing together. But he is far more likely to expose such choral phenomena *as* fantasies, sometimes at the very moment of their presentation. Thus, for instance, Fellini deflates the harem scene in *8 ½* almost immediately upon arrival: explicitly framed as a chorus ("C'è Guido!" the women cry in unison when he arrives) the hallucinatory consensus among the women quickly devolves into a melee. Far more haunting, however, may be the concluding sequence of *I vitelloni* which, at first glance, seem to constitute the most powerfully "choral" episode in the entire film. As Moraldo, the arguable protagonist of a resolutely polycentric narrative, boards a train out of town, we are provided with a montage of the other four friends, and fellow "layabouts," sleeping in their beds. Despite the montage's superficially unifying effect – drawing these disparate characters into a single sequence – it functions more precisely as a centrifuge, atomizing these characters into discrete shots and apparently autonomous narrative units. The fact that the montage is comprised of a series of reverse tracking shots means that the film is literally putting distance between us and the characters – even as, we know, Moraldo is doing the same, distancing himself from them and the "vitelloni" lifestyle they represent. That the film – like Pavese and Vittorini's texts, or De Santis's or De Sica's films – ends with the departure of the protagonist only confirms the imaginary status, the non-sustainability, of this dialogically and narratively-elaborated community. What distinguishes Fellini's fantasmatic collective from the others widely produced in postwar Italy, however, is its willingness to more definitively debunk the illusion it has created and explored.

Conclusion
Quotation and the Anxiety of Attribution

Modernist film and postmodernist fiction would of course continue to strain the logics of attribution and identification that, as this project has shown, have traditionally been used to decode figural expression within narrative. From the disembodied voices in Beckett's trilogy, to the disembodied gazes in Antonioni's, to the *acousmatic* sounds[1] that surface in much of Godard's cinema, both media witness far more radical de-couplings of speech and sight from diegetic bodies than those in any of the texts I've considered here. But as I hope this project has been able to demonstrate, such patterns of disassociation can be discerned much earlier, in modernist narratives that began to complicate – and make non-coincident – the relationship between fictional utterances and utterers in ways much of the commentary to date has not explicitly acknowledged. Phrases might belong to multiple speakers; speech, improbably stylized, seems to originate with none. It is no accident, after all, that the voice would often become a prominent *theme* in these works, as well as a feature. Or that in a range of modernist texts, including those I discuss here, or those – like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Stein's *Three Lives* – that I don't, the "spoken word" would become a source a fascination, exerting what Marlow, in *Lord Jim*, refers to as a "weird power" (171). Emancipated increasingly from the body, voice becomes less remarkable for its 'self'-expressive properties, than for its sheer materiality.

Yet in spite of what we have seen to be the frequently unconventional presentation of character voice in many modernist novels, modes of reception and interpretation among readers have remained surprisingly static. Like the classic text,

[1] Michel Chion uses the term to indicate a "sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen" (18).

which as Barthes notes, is "always haunted by the appropriation of speech," many commentators seem to abide by a notably retrograde and *readerly* code when it comes to dialogue, assuming that the "the majority of…utterances are assigned origins," and that "we can assign an origin, we can identify a parentage, who is speaking" (*S/Z* 41). When Michael Toolan or Peter Brooks refers to the "irresponsibility" of free indirect discourse, or when readers of *The Waves* insist on the distinctness of the characters' "monologues," it seems clear that our practices of interpreting fictional speech remain colored by a kind of generalized anxiety of attribution. In this sense, we might reproduce the kind of anxiety – the fear of the free-floating or ambient voice – dramatized through certain modernist characters: from Quentin Compson, tyrannized by the discourses of others, to Amalia in Kafka's *The Castle*, who laments to K that "in the account you gave I couldn't always distinguish your opinion from the landlady's" (156).

Both literary and film narrative continue to reflect this tremendous pressure to attribute, to mitigate the evident threat that is apparently posed by the unattributed or renegade voice. In fact, it may be cinema that best showcases both the resistance to this pressure, and the capitulation to it. In closing, I'd like to highlight two films which, I'll suggest, may illustrate most plainly the limitations of attribution as a default narrative practice. In the first, Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962), the film ends with an inarguably daring montage of images, none of which is focalized through any particular point of view. Vittoria, the heroine, has disappeared from the frame, along with Piero, and though we see people in some of the shots, we don't see anyone seeing – we don't see *with* anyone. It is disturbing, and generates a sense of disorientation that is generally experienced – frequently within the context of horror films – as brief sequences in which

the director temporarily "unidentifies" the point-of-view, which often happens to be moving, hand-held, or shaky. (Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) or Dario Argento's *Profondo Rosso* (1975) both make memorable use of this technique). All these sequences reveal, to more or less dramatic extent, a willingness to make readers aware of the "fantasmatic" nature of the cinematic body.[2] If the eye-line match is like the cinematic equivalent of the quotation mark – assigning to a specific subject the gaze in question – than Antonioni's refusal to provide one, sends the message to viewers that they should no longer be looking for such established associations or "matches." Just over a decade later, Antonioni would in some sense "top" this show of disassociation with the concluding sequence of *The Passenger*.

In between the two, however, Antonioni seems to conspicuously 'give in' to attributive pressure in *Zabriskie Point* (1970). Near the film's conclusion, the heroine, Daria, looks up at the house she has just left. Antonioni then stages a highly pyrotechnic scene of destruction, in which the house is made to explode again and again, in increasingly flamboyant displays. It is a startling sequence, the impact of which is substantially lessened when the camera cuts back to Daria, providing us with the reverse shot – the closed quotation mark. It was just her fantasy, the film assures us; she is the originator, the one 'responsible,' for the sequence. But wouldn't it be more interesting if she *wasn't*, if the film left the status of this scene perhaps more ambiguated, *less* attributed? The experiments in over- or under-attribution that emerge in modernist fiction can attest to the rich rhetorical and expressive potential – perhaps still being explored – that less compulsory forms of speech or sight representation may have.

[2] See Mary Ann Doane, who refers to the "fantasmatic" body as "the body reconstituted by the technology and practices of the cinema" (33-34).

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