

**THE SELF IN AND THROUGH THE OTHER**

**A Bakhtinian approach to**

*Little Dorrit*

**and**

*Middlemarch*

**LORRAINE DALMAE ADKINS**

**November, 2013**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
in English Studies in the Graduate Programme in the College of Humanities  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis explores how readings of two nineteenth century English novels, *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch*, can be enhanced by using key elements of Mikhail Bakhtin's 'prosaics' as a lens through which to examine them. Additionally, the readings are used to provide a platform from which to explore the Bakhtinian notion that language is inextricably connected to selfhood.

The Introduction (1.1.) offers a brief discussion on Bakhtin and, in particular, to his formulation of a 'prosaics', offered in opposition to traditional linguistics (or 'poetics') which, he feels, is unable adequately to do justice to the social, ethical and ideological complexity of a dialogised heteroglossia, such as is found in the novel. An explanation follows (1.2.) of why the 'word' should not be conceived of as static lexical element but rather as an 'utterance'. Invested with both clear and distinct meanings as well as dialogic overtones, the word forms the basis of all human communication. As the primary means of expressing the 'self', it cannot be heard in isolation but is always responsive and dependent upon "another's reaction, another's word – the two 'interpenetrating' the single utterance, establishing, as a result, its specific locus of meaning" (Danow 22). Likewise, it follows that the 'self' cannot exist purely in and for the individual but is irrevocably linked to the 'other'.

Chapter Two begins with a discussion on the way in which 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces work simultaneously to shape language (2.1.). It looks at the Bakhtinian idea that language cannot ever have been monologic and unmediated, being instead ever-changing and evolving as a result of numerous influences brought to bear on it such as context, ideology and the discourses of others. The nature of heteroglossia is discussed (with particular reference to 'dialogized heteroglossia'), as is 'hybridization' in which, although a statement appears to emanate from one voice, another parodic or ironic voice will also be evident in refracted form. 2.2. and 2.3 engage in a detailed analysis of selected passages from Books I and II respectively of *Little Dorrit* with a view to exploring ways in which a Bakhtinian reading is able to provide heightened appreciation of the text. With particular regard to the overtly parodic style of Dickens, I aim to show how Bakhtin's *prosaics*, which militates against privileging one 'voice'

over another, enables the voice of a relatively neglected character, such as Fanny Dorrit, to be adequately heard. Although the emphasis in this chapter is on language, I broach the Bakhtinian notion that both the ‘word’ and the ‘self’ are inscribed through the ‘other’.

In Chapter Three the focus shifts to *Middlemarch* and to Bakhtin’s notion that selfhood can only be properly located in its dialogic relations to ‘another’. The chapter is offered in four parts, beginning with a brief discussion on some similarities between Bakhtin’s and Eliot’s philosophical thinking, particularly in regard to the ethical nature of the self (3.1.). The next three parts provide detailed thematic analyses of selected passages from *Middlemarch*. Particular attention is paid to Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate, whose relationship is explored in some detail. In order adequately to chart their development in the novel I begin by situating each of these characters in his or her various ‘fields of action’, or, as Bakhtin would have it, ‘character zones’. Character zones take into account not only the characters’ direct discourses but also other aspects of their being, including their backgrounds, ideologies and the various attitudes held by both the narrator and other characters towards them (3.2.). The next section (3.3.) explores, in dialogical terms, the rise and fall of Rosamond’s and Lydgate’s difficult alliance and it is suggested that their relationship represents the antithesis of the Bakhtinian notion of ‘finding the self in and through the other’. In the final section (3.4.), Rosamond’s and Lydgate’s possibilities for ‘real becoming’ are canvassed when each enters into dialogic relation with Dorothea Brooke.

The Conclusion (4) offers a brief discussion of some of the ways in which the novel, as a genre, is *open-ended*. As such, it affords ongoing discussion in which *completeness* and *conclusiveness* is replaced with *unfinalizability* because “the final word has not yet been spoken” in the ongoing search for meaning (EaN 30).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am hugely indebted to my supervisor, Dr Jill Arnott, whose extraordinary knowledge, insightfulness, and calm support have been incalculably valuable to me. Working with her has been both an enormous privilege and a pleasure.

My deepest gratitude goes to my immediate and extended family and dear friends for their interest and encouragement, and especially to my husband, Philip, who has been a discerning and willing sounding-board for my ideas and whose serene and generous attitude has allowed me the freedom and space to enjoy my work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

### Abbreviations used in this thesis:

- Art*            *Art and Answerability*. Bakhtin, Mikhail.
- AH<sup>1</sup>            “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”. *Art and Answerability* 4 – 256.
- AiG<sup>1</sup>            “Avtor I geroi v exteticheskoi deiatel; nosti” [Author and hero in aesthetic activity]. Tr. Morson and Emerson. The 1979 Russian collection 7 – 180.
- DBW            *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*. Holquist, Michael.
- DiN            “Discourse in the Novel”. TDI 259 – 422.
- EaN            “Epic and Novel”. TDI 3 – 40.
- FTC            “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics”. TDI 84 – 258.
- KFP<sup>2</sup>            “Kfilosofii postupka” [Toward a philosophy of the act]. Tr. Morson and Emerson. The 1984-85 issue of *Filosopiia I sotsiologiia nauki I tekhniki*, a yearbook of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Moscow: Nauka, 1986 80 – 160.
- MB            *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Morson, Gary and Emerson, Caryl.
- MPL            *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Voloshinov, V.N.
- N70 – 71      “From Notes Made in 1970 – 71”. SG& 132 – 58.
- PDP            *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Bakhtin, Mikhail.
- RQ            “Response to a Question from the *Novyi Mir* Editorial Staff”. SG& 1 – 9.
- SG            “The Problem of Speech Genres”. SG& 60 – 102.
- SG&            *Speech Genres and Other Essays*.
- TDI            *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Holquist, Michael. Ed.
- TPA<sup>2</sup>            “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” (see KFP)

<sup>1</sup>            “Toward a philosophy of the act” [Abbreviated as TPA or KFP].

<sup>2</sup>            “Author and hero in aesthetic activity” [Abbreviated as AH or AiG]

## NOTES

### Referencing:

Morson and Emerson translated into English a number of Bakhtinian works from the original Russian and, at times, use Russian abbreviations when they quote from these texts. Where this is the case I include, in square brackets, the English abbreviations. For instance, “Avtor i geroi v exteticheskoi deiatel; nosti” (“Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity) I abbreviate as AiG [AH]<sup>1</sup> in my text and “Kfilosofii postupka” becomes KFP [TPA]<sup>2</sup>.

As per my Bibliographic Note, I use abbreviations for frequently cited texts. In order to facilitate tracking I have included the relevant abbreviated forms in my full Bibliography. Where applicable, these appear in square brackets after the titles of the works cited.

### Inverted commas and quotation marks:

Whereas, in my copy of *Little Dorrit*, single inverted commas are used to signal direct speech, in *Middlemarch*, the publishers have used double quotation marks. In the interest of consistency I have used single inverted commas throughout.

When quoting short phrases or when quoting from the excerpts I have transcribed, I use single quotation marks. For all other quotes I use double quotation marks and single quotation marks within a quote to denote words or phrases my source is quoting from a source of his or her own.

### Mr and Mrs / Mr. and Mrs:

These differ in my copies of *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch*. Again, in the interest of conformity, I have opted to dispense with the full stop used in my copy of *Middlemarch*.

### Spelling:

I tend to use English (UK) spelling, whereas many of my sources use English (USA) spelling. Because Bakhtin was translated into English using (USA) spelling, certain discrepancies may appear, particularly in ending with ‘z’ or ‘s’ suffixes. For the most part, I use ‘s’ suffixes but I have adopted the ‘z’ suffixes for words that are peculiar to Bakhtin, for example ‘unfinalizability’.

### Italicisation:

In my transcripts of *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch* I use bold italics for those aspects I wish to discuss in detail. The authors’ own emphases appear in normal italics.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
	1.1. Discourse on Selfhood and the Novel .....	1
	1.2. Heteroglossia and Dialogy in the Novel .....	9
2	<b><i>LITTLE DORRIT</i></b>	
	2.1. Introductory Remarks .....	15
	2.2. Book I – “Poverty” .....	17
	2.3. Book II – “Riches” .....	34
3.	<b><i>MIDDLEMARCH</i></b>	
	3.1. Introductory Remarks .....	104
	3.2. Character Zones .....	109
	3.3. Testing the Boundaries of the Self .....	140
	3.4. Towards Real Becoming .....	210
4.	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	253
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	258



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Discourse on Selfhood and the Novel

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895 – 1973), graduated from the University of Petrograd in 1913 with a degree in classics and philology. He worked as a schoolteacher in the town of Nevel for some years, during which time he was an active participant in study circles devoted to exploring the relationship between philosophy, religion, and politics (MB xiii). Unable to find official employment because of a lack of political credentials, he was arrested in Stalin's mass raids on intellectuals in 1929 and spent six years in exile in Kazakhstan, during which time he produced a total of nine volumes on a range of topics from Freud to Marx and the philosophy of language (TDI xv). However, only one of these, the Dostoevsky book (also referred to in this thesis as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* or PDP), appeared under his own name – the others all appearing under pseudonyms or the names of friends within the “Bakhtinian Circle”. Consequently, he remained in relative obscurity until the 1960s when his works began to be published under his own name and translated into English. The result was his sudden rise to prominence in the West as a theorist of language and literature. He is currently regarded as one of the most influential Russian literary theorists, probably best characterised as a philosopher of discourse and human communication “whose thinking embraces not only the linked realms of both everyday and literary discourse but also ethical and metaphysical concerns, encompassed by the diametrically opposed positions of ‘dialogism’ in relation to ‘monologism’” (Danow 3 – 4, 12 – 13).

Biographer Michael Holquist writes of the highly distinctive concept of language that runs through all Bakhtin's writings, in which opposition and struggle are characterised by a constant clash between centripetal forces that seek to cohere by driving language and linguistic norms towards unification, and the powerful and ubiquitous centrifugal forces that pull away from unified meaning (TDI xviii). In *Subversive Pleasures*, Robert Stam pays tribute to Bakhtin as “a profoundly anticipatory thinker” whose reasoning regarding the dialogical relationship between self and other pre-empts similar concerns posited by much later thinkers such as Lacan, Pêcheux, Halliday, Lakoff, Heidegger, Sartre and others. Citing Julia Kristeva's views in her late-sixties essays, Stam agrees that Bakhtin “uncannily foreshadowed major poststructuralist topoi” in a number of areas, including “the denial of univocal meaning, the infinite spiral of interpretation,

the negation of originary presence in speech [and] the unstable identity of the sign, the positioning of the subject in discourse [. . .] and the pervasive presence of intertextuality” (2).

My approach to Bakhtin is primarily informed by his theory of the novel as outlined in his essay “Discourse in the Novel” in which he explores the dialogic nature of prose and discusses why he feels that the novel is the ideal arena for staging *heteroglossia*, or linguistic diversity, with its attendant ideological and ethical diversity. Bakhtin puts forward the view that, because traditional ‘poetics’ conceives of language (especially literary language) as unitary and monologic, it does not provide an adequate model for the interpretation of the intrinsically dialogic novel or, as Morson and Emerson put it, because the methods used to analyse prose were derived from poetry, they were unable to “reveal the ‘prosiness’ of prose and the ‘novelness’ of novels” (MB 19). Consequently, Bakhtin began to formulate a new type of methodology to describe what he constantly refers to as the ‘form-shaping ideology’ of the novel for which he used a variety of phrases including ‘prosaic wisdom’ and ‘prosaic intelligence’ which, claim Morson and Emerson, are roughly synonymous with their own neologism, *prosaics* (MB 15). As opposed to *poetics*, *prosaics* “designates a theory of literature that privileges prose in general and the novel in particular over the poetic genres” (MB 15).

Underpinning the notion of *prosaics* are two related ideas about the nature of language itself. Firstly, Bakhtin emphasises that no (national) language is ever a unitary system of shared linguistic norms and conventions: rather, it will always be characterised by *heteroglossia*, translated by Morson and Emerson as ‘varied-speechedness’ (MB 139): the multiple, non-normative and potentially contested ‘languages’ used by different cultural or ethnic groups, class fractions, generations, professions, and so forth. Secondly, Bakhtin insists that language is innately *dialogic*: that any utterance does not simply carry the intended meanings of the speaker or writer, but is also invested with meaning both in the process of its reception by an addressee and in its interaction with other words directed at the same object. In “Discourse in the Novel,” he argues that “The living utterance [. . .] cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue” (276).

Of all the literary genres it is the novel, Bakhtin believes, that has the potential to do justice to the social, ethical and ideological complexity of a *dialogized heteroglossia*; he asserts that “the dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates

the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel” (DiN 275). Novelistic language, he feels, can be defined as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised” (DiN 262). Because of its variety of voices, and the opportunity it offers for stylistic variation, it is the novel, therefore, that presents for Bakhtin the perfect arena for staging dialogised heteroglossia, that is, for employing “*another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (DiN 324).

He admits that, in the narrow sense, poetry also has double and even multiple meanings but because it usually emanates from only one speaker, he contends that these meanings never bring in their wake *dual accents* simply because one voice, a single accent system, is “fully sufficient to express the ambiguity of poetry” (DiN 328). At the other end of the scale is the drama which, he feels, is similarly limited. Despite the existence of many voices, generally speaking, it yields only direct discourse and so lacks a key mechanism for mediated double-voicing, provided by the author/narrator whose ‘presence’ in the novel is pervasive. Holquist emphasises that the “extraordinary sensitivity to the immense plurality of experience more than anything else distinguishes Bakhtin from other moderns who have been obsessed with language” (TDI xx) and that Bakhtin was the first theorist really to come to grips with the conclusion that the novel “cannot be studied with the same set of ideas about the relation of language that we bring to bear on other genres” (TDI xxix). The novel, therefore, is “utterly different from such genres because it presumes a completely other relationship to language” (TDI xxx).

In *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture* David Danow concurs with Bakhtin’s quarrel with the tendency of traditional linguistics to treat the word as a static lexical element when, in fact, it should be conceived of as an *utterance* “invested with a distinct significance and meaning, whose definite features are its communicative aspect and intent” (22). These features enable it to transcend its “purely logical or concrete semantic relationships and enter into the dialogical relationships which afford it specificity” (22). It is the utterance, in Bakhtin’s view, upon which all human communication is founded. Filled with *dialogic overtones*, it is always responsive, never isolated (15). Furthermore, Danow advances the view that “in the linked concepts of individuals and their individual use of language, the sense of the other in relation to the self is accorded striking affirmation as a formative influence” (59), with the other assisting in the “ongoing process of determining the self, which also means determining the word of the self” (60). Just as the other’s word is a prerequisite for formulating one’s own word so, too, is the

other necessary for the formulation of selfhood. Put differently, it is not possible to know oneself without “the interacting presence of the other” (60).

In Bakhtin’s terminology, since the word (or utterance) is the chief means of expressing and understanding the self, like the utterance, the self cannot exist only for and in the individual but is irrevocably linked to the other. As he writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*:

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). [Self] exists on the *boundary* between one’s own and someone else’s consciousness, on the *threshold*. And everything internal gravitates not towards itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence. [. . .] The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. [PDP 287]

Whereas Bakhtin selected texts mainly from the great nineteenth-century Russian novelists, including Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, as a platform from which to argue his stance on both the nature of language and of the self, I have opted for selected texts from two of the greatest nineteenth-century English novelists (Dickens and Eliot) so as to illuminate and extend his argument. In exploring the extent to which the staging of heteroglossia and the dialogic nature of novelistic prose is able to enhance an understanding of selfhood, in and through the voices or manifold ‘languages’ of not only the characters but also the narrator and author, I consider the ways in which a Bakhtinian reading is able to shed new light on events, characterisation and the representation of selfhood in these texts. My aim is to interrogate how existing readings of *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch* can be enhanced by using key elements of Bakhtin’s theory of ‘prosaics’ as a lens through which the texts are scrutinised.

As distinct from a purely linguistic approach, my investigation is conducted along thematic lines in which I closely follow events in the lives of selected characters in each of the two novels. By contextualising my analysis in this way I hope to be able to identify subtle and complex instances of dialogism and to discuss these in a way which takes into account (much of) the heteroglossia which precedes, surrounds and permeates the specific sections I examine. Throughout the thesis I will be utilising Bakhtin’s dialogical approach to the novel – an approach which resists the natural tendency by readers and authors to hierarchise certain discourses within a novel (thus selectively to privilege certain ideologies, values and characters over others). One obvious corollary of an awareness of heteroglossia is that one does not *automatically* assume that some ‘voices’ are fundamentally more valid than others simply because they emanate from the larger project of accepted ideologies. Accordingly, a dialogical reading encourages all voices to be adequately heard, including those that go against the grain. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin

refers to this dialogised heteroglossia as a special type of *double-voiced discourse* simultaneously serving two speakers and expressing two different intentions: “the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author”. Discourse of this type yields “two meanings and two expressions”. In that the individual voices are “dialogically interrelated,” they are aware of each other, just as “two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other”. Or, as he puts it: “it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other” (324). The specific way in which dialogised heteroglossia operates is discussed in section (1.2.) which provides a more detailed explanation of some of the aspects of Bakhtinian thought used in my analysis of the texts themselves. In applying Bakhtin’s dialogical approach to *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch* I hope to shed new light on the ways in which his concept of dialogism is able to contribute to a clearer understanding of the creation of selfhood, particularly in characters who have been relatively neglected by scholars and critics, such as Fanny, in *Little Dorrit*, or those whose ideology visibly clashes with that of the author, as is the case with Rosamond in *Middlemarch*.

In Bakhtin’s estimation, the linguistic diversity and dialogic complexity of the novel make it the ideal forum for debate on a host of topics from a variety of different viewpoints and in the context of the heteroglossia that surrounds and permeates the speech of each character, as well as that of the narrator and author. Heteroglossia in the novel registers the constant clash and/or interaction of different sets of linguistic norms and practices, all with their attendant social and ideological implications. It is this dialogic quality of the novel which, Bakhtin believes, gives rise to the genre’s essential *open-endedness*. As opposed to *completeness* or *finalizability* (in which a particular viewpoint is privileged to the extent that it eventually takes precedence over all others) the novel’s inherent *open-endedness* or *unfinalizability* affords it an ongoing vitality through the ages. For him, the novel is “the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” and as such, is “full of plastic possibilities” (EaN 3). Bakhtin has similar views pertaining to the development of the self, contending that *finalizability* signals an ending in which the final word has been spoken. Growth is denied simply because nothing new can be added. This degree of *completeness* he likens to a kind of death which the novel is able to avoid by offering endless opportunities for discussion and reinterpretation.

I hope to be able to contribute to the ongoing critical project of examining Bakhtin’s notions of the novel and the self on several different fronts. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, whereas

Bakhtin drew primarily upon nineteenth century Russian novels to exemplify his theories, I make use of two nineteenth century English counterparts for my line of enquiry.

Secondly, in my preliminary reading for this thesis I discovered that much of the scholarship on Bakhtin either focuses on a *systematic* presentation of his ideas as they evolved over time or, alternatively, concentrates on an exploration of selected Bakhtinian themes with regard to novelistic prose *in general*. In demonstrating how Bakhtinian concepts can be applied to novelistic prose, this kind of methodology usually involves utilising *disparate* examples from a *variety* of novels. Because the excerpts are usually drawn from numerous authors and texts, they lack adequate contextualisation and, consequently, are not suited to illustrate Bakhtinian ideas in a systematic way with regard to *a particular* novel. To enable contextualisation, I have *inverted* this approach by chronologically presenting close readings of extended and substantial thematic strands in each of the two novels. There are drawbacks to both methods and the downside of mine is that it precludes an analysis of the *progression* of Bakhtin's theories as they evolved over time – this because the unfolding narrative necessarily dictates which Bakhtinian ideas to explore at any given moment. That aside, a number of his core ideas do, in fact, emerge in the course of the analyses of the novels, including, amongst many others, the nature of the *utterance*, the *dialogic* or double-voiced word, *heteroglossia*, the effects of *centripetal and centrifugal forces*, *hybridisation*, *character zones*, the *addressee and superaddressee*, *authoritative and internally persuasive dialogue*, *selfhood* and *the event of being*, *pretendship*, *accountability*, *finalizability* and *unfinalizability*. By situating Bakhtinian theory within thematic readings I hope to be able to evoke in the reader an absorbing and sustained interest in the dialogic orientation of the texts themselves.

Thirdly, the notion of selfhood is introduced into the exegesis as a whole. After having conducted extensive research on the subject it is my conclusion that no other work has explored Bakhtin's notions of selfhood as embodied in novelistic characters by focusing on detailed thematic exegeses of aspects of only two novels. My feeling is that a sustained exploration of the dialogic relationships experienced by characters with 'an other' (or others in general) should enable a fuller and more relevant examination of Bakhtin's ideas about selfhood.

Finally, in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson express their opinion that what Bakhtin "really needed to do in order to illustrate his concept was to study a whole novel – *Eugene Onegin*? *Anna Karenina*? *Middlemarch*? – from his personal perspective but he

never undertook such a study” (MB 330). I found their comment encouraging since it had long been my intention to attempt something of this nature by following a specific theme or themes within which to explore the personalities and life-choices of a small group of selected characters. Unfortunately it is, without question, beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse an entire book. However, my approach is designed to afford readers both a degree of continuity and an intimate knowledge of my selected characters, something which cannot be achieved within the usual practice of ‘importing’ discrete examples from a variety of texts so as to demonstrate Bakhtinian methodology.

For the exegeses, I have elected to use lengthy transcripts from both novels, thus allowing readers to engage directly with the transcribed texts without the additional encumbrance of having to locate the relevant sections in the primary texts. I am acutely aware that the very act of selecting particular strands and themes within each novel limits the extent to which these two rich novels can be explored, and that the excerpts I have chosen necessarily involve a degree of bias on my part. Therefore, bearing in mind the Bakhtinian notion that no final interpretation can or should be assigned to a particular novelistic reading, I have, wherever possible, tried to limit ellipses and paraphrasing – a decision that inevitably adds to the length of the transcripts. On balance though, my feeling is that this approach affords readers the opportunity to determine for themselves the legitimacy of my selections and of my arguments. Having the relevant sections of the primary texts readily available may also provide readers with the chance to identify examples of dialogic which I have either simply overlooked or made a conscious decision to omit in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

In addition to close readings and exegeses of selections from *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch* my study is based on engagement with selected Bakhtinian texts and contemporary critical writing on Bakhtin. In regard to the latter, I have drawn from a variety of sources. One in particular, Morson and Emerson’s *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, has proved an invaluable foundation for the formulation of my arguments, particularly for the *Middlemarch* sections. As well as providing a lucid chronological account of various Bakhtinian ideas about language and the novel as they emerged over time, the volume offers a full and fascinating account of many of Bakhtin’s ethical and philosophical ideas. In the main, my readings of both novels are ultimately informed by, and tested against, Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the novel and by his philosophical and ethical notions regarding selfhood as presented in, but not restricted to, his collection of essays in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

I approach the two novels in slightly different ways. Because of its satirical richness I have used *Little Dorrit* primarily to explore Bakhtin's approach to discourse – the way in which language continually changes and takes on new meanings, depending on the context in which it is spoken (a context that includes the complex relationship that exists between the word, speaker, listener and referent), and how the utterance is shaped by all the other ways in which the referential object has already been spoken about. Section 1.2 provides a further elucidation of the Bakhtinian notion of the ever-changing word. Utilising Wendell V. Harris's identification of the various forms of dialogism commonly used in the nineteenth century English novel, I pursue a thematic line of enquiry by taking a sample of characters and 'hearing' the interplay of their voices as a play of competing discourses which should enable a fuller understanding of each character's psychological makeup and sense of selfhood. In so doing, my primary aim is to produce an enhanced understanding of the relatively neglected character of Fanny Dorrit and so attempt to 'rescue' her from the scrapheap of so-called 'flat' characters, a term coined by E. M. Forster long after Dickens's death, to describe characters who do not display capacity for development and growth (64).

Dickens's resonant humour is, perhaps, better suited to evoke an immediate and intense appreciation of the parodic aspects of dialogy than is Eliot's relative realism. That being said, despite being selected primarily for their ability to reflect the complexity of dialogised heteroglossia in novels, the passages I have chosen for *Little Dorrit* also, importantly, lay the foundation for an exploration into the nature of selfhood. The exploration of selfhood forms the main thrust of my thesis and is developed in detail in the more lengthy *Middlemarch* sections which, whilst continuing to explore Bakhtin's notions regarding the nature of language, focus in greater depth on his philosophical and ethical ideas about the nature of the self, and his belief that selfhood can only be meaningfully achieved with the help of another.

Close textual examination should reveal the differences between the satirical style in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and the more realistic and philosophical nature of Eliot's *Middlemarch* while simultaneously demonstrating that both styles of writing lend themselves – in different ways – to Bakhtinian readings.



## 1.2. Heteroglossia and Dialogism in the Novel

Central to Bakhtin's argument in "Discourse in the Novel" is the idea that language cannot ever have been monologic (the direct, unmediated orientation of discourse which carries a single set of intended meanings), with the possible exception of the words used by the mythical Adam (DiN 278 – 79). Bakhtin uses the example of Adam as having been the first person to speak in a "virginal and as yet unqualified world with the first word" and, consequently, being exempt from "dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word" as he, alone, spoke into a socio-linguistic vacuum (DiN 279). (Of course, in accepting the myth or Biblical account to which Bakhtin is referring, Adam, too, would necessarily be disqualified given his regular 'conversations' with his creator.) Having said that, the point Bakhtin is making is that, as soon as there is more than one speaker any utterance gets its meaning from its interaction with other utterances, as speakers constantly shade their language and adapt it to their own ends by choosing a 'language' from within the heteroglossia of a national language through which to speak. Thus, not only are there many different 'Englishes', emanating from a variety of factors such as different epochs, culture, generation, race, social standing, religion, education and so forth, but we also all use different 'Englishes' in different contexts. For instance, while we may use one 'English' to address our spouses, we use another to address our parents and children. Similarly, the language we use to address our close friends is, in all likelihood, slightly different from the one in which we address mere acquaintances. Additionally, we may employ business language in the workplace, legal language in the courts, parliamentary language in government, religious language in church, ceremonial language for formal occasions, and so forth. Moreover, because the utterance "is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (DiN 280), languages continually change and grow, with each day representing "another socio-ideological semantic 'state of affairs', another vocabulary, another accentual system" (DiN 291). Bakhtin is convinced, therefore, that language is "heteroglot from top to bottom ... [as] 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages'" (DiN 291). Consequently, no utterance is ever completely one's own but belongs, in part, to another or to others and so falls into the category of the 'already uttered', the 'already known' (DiN 279). As Bakhtin puts it: "The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context" (DiN 284). In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Michael Holquist characterises the utterance as 'a border phenomenon'. Because it takes place not only between speakers but also between "what is said and what is not said" it is "drenched in social factors". As a "social phenomenon, *par excellence*,

the utterance is shaped by speakers who assume that the values of their particular community are shared, and thus do not need to be spelled out in what they say” (DBW 61).

In Bakhtin’s estimation language is also subject to the dual action of centripetal and centrifugal forces, both of which are equally vital to communication. While centripetal forces allow us to understand each other through an inward pull towards standardisation of the language and centralised meaning (as, for example, in dictionaries), centrifugal forces allow for speech diversity by constantly pulling against this form of unification in the “uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification” (DiN 272). Furthermore, these two forces always work together as each utterance “participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (DiN 272). This dual action ensures the continued dynamics of a given language because both “stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing” (DiN 272). As Holquist puts it, “The idea of heteroglossia comes as close as possible to conceptualizing a locus where the great centripetal and centrifugal forces that shape discourse come together” (DBW 70).

Actually, one can use several different ‘languages’ during the course of a lifetime but not think to look at them through the eyes of another or *consciously* to bring them into dialogue with one another. This unconscious approach would constitute an instance of living with a heteroglossia in which the different ‘languages’ have not begun to challenge, interrogate, illuminate and complement one another. A case in point is Bakhtin’s example of an illiterate peasant who prayed in one language, sang songs in another, conversed with his family in a third, and dictated petitions to a local authority in yet another; all of which constitute “*different languages* even from the point of view of abstract socio-dialectological markers. But these languages were not dialogically coordinated in the linguistic consciousness of the peasant; he passed from one to the other without thinking, automatically” (DiN 296). ‘Dialogism’, on the other hand, results when the ‘voices’ within a language enter into a *conscious* dialogue with one another, as opposed to simply co-existing. One example Bakhtin gives is of what happened when the ‘low’ languages of dialect, folksayings, street songs and anecdotes became ‘consciously opposed’ to the official ‘literary language’ of their time, parodying and polemically opposing the latter. He calls this an example of “heteroglossia that had been dialogized” (DiN 273).

It is the manifestly dialogised heteroglossia that one encounters in the novel that particularly absorbs Bakhtin. A good novel succeeds in creating dynamic interplay between its many characters, representing a variety of social classes, age groups, occupations and ideologies and, in so doing, provides many valid voices, thus enabling a reading in which hierarchical privileging of major characters (or voices) at the expense of minor ones can be avoided. At the same time, these ‘voices’ are interwoven with the voice of the author/narrator who adds richness and texture, and who commentates simultaneously on both the characters and *their* society or on society in general.

The various voices in the novel are often heard in deliberate opposition to one another (the dialogical effect) in which one form of language is consciously set against another. Examples Bakhtin gives of the dialogical effect include “comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre” (DiN 324). The above discourses are all “double-voiced” and “internally dialogized” – each having “a potential dialogue embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages” (DiN 324). Double-voicing is also evident in what Bakhtin refers to as ‘hybridization’, which he defines as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” (DiN 358). What this means is that hybridisation gives a dual perspective in one sentence or passage so that, although a statement appears to emanate from one voice, another voice (usually parodic or ironical) will also be evident in refracted form. The author’s voice too, is usually discernible, sometimes hidden, as it were, in hybridisation and, at other times, quite overt and undisguised through direct narratorial comment. The author’s voice can be subtle or even inadvertent, in that meaning, according to Bakhtin, does not rely on the speaker’s intention alone but also on the way in which the listener or reader interprets the speech. In this way all readers, over time, are able to become ‘co-creators’ as no single meaning for any utterance can be derived by every reader.

Co-creating is, of course, made possible by the fact of the novel’s rootedness in social heteroglossia which means that no one set of linguistic or ideological norms can claim to be the only or the only correct one. This phenomenon brings about what Bakhtin speaks of as the ‘homelessness’ of the novel, an aspect he sees as a positive attribute. While for him the word ‘home’, in a literary sense, denotes a single, and therefore inadequate, normative set of linguistic

and syntactical rules, the ‘linguistic homelessness’ of the novel is brought about by its “presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world [. . .] or literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought” (DiN 366). Instead, the novel consciously manifests itself in “the midst of social languages that are surrounded by a single culture [. . .] or [. . .] cultural-political world” (DiN 366) and so provides endless possibilities in language, style, voice, hybridisation, meaning and interpretation in which “the double-voiced prose discourse can never be exhausted thematically” (DiN 326). He warns authors that, should they lose touch with linguistic double-voicedness and “the internal dialogization of living, evolving discourse,” they will never comprehend “the possibilities and tasks of the novel as a genre” (DiN 327). Even though the work may appear similar to a novel the style will always give [the author] away. The reader will recognise, he insists, the “naively self-confident or obtusely stubborn unity of a smooth, pure single-voiced language (perhaps accompanied by a primitive, artificial, worked-up double-voicedness)” (DiN 327). Moreover, the reader will be able to discern that the work is purged of speech diversity because such an author does not listen “to the fundamental heteroglossia inherent in actual language; he mistakes social overtones, which create the timbres of words, for irritating noises that it is his task to eliminate” (DiN 327.) This kind of treatment results in a novel emerging, instead, as a bad drama or “closet drama” replete with “artificially worked out stage directions in which authorial language inevitably ends up in the awkward and absurd position of the language of stage directions in plays” (DiN 327). Commenting on the way in which Victorian novels are able to comprehend these various possibilities and tasks, Peter Garrett points out, in “Double Plots and Dialogical Form in Victorian Fiction,” that the distinguishing feature of major Victorian novels “is the way their multiple narratives and frequent thematic parallels or oppositions are subject to a dialogical play of perspectives which prevents them from resolving into any single, stable pattern or meaning” (6).

In *The Dialogical Principle* Tzvetan Todorov reiterates that “there is no utterance without relation to other utterances” but suggests that Bakhtin’s use of the word *dialogism* is “loaded with such an embarrassing multiplicity of meanings” that he (Todorov) prefers to substitute the term ‘intertextuality’, and set aside “the denomination *dialogical* for certain specific instances of intertextuality, such as the exchange of responses by two speakers, or Bakhtin’s conception of human personality” (60). However, perhaps Todorov’s use of the term ‘intertextuality’ is too narrow in its application, and also too neutral a term: one which risks losing the sense of a real, politically and ethically significant confrontation between different ways of seeing the world.

Wendell V. Harris addresses this issue in his article, “Bakhtinian Double Voicing in Dickens and Eliot” in which he distinguishes between the various forms of dialogism or double-voicing most commonly used in the nineteenth century English novel, and in which he claims that “the relationship of double voicing to the key Bakhtinian term ‘dialogism’ is clarified by unpacking and assigning names to some at least of what Todorov called ‘the embarrassing multiplicity of meanings’ Bakhtin assigns to the latter” (446). Accordingly, in his essay, he identifies and discusses several forms of dialogism as follows:

Grounding all other meanings is an *ontological* dialogism which maintains that the richness of human experience can never be reduced to a series of “truths”. In that meaning always requires interaction between words and context, our understanding of utterances depends on *contextual* dialogism. *Linguistic* dialogism results from each word’s carrying previous meanings and other persons’ intentions, so that each use is half others’ uses, half one’s own. *Ideological* dialogism results from our each holding a set of ideas – every person is an ideologue. Related to but distinguishable from the ideological is the social or *idiolectical*: each person experiences, thinks, and speaks partially as a reflection of social status, regional background, nationality, and professional training. Unique combinations of ideological and idiolectical dialogism forces in each person produce the manifold variety of ways in which thought is expressed: the result is what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia”. *Overt* dialogism is simply the interchange of speech between individuals – “dialogues” in its most usual sense. Thought characterized by internal debate between different aspects of a single consciousness or between one person’s internalizations of the attitudes of others presents us with *psychological* dialogism. *Narratorial* dialogism occurs when a narrator incorporates a character’s mode of thought or speech through indirect discourse or grammatical blending – Bakhtin sometimes refers to this latter form as a narrator’s entry into the “zone” of a character. [. . .] And finally, what I shall call *literary* dialogism is the structural use or exhibition of dialogical relations in a literary text, of which the supremely dialogical genre is, Bakhtin insists, the novel. Double voicing, then, enacts the richness of ontological dialogism through the interrelationship of two voices; the existence of the two is made manifest in psychological and narratorial dialogism by linguistic, ideological and idiolectical markers. [446 – 47]

During the course of my discussions, and particularly in my thematic analysis of *Little Dorrit*, I refer to the above taxonomy which, I believe, helps to clarify some of the many different varieties of dialogism found in the selected texts.

In my analyses of both novels one of my primary objectives is to explore some of the ways in which a Bakhtinian reading may be able to provide an increased appreciation of the texts. I hope to do so by drawing both on his ideas about the nature of language, and his contention that what sets the novel apart from other genres is the way in which each utterance is inscribed through, and takes its meaning from, the utterances of others. In so doing, I also hope to be able to demonstrate that, although double-voicing is obviously most easily identifiable in the overtly comic or satiric parts of *Little Dorrit* (as in, for example, the interplay between members of the Dorrit family and characters from somewhat contrasting backgrounds, such as Mrs Merdle, Sparkler and Mrs General), bifurcation is also present in *Middlemarch* as well as in those passages in *Little Dorrit* that aim at a more realistic approach to characters, such as those within

the Dorrit family, who are relatively socially homogenous and not obviously divided by class or culture.

As previously stated, the sections on *Little Dorrit* also serve as an introduction to Bakhtin's distinctive understanding of the concept of 'selfhood', the exploration of which forms the basis of my discussion on *Middlemarch*, in which I discuss, in detail, various characters' potential for growth. Bakhtin's understanding of selfhood complements his theory about the utterance and is similarly articulated in the distinction between 'self' and 'other', communication between which lies, he believes, at the root of human consciousness. Thus he muses in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. [. . .] *To be* means *to communicate*. [. . .] To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no integral sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary: looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*. [. . .] I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance). [287]

Knowledge of the self can never, therefore, attain full completion but is always oriented towards the other. In much the same way, the novel, too, cannot be self-completing. Seen through the eyes of various readers over time it, too, is in a perpetual state of 'becoming'. Its orientation is always toward a future in which events, characters and their actions are likely to be the subject of ongoing, open-ended interpretation and debate.

## 2 *LITTLE DORRIT*

### 2.1. **Introductory Remarks**

Dickens's ability humorously to critique what he perceives to be serious flaws in the system (both political and social) features among his many gifts as a story-teller. Another brilliant aspect of his writing is to depict, often with humour but sometimes with great sensitivity and pathos his characters' idiosyncrasies, emotional flaws and the numerous difficulties they encounter. In *Little Dorrit* one of the overriding preoccupations of the narrator is with imprisonment of some sort – both physical incarceration and emotional entrapment – in which characters frequently suffer not only at the hands of circumstance, the establishment and society but also as a result of their own narrowly inscribed views. The passages I have chosen to explore focus largely on the social and emotional entrapment of selected characters; an entrapment that appears to shape their individual ideologies in different ways and to varying degrees or, as J. Hillis Miller expresses it, one which is “not accidental and exterior, but inner and permanent” (*Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* 231).

Bakhtin insists that *any* dialogue between two voices is *always* also a dialogue between two socio-ideological points of view and he believes that this is what makes the novel a radically democratic genre, symptomatic of the whole democratising thrust of a progressive Modernity. So as to give that democratic potential its due he insists that one needs to listen to *all* the voices in the novel, allowing them *all* to mediate, interrogate and complement each other. In applying a Bakhtinian analysis to these passages, my primary aim is to demonstrate the ways in which the ‘word’ or ‘utterance’, responds *dialogically* to the speech (or word) of others and how this dialogical relationship either enables the potential for growth and self-realisation (however limited) through characters’ revelation of selfhood to another, or reveals its opposite: the incapacity for growth in those characters who fail adequately to respond to the dialogising voice of another.

Much has been written about Dickens's tendency either to caricature or to ‘gloss over’ relatively minor characters. Possibly as a result of this, in the Dorrit family, only major characters such as Mr Dorrit and Amy have been explored in depth by scholars. Aside from a page devoted to Fanny in Frank and Queenie Leavis's *Dickens the Novelist*, I was hard-pressed to locate criticism on her that amounted to more than the odd passing comment. I found this somewhat disturbing,

especially since she is strongly featured in conversation – with not only Amy but also with their father, their brother and their uncle, as well as with Mrs General, Mrs Merdle, and Sparkler. Bearing in mind the claim that Bakhtinian theory militates against unreflectively privileging one ‘voice’ over another, and specifically the voices of major characters over minor ones, I have chosen to focus on how, through the interplay between Fanny and Amy and their respective interactions with others, Dickens clearly had more in mind for Fanny than mere caricature. Once identified, the double-voicedness of her exchanges reveals her own self-dividedness and, consequently, at least some capacity for self-reflexivity and growth.

As I mentioned earlier, so as to try to derive most benefit from a Bakhtinian reading, the passages I have selected for discussion pertain to a specific theme or themes within each of the two novels I explore. This approach should afford the reader an opportunity to follow narratives more-or-less uninterruptedly within my chosen themes. This approach provides a context for events, dialogue, characterisation and narratorial point of view and obviates the need for constantly having to locate relevant passages in the primary texts. Having made the decision to retain the flow of the narrative, the challenge was to negotiate a course between continuity and context on the one hand and a concise, non-repetitive explication of Bakhtinian theory on the other. A necessary consequence of retaining the flow of the narrative is the length of the extracts and automatic inclusion of material that is not immediately relevant to the critical discussions that follow, other than to provide continuity and structure. Another concern is the very real danger of repetition – there is only so much one can say regarding certain *types* of exchange without running the risk of going over old ground. I have tried to keep repetition to a minimum but where this is unavoidable I trust that it will serve to consolidate an understanding of those aspects central to a Bakhtinian reading. So as to present a balanced view of Fanny, I have tried to keep her storyline reasonably intact but length constraints have necessitated the omission of some scenes in which Fanny is included, but not prominently featured. In the spirit of ongoing discussion and interpretation, therefore, I fully expect differences of opinion as to what should (or should not) have been included. Such is the nature of openendedness and unfinalizability.

In the extracts to be analysed, please bear in mind that I have followed the method Bakhtin frequently used when analysing various texts, including passages from *Little Dorrit*. All italicization in bold print is mine, added for the convenient identification of aspects I wish to discuss. The author’s own italics appear in normal print.



## 2.2. Book I – “Poverty”

In order to stay within the limited scope of the thesis, I have restricted my principal readings to those events involving Fanny (Book I) and activities that have a bearing on her trajectory after the Dorrits’ re-entry into society (Book II).

Ever-conscious of her family’s welfare, Amy has arranged dancing lessons for Fanny and we take up the story after a dancing role has been secured for Fanny at the theatre at which their ageing and disheveled uncle Frederick, with whom she is living, is engaged as a ‘clarionet’ player. Amy, puzzled and disturbed by the news that Fanny has accepted a bracelet from a lady, is anxious to voice her concerns to Fanny and she makes her way to the theatre where she is greeted by the latter “in no very cordial tone of welcome” (279). It appears that Fanny has been summoned to the residence of the donor who happens to be the mother of a certain Mr Sparkler who, it seems, has become besotted with Fanny.

[Fanny] was pretty, *and conscious, and rather flaunting*; and the *condescension* with which she put aside the *superiority of her charms*, and of *her worldly experience*, and addressed her sister on *almost equal terms, had a vast deal of family in it*.

‘I am interested, Fanny, and concerned in anything that concerns you.’

‘So you are, so you are, and *you are the best of Amys*. If I am ever a little provoking, I am sure you’ll consider what a thing it *is to occupy my position and feel a consciousness of being superior to it*. I shouldn’t care,’ said *the Daughter of the Father of the Marshalsea*, ‘if others were not so common. *None of them have come down in the world as we have*. They are all on their own level. *Common*.’

Little Dorrit *mildly looked at the speaker, but did not interrupt her*. Fanny took out her handkerchief, and *rather angrily* wiped her eyes. ‘*I was not born where you were, you know, Amy, and perhaps that makes a difference*. [. . .]

‘Now, Amy,’ said her sister, ‘come with me, if you are not too tired to walk to Harley Street, Cavendish Square.’

*The air with which she threw off this distinguished address and the toss she gave to her new bonnet (which was more gauzy than serviceable)*, made her sister wonder; however, she expressed her readiness to go to Harley Street, and thither they directed their steps. [Book I, Chap 20: 282 - 83]

This section provides the first extended description of Fanny. What immediately strikes one is that, beneath her numerous affectations and careless treatment of Amy (‘You are the best of Amys’) there exists a real candour and a genuine desire to justify herself to Amy. As distinct from the ‘flat’ characters (such as Mrs Merdle and Mrs General), it is made abundantly clear at the outset that Fanny is a decidedly more complex character, who clearly feels herself superior to Amy but, at the same time, is keenly desirous of Amy’s approval. ‘Almost equal terms’ and ‘a vast deal of family in it’, mark out the social hierarchy of the family as she sees it: with Mr Dorrit at the head, followed closely by herself, then their brother Tip, and lastly, Amy (with Uncle lagging some distance behind). ‘The Daughter of the Father of the Marshalsea’ (note the capital letters) mischievously alludes to Fanny’s sense of status. It *is* the truth but contained within the truth is the narrator’s parodic take on it – an impression he wishes to impress upon the reader.

Underscoring its hybridity is the fact that it is flanked by the parodic descriptions: ‘rather flaunting’, ‘conscious prettiness’(suggestive of a degree of self-awareness), ‘condescension’, ‘superiority’ and ‘worldly experience’ on the one side, and her so-called ‘distinguished address’ and bonnet which was ‘more gauzy than serviceable’, on the other. The vast dispositional difference between the sisters is accentuated by the ‘mild’ Amy not taking issue with Fanny as she angrily articulates her resentment at being socially lumped together with ‘common’ dancers, bemoans the fact that their family has ‘come down in the world’, and alludes to social difference between the sisters themselves (‘I was not born where you were’).

Arrived at that destination, Fanny singled out the *handsomest* house, and knocking at the door, inquired for Mrs Merdle. The footman who opened the door, although he had *powder* on his head and was backed up by two other footmen likewise *powdered*, not only admitted Mrs Merdle to be at home, but asked Fanny to walk in. Fanny walked in, *taking her sister with her*; and they went up-stairs with *powder going before and powder stopping behind*, and were left in a spacious semicircular drawing-room, one of several drawing rooms, where there was a *parrot on the outside of a golden cage holding* on by its beak, with its scaly legs in the air, and *putting itself into many strange upside-down postures. This peculiarity has been observed in birds of quite another feather, climbing upon golden wires.*

The room was far more splendid than anything Little Dorrit had ever imagined, and would have been splendid and costly in any eyes. She looked in *amazement* at her sister, and would have asked a question, but that *Fanny with a warning frown* pointed to a curtained doorway of communication with another room. The curtain shook next moment, and a lady, raising it with a heavily ringed hand, dropped it behind her again as she entered. [Book I, Chap 20: 284]

The narrator here begins to introduce a new social ‘climate’ in which he adroitly lays the groundwork for the grand entrance of the formidable Mrs Merdle, whose house is the ‘handsomest’ in, arguably, the most elite suburb of London. Fanny, it seems, is not the least intimidated as she guides Amy into the house with her, and they walk up the stairs amidst a prodigious amount of ‘powder’ emanating from the three footmen. Ontological dialogism (which grounds all other meanings) dominates this short descriptive passage. It is true that the owners of this handsome house are rich and that powdered footmen convey their visitors to one of the several luxurious reception rooms in which a parrot postures on the outside of a golden cage. These are the facts. But *ontological dialogism*, as understood by Wendell V. Harris, dictates that “the richness of human experience can never be reduced to a series of truths” (446), and here we become privy to the seemingly different effect the experience has on each of the sisters: whilst Amy clearly wishes to give expression to her ‘astonishment’, Fanny already seems to have cultivated a sense of social decorum and self-containment. Furthermore, the entire experience is offset by the narrator’s sardonic dismissal of the haughty footmen as ‘powder’ and his reduction of the glamorous setting by placing within it an ungainly, contorting parrot, an effect he drives home by comparing the creature’s ludicrous antics to the ‘peculiarity observed

in' social climbers ('birds of quite another feather') in their various efforts to claw their way up the societal ladder.

Bakhtin often refers to the fact that works of fiction are apt to incorporate at least some of the author's own philosophies, tastes, points of views and general attitudes to life. Francesco Berger writes in "Just Like His Books" that people often asked him what Dickens was like, to which he would reply, "I can give no better answer than bid them read his books, for in them they will find all there is to know of him. No author "ever revealed himself more completely to his readers than Dickens does in his pages" (Philip Collins. *Charles Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* [Volume 2] 241). The obvious parody of the powdered splendour of the Merdle's residence is a case in point. As the then popular American journalist, Grace Greenwood, was led to remark after dining at Tavistock House, "In the course of the evening, I expressed to him my pleasure of seeing that his servants wore no distinctive livery, and he replied: 'I hope you are not surprised; I do not consider that I own enough of any man to hand a badge upon'" ("So Unlike Ordinary Great Men." Philip Collins. *Charles Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* [Volume 2] 236).

*The lady was not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. She had large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom, and was made the most of in every particular. Either because she had a cold, or because it suited her face, she wore a rich white fillet tied over her head and under her chin. And if ever there were an unfeeling handsome chin that looked as if, for certain, it had never been, in familiar parlance, 'chucked' by the hand of man, it was the chin curbed up so tight and close by that laced bridle.*

[Book I, Chap 20: 284]

The introduction to Mrs Merdle resonates with *authorial dialogism* in which Dickens starts manipulating his readers' impressions of Mrs Merdle to his way of thinking. The repetition of 'young and fresh' highlights the obvious irony of Mrs Merdle's efforts to halt the disagreeable advancement of her age whilst the quadruple repetition of the word 'unfeeling' provides a parodical suggestion as to how he wants us to perceive her. One of his daughters, Mamie, who spent much time in her father's study recuperating from a long illness, gives an illuminating account of Dickens at work:

On one of these mornings, I was lying on the sofa endeavoring to keep perfectly quiet, while my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice. Ceasing this soon, however, he returned once more to his desk, where he remained silently writing until luncheon time. It was a most curious experience for me, and one of which I did not, until later years, fully appreciate the purport. Then I knew that with his natural intensity he had thrown himself completely into the character he was creating, and that for the time being he had not only lost sight of his surroundings, but had actually become in action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen.

["Working Habits". Philip Collins. *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (Volume 2) 120]

The description of Mrs Merdle with her ‘unfeeling bosom’ and tightly curbed up chin reflect some of these antics and suggests contextual dialogism over the novel as a whole – certainly in *Little Dorrit* all Dickens’s less desirable or ridiculous characters sport facial or physical anomalies that accentuate their unattractive qualities: the sour and unlikeable Mr Flintwinch is described as a ‘bent and dried up’ old man whose ‘head was awry’ and who has ‘a one-sided, crab-like way with him’(Book I Chap 3: 71 and 72); Arthur Clennam’s pious, and mean-spirited, crippled mother looks at him ‘with her cold eyes and her cold grey hair, and her immovable face, as stiff as the folds of her stone head-dress’ (Book I Chap 3: 74); the egotistical and materialistic Christopher Casby is ponderous and elephantine and ‘so grey, so slow, so quiet, so impassionate, so very bumpy in the head (Book I Chap 13: 187); the self-confessed man-hater, Miss Wade has a ‘still and scornful expression’ which is ‘set off by the arched dark eyebrows, and the folds of dark hair’, prompting the narrator to muse upon the impossibility of its ever softening or relenting (Book I Chap 2: 62). Then, too, there is the fraudulent Mr Merdle who, we are informed, is ‘a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red colour in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands’ (Book I Chap 21: 293), or crossing them ‘under his uneasy coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody’ (Book I Chap 33: 445). Finally, if we read the description of Mrs Merdle in conjunction with oft-repeated description of the novel’s most comprehensively villainous character, Monsieur Rigaud/Blandois, whose ‘moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner’ (Book I Chap I: 44), it seems reasonable to conclude that the satirised physical anomalies serve as a dialogical link between the vain, overbearing and society-conscious Mrs Merdle and other unsavoury characters in the novel.

‘Mrs Merdle,’ said Fanny. ‘My sister, ma’am.’

‘I am glad to see your sister, Miss Dorrit. *I did not remember that you had a sister.*’

‘*I did not mention that I had,*’ said Fanny.

‘Ah!’ Mrs Merdle curled the little finger of her left hand as who should say, ‘*I have caught you.* I know you didn’t!’ All her action was usually with her left hand because her hands were not a pair, the left being much the whiter and plumper of the two. Then she added: ‘Sit down,’ and composed herself *voluptuously, in a nest of crimson and gold cushions, on an ottoman near the parrot.* ‘Also *professional?*’ said Mrs Merdle, looking at Little Dorrit *through an eye-glass.*

Fanny answered No. ‘No,’ said Mrs Merdle, dropping her glass. ‘Has not a professional air. *Very pleasant; but not professional.*’

‘My sister, ma’am,’ said Fanny, in whom there *was a singular mixture of deference and hardihood,* ‘has been asking me to tell her, as between sisters, how I came to have the *honour* of knowing you. And as I had engaged to call upon you once more, I thought I might take the liberty of bringing her with me, when perhaps *you would tell her.* I wish her to know, and *perhaps you will tell her?*’

‘Do you think, at your sister’s age –’ hinted Mrs Merdle.

‘She is much older than she looks,’ said Fanny; ‘almost as old as I am.’

*‘Society,’ said Mrs Merdle, with another curve of her little finger, ‘is so difficult to explain to young persons (indeed it is so difficult to explain to most persons), that I am glad to hear that. I wish society was not so arbitrary, I wish it was not so exacting – Bird, be quiet!’*

The parrot had given a most piercing shriek, as if its name were Society and it asserted its right to its exactions.

‘But,’ resumed Mrs Merdle, ‘we must take it as we find it. *We know it is hollow and conventional and worldly and very shocking, but* unless we are Savages in the Tropical Seas (*I should have been charmed to be one myself – most delightful life and perfect climate, I am told*), we must consult it. It is the common lot. Mr Merdle is a most extensive merchant, his transactions are on the vastest scale, his wealth and influence are very great, but even he – *Bird, be quiet!*’

*The parrot had shrieked another shriek; and it filled up the sentence so expressively that Mrs Merdle was under no necessity to end it.*

[Book I, Chap 20: 284 - 85]

Michael Holquist reiterates Bakhtin’s concept of the “opposition and struggle” of language, alluding to it as “no passive stuff, no mere yielding clay” (TDI xviii) and the introductory sparring between the spirited Fanny and the formidable Mrs Merdle promises to develop into a prodigious and enduring battle of words between them as they continually strive to gain ascendancy over the other. In “The Poetics of *Ressentiment*,” Michael André Bernstein makes a case for a ‘darker and more desperate aspect’ than Bakhtin’s account of dialogic usually acknowledges. Instead of dialogue fostering “generous mutual attentiveness,” what is often found are “speakers stalking one another with the edgy wariness of fighters ready to erupt into lethal violence the moment one of them senses an opening” (Morson and Emerson. *Rethinking Bakhtin; Extensions and Challenges* 204 and 199). The quest for dominance that colours all future (real and imagined) encounters between Fanny and Mrs Merdle here begins with the latter’s seemingly innocuous observation of social niceties (the allusion to her not knowing that Fanny had a sister), and Fanny’s tart response. Although Fanny studiously stays within the idiom of social refinement, the discernibly combative tone of her response is a sure sign that the battle lines have been drawn between them – a challenge Mrs Merdle does not fail both to notice and to return with interest. Her counter-attack, therefore, in juxtaposing ‘professional’ and ‘pleasant’, serves a dual purpose: whilst affecting civility, her allusion to Fanny’s ‘vulgar’ profession puts the young pretender squarely in her place.

In summing up the manifold aspects of language resulting from the continual duel played out between opposing centripetal and centrifugal forces Holquist hails Bakhtin’s acute sensitivity to the “immense plurality of experience,” pointing out that, whereas other receiver-sender models for communication involve “two actual people talking to each other as sovereign egos capable of sending messages to each other through the kind of *uncluttered space*,” Bakhtin prefers the view that each person constitutes “a consciousness at a *specific point* in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made – out of all possible languages available to it at that moment – of a discourse to transcribe its intention *in this specific exchange*” (TDI xx – emphasis added). If it is

Fanny's intention to forcefully attempt to close the social gap between herself and Mrs Merdle, the latter signifies her equal determination to maintain a healthy distance between the parties – a distance she reinforces by extravagantly arranging herself 'in a nest of crimson and gold cushions' from which vantage point she conspicuously presses her eye-glass into action as an additional barrier through which to survey the less offending of the two sisters. It is, perhaps, unfortunate for the unsuspecting Mrs Merdle that the author has, somewhat cunningly, positioned her 'nest' in close proximity to the objectionable parrot and his golden cage, mentioned earlier (Book I, Chap 20: 284). The authorial dialogism here might well be overlooked but for contextual dialogism, in terms of which, as the piece unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that the parrot is used to parody both society and Mrs Merdle as it unmasks her hypocrisy by repeatedly interrupting her discourse with ear-piercing shrieks.

*'Since your sister begs that I would terminate our personal acquaintance,' she began again, addressing Little Dorrit, 'by relating the circumstances that are much to her credit, I cannot object to comply with her request, I am sure. I have a son (I was first married extremely young) of two or three-and-twenty.'*

*Fanny set her lips and her eyes looked half-triumphantly at her sister.*

*'A son of two or three-and-twenty. He is a little gay, a thing Society is accustomed to in young men, and he is very impressible. Perhaps he inherits that misfortune. I am very impressible myself, by nature. The weakest of creatures – my feelings are touched in a moment.'*

She said all this, and everything else *as coldly* as a woman of snow; quite forgetting the sisters except at odd times, and apparently addressing some abstraction of Society; for whose behoof, too, she occasionally arranged her dress, or the composition of her figure upon the ottoman.

*'So he is very impressible. Not a misfortune in our natural state, I dare say, but we are not in a natural state. Much to be lamented, no doubt, particularly by myself, who am a child of nature if I could but show it; but so it is. Society suppresses us and dominates us – Bird, be quiet!'*

The parrot had broken into a *violent fit of laughter, after twisting divers bars of his cage with his crooked bill, and licking them with his black tongue.* [Book I, Chap 20: 285 – 86]

The formalities concluded, the real reason for Fanny's visit begins to emerge. Mrs Merdle, anxious to prevent a liaison between her only son and Fanny, has summoned the latter to her presence but, having no doubt expected resistance from her adversary, she opts to voice her 'concerns' through the conduit of the more pliable Amy. Disingenuously implying that Fanny instigated their meeting, she proceeds cautiously with her directive, shielding herself from personal attack by comparing herself to her unfortunately 'impressible' son ('I am very impressible myself', 'the weakest of creatures, 'my feelings are touched in a moment') whilst, at the same time, taking refuge behind the so-called authoritative dictates of a vaguely defined society ('Society suppresses us and dominates us'). Her aim, at this point, is to give the impression of depersonalising her distaste for Fanny and the lowly circles in which Fanny moves by simultaneously absolving herself and placing the blame on a higher authority.

In the section on *Middlemarch* I explore, in some detail, Bakhtin's notion of *authoritative discourse* (which cannot be questioned) in relation to *internally persuasive discourse* (which presupposes a degree of internal dialogism). For now I wish only to point out that Mrs Merdle hides behind the authoritative discourse of society ('Society suppresses us and dominates us') and that, in Bakhtin's view, and for whom "creativity and responsibility were inseparable" both being "part of the 'task' and work of daily life" (MB 41), this type of mindset critically inhibits the development of a responsible and accountable self. That the image she wishes to project ('the weakest of creatures') is wholly fictional is underscored by the narratorial dialogism of 'She said all this, and everything else as coldly as a woman of snow'. The parody is driven home by her being interrupted (again!) by the shrieking laughter and convulsive contortions of the parrot who, it seems, is intent on providing a running 'commentary' on her performance.

Bakhtin describes language as a process "teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language" all of which, he says are "more or less successful, depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed" (DiN 356 – 57). Providing, as it does, a comic summation of Mrs Merdle's socio-ideological mumbo-jumbo must surely qualify the parrot to be, if not a purveyor of parvenu-languages then, at least, a pretender to the status of language, for, quite clearly, the narrator uses its periodic outbursts to deride Mrs Merdle and her society.

'It is quite unnecessary to say to a person *of your good sense, wide range of experience, and cultivated feeling,*' said Mrs Merdle from her *nest* of crimson and gold – and *there put up her glass to refresh her memory as to whom she was addressing,* – that the stage sometimes has a fascination for young men of that class of character. In saying the stage, I mean the people on it of the female sex. Therefore, when I heard that my son was supposed to be fascinated by a *dancer*, I knew what that usually meant in Society, and confided in her being a *dancer at the Opera*, where young men moving in Society are usually fascinated.'

She passed her white hands over one another, *observant of the sisters now*; and the rings upon her fingers *grated* against each other with a *hard* sound.

'As your sister will tell you, when I found what the theatre was I was much surprised and much distressed. But when I found that your sister, *by rejecting my son's advances* (I must add, in an unexpected manner), *had brought him to a point of proposing marriage*, my feelings were of the *profoundest anguish – acute.*'

*She traced the outline of her left eyebrow, and put it right.*

[Book I, Chap 20: 286 – 87]

Although there is no vocal interjection from the parrot in this section, the link between it and Mrs Merdle is consolidated by the reference to the latter's 'nest of crimson and gold'. Furthermore, she simply goes through the motions of 'parroting' her particular brand of socio-idiolectal 'pleasantries', seemingly forgetting who her audience is, and elaborately using her glass to 'refresh her memory as to whom she is addressing'.

Holquist makes the point that language cannot be “divorced from a particular saying, which is charged with particular overtones” because ‘general language’ is simply not possible. “Language,” he writes, “when it means, is somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone else is one’s own inner addressee” (TDI xxi). Commenting on the nature of the utterance, Robert Stam speaks of its “always being addressed to someone” (its addressivity). The addressee can emerge from a variety of different spheres including being “an immediate participant/interlocutor in an everyday dialogue, or a differentiated collective of specialists, an ethnic group” (20 – 21). Citing Bakhtin, he goes on to say that addressees can also be “like-minded people, opponents or enemies, a subordinate, a superior, someone who is lower, higher, familiar, foreign . . . or even an indefinite, unconcretized other” (Note 17 – “The Problem of Speech Genres” 95). In the first part of Mrs Merdle’s ‘speech’, the words she utters could be addressed to either sister or to both or, inasmuch as they require no response, they may simply be directed at no-one in particular (an indefinite, unconcretized other). When she embarks on the real objective of her delivery, however, her focus is quite sharply brought to bear upon her immediate audience, emphasising their lowly status in relation to her obvious superiority and requiring from them a suitably subservient response.

Bakhtin maintains that, particularly in regard to emotional meanings and expressions, “all direct meanings and direct expressions are false”. This is because, “*Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks [is] what determines the word’s actual meaning” (DiN 401). Or, in Danow’s formulation, the word’s dialogical nature “emanates in large part from the choice of a particular utterance on the part of the addresser, who inevitably takes into consideration the status and relationship of the addressee” (37). Not content with denigrating Fanny’s profession as a dancer, Mrs Merdle’s tendentious, but possibly accurate, implication is that Fanny has used reverse psychology in order to entrap the unsuspecting Sparkler. To emphasise the social difference between her and the sisters, Mrs Merdle shows off her ‘white hands’ replete with rings. However, the hard grating sound they make quite obviously constitutes a bit of narratorial fun that relates back to the contextual dialogism of ‘dark’, ‘cold’, and ‘unfeeling’ (Book 1, Chap 20: 284 – 85) and, together with her careful correction of her left eyebrow, gives the lie to her declaration of ‘acute’ and ‘profoundest anguish’.

‘In a distracted condition, which *only a mother – moving in Society* – can be susceptible of, I determined to go myself to the theatre, and represent my state of mind to the dancer. I made myself known to your sister. I found her, to my surprise, in many respects *different* from my expectations; and certainly in none more so, than in meeting me with – what shall I say – *a sort of family assertion on her own part?*’ Mrs Merdle smiled.



*'I told you, ma'am,'* said Fanny, *with a heightening colour*, 'that although you found me in that situation, I was so far above the rest, that *I considered my family as good as your son's*; and that *I had a brother who, knowing the circumstances, could be of the same opinion, and would not consider such a connection any honour.*'

'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Merdle, after *frostily looking at her through her glass*, 'precisely what I was on the point of telling your sister, in pursuance of your request. *Much obliged to you for recalling it so accurately and anticipating me.* I immediately,' addressing Little Dorrit, '(for I am a creature of impulse), took a bracelet from my arm, and begged your sister to let me clasp it on hers, in token of the delight I had in our being able to approach the subject so far on a common footing.' (This was perfectly true, the lady having bought a cheap and showy article on her way to the interview, with a general eye to bribery.

*'And I told you, Mrs Merdle,'* said Fanny, *'that we might be unfortunate, but we are not common.'*

*'I think the very words,* Miss Dorrit,' assented Mrs Merdle.

*'And I told you,* Mrs Merdle,' said Fanny, 'that if you spoke to me of the superiority of your son's standing in Society, it was barely possible that *you rather deceived yourself in your suppositions about my origin*; and that my father's standing, even in the Society in which he now moved (what that was, was best known to myself), was eminently superior, and was acknowledged by every one.'

*'Quite accurate,'* rejoined Mrs Merdle. *'A most admirable memory.'*

'Thank you, ma'am. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell my sister the rest.' [Book I, Chap 20: 287]

Bakhtin writes that the various languages of the heteroglossia are always "socially typifying languages, no matter how narrow the social circle in which they are spoken" (DiN 290). There is a discernible difference in the way in which Mrs Merdle and Fanny naturally express themselves but one has to admire the way in which Fanny is able to switch from one 'socially typifying language' to another as she, seemingly effortlessly, engages with Mrs Merdle in the idiolect of the latter. It appears that the two opponents understand each other only too well. Aside from her role as a metaphorical tennis net over which Mrs Merdle and Fanny lob veiled insults, Amy plays little or no part in these exchanges which for her, Bakhtin might have said, characterise a "socially alien language" operating "within the boundaries of one and the same national language" (DiN 285). Lacking either societal aspirations or a combative nature leaves her with neither the ability nor the desire to learn to converse in 'socially typifying languages' other than her own.

According to David Danow, "Bakhtin consistently grants the word an aggressive character; as an entity struggling in the world to make itself heard within the unceasing global polemic, in which each voice attempts to convince with its particular world view" (31). This struggle is clearly evident when verbal power-play commences in earnest as Mrs Merdle and Fanny engage in a battle for domination and one-upmanship with regard to their own and the other's social positions. Clearly Fanny is wrong-footed at the outset by Mrs Merdle's implied denigration of her opponent's family; undoubtedly a ploy to put Fanny at a disadvantage. That it succeeds is evidenced by Fanny's 'heightening colour' and her swift retaliation in defence of herself and her family's honour. Despite beginning to lose her composure, the quick-learning Fanny is able to gather herself sufficiently to mimic Mrs Merdle's mode of expression in retaliation. Thus, when

Mrs Merdle uses society to refract her privately-held opinions, Fanny brings her brother into the fray, fictively implying his own low opinion of Sparkler, and reminding Mrs Merdle that she had ‘rather deceived’ herself in her suppositions about Fanny’s origin.

Presumably for the benefit of Amy and the reader, their conversation is, for the most part, a rehash of their prior encounter, replete with a great many ‘you said . . . I said . . .’ examples of what has previously taken place between the two women. Dialogism, Robert Stam points out, exists not only in the more obvious forms of argument or disagreement but also in more subtle forms such as “grudging acknowledgement of the factual validity of another’s statement” (14). This kind of grudging acknowledgement is evident in Mrs Merdle’s smooth acknowledgement of the validity of Fanny’s recall of events.

‘There is very little to tell,’ said Mrs Merdle, *reviewing the breadth of bosom which seemed essential to her having room enough to be unfeeling in*, ‘but it is to your sister’s credit. I pointed out to your sister the plain state of the case; *the impossibility of the Society in which we moved recognising the Society in which she moved – though charming*, I have no doubt; the immense disadvantage at which she would consequently place the family she had so high an opinion of, *upon which we should find ourselves compelled to look down with contempt, and from which (socially speaking) we should feel obliged to recoil with abhorrence*. In short, I made an appeal to that laudable pride in your sister.’

‘Let my sister know, if you please, Mrs Merdle,’ Fanny pouted, *with a toss of her gauzy bonnet, ‘that I had already had the honour of telling your son that I wished to have nothing whatever to say to him.’*

‘Well, Miss Dorrit,’ *assented* Mrs Merdle, ‘perhaps I might have mentioned that before. If I did not think of it, perhaps it was because my mind reverted to the apprehensions I had at the time that he might persevere and you might have something to say to him. I also mentioned to your sister – I again address the *non-professional* Miss Dorrit – that my son would have nothing in the event of such a marriage, and would be an absolute beggar. (I mention that, merely as a fact which is part of the narrative, and not as supposing it to have influenced your sister, except in the prudent and legitimate way in which, constituted as *our artificial system is*, we must all be influenced by such considerations.) Finally, after some high words and high spirit on the part of your sister, we came to the complete understanding that there was no danger; and your sister was *so obliging as to allow me to present her with a mark or two of my appreciation at my dressmaker’s.*’

Little Dorrit looked sorry, and glanced at Fanny *with a troubled face*.

‘Also,’ said Mrs Merdle, ‘as to promise to give me the *present pleasure of a closing interview, and of parting with her on the best of terms*. On which occasion,’ added Mrs Merdle’ quitting her nest, and putting something in Fanny’s hand, ‘Miss Dorrit will permit me to say Farewell with best wishes in my own dull manner.’

The sisters rose at the same time, and they all stood near the cage of the parrot, *as he tore at a claw-full of biscuit and spat it out, seemed to mock them with a pompous dance of his body without moving his feet, and suddenly turned himself upside down and trailed himself all over the outside of his golden cage, with the aid of his cruel beak and black tongue*. [. . .] [Book I, Chap 20: 287 - 88]

Stam makes the point that “to speak of dialogue without speaking of power, in a Bakhtinian perspective, is to speak meaninglessly in a void”. Thus, he concludes, language is “everywhere imbricated with the asymmetries of power” (8). Nowhere is this more impressively illustrated than in the above climactic scene in which the battle for hegemony descends rapidly into a kind of genteel slanging match in which the formidable Mrs Merdle fully reveals her hand and Fanny struggles valiantly to wrest back control.

Bakhtin always comes back to what he regards as critical for any novelist aspiring to double-voicedness. It must, he insists, always be grounded in social heteroglossia. As he puts it, “The distinctive qualities of a character’s discourse must always strive for a certain social significance, a social breadth”. He is convinced that each word “tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life” (DiN 293). In what he calls “an authentic novel” he senses behind each utterance “the elemental force of social languages with their internal logic and internal necessity,” revealing both “the reality of a given language” and its “potential” – its “truth together with its limitations” (DiN 356 – 57). For this reason he sees formal markers of languages, manners and styles in the novel as being “symbols for sets of social beliefs” (DiN 357). In the novel, therefore, double-voicedness “always tends towards a double-*language*dness” with the result that novelistic double-voicedness involves more than mere logical contradictions and cannot be “unfolded” into “purely dramatic contrasts” (DiN 356 – 57).

Moreover, Bakhtin insists that, in the novel, the speaking person is always “to one degree or another, an *ideologue*, and his words are always *ideologemes*”. In the novel, therefore, a particular language is “always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance” (DiN 333). He goes on to conclude that “It is precisely as ideologemes that discourse becomes the object of representation in the novel, and it is for the same reason novels are never in danger of becoming a mere aimless verbal play (DiN 333).

During the course of her visit to Mrs Merdle two important things emerge about Fanny. The first is that she vociferously defends her own and her family’s social position, albeit somewhat disingenuously and, secondly, it becomes increasingly clear that her sights are set on a social position equal to that of Mrs Merdle. Bakhtin might have said that she employs Mrs Merdle’s idiolect dialogically (‘I have already had the honour of telling your son’) but, at the same time, the narratorial dialogic present in Fanny’s pouting and in ‘the toss of her gauzy bonnet’ indicates that she is not *yet* sufficiently equipped to hold her own with her opponent, whose unfeeling bosom musters all the superiority her ‘Society’ (note the capital ‘S’) holds over the one in which Fanny moves, ‘however charming’. With terrible finality she brings the full weight of Society to bear on Fanny and her family, ‘upon which’, she silkily explains ‘we should find ourselves compelled to look down with contempt, and from which we should find ourselves obliged to recoil with abhorrence’. In one stroke, with the repeated use of ‘we’, ‘ourselves’ and ‘our’, she clearly demarcates her territory and casts out Fanny and her society as ‘other’, alien and undesirable. Amy remains silent throughout the invective but her troubled face after hearing that

Fanny had already accepted money from Mrs Merdle signifies an uneasy awareness of the capricious and lopsided ‘game’ her sister is playing. Mrs Merdle triumphantly closes the interview by decisively dismissing the sisters on ‘the best of terms’ and slipping something into Fanny’s hand.

Round one to Mrs Merdle, one might say, but the indications suggest that she may well have underestimated the tenacity of her opponent who may yet have the ability to upend her ‘superior’ position, since it is the parrot who has the final dialogic ‘say’, seemingly mocking them all ‘with a pompous dance of his body without moving his feet’ and using his ‘cruel beak and black tongue’ to trail himself upside down ‘all over his golden cage’.

Musing on the differences between ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres Bakhtin makes the point that the epic world valorizes the distant past and, as such, is “an utterly finished thing [. . .] impossible to change [. . .] conclusive and immutable” which, being “beyond the realm of human activity” and “impossible to really touch” one can only accept “with reverence”. He goes on to say that “the epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image” (EaN 17). Conversely, the novel, “at the core of which lay personal freedom and creative imagination” is to be located in the “zone of direct contact” and “inconclusive present-day activity” (EaN 39). Whereas, therefore, the “idealization of the past [. . .] has something of an official air,” the novel, he says, “is associated with the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought (holiday forms, familiar speech, profanation)” (EaN 20). He strongly believes that the novel’s “authentic folkloric roots” are to be sought in “the common people’s creative culture of laughter” (EaN 20) which is “at the same time cheerful and annihilating [and in which] a fundamentally new attitude toward language and toward the world is generated”; an attitude he refers to as “laughing at living reality” (EaN 21). This attitude, he says, formed the basis of the comic novel whose “classic representatives in England were Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Dickens, Thackeray and others” (DiN 301). As a matter of general interest, Dickens named his eighth child Henry Fielding, was a close friend of Thackeray and an admirer of Smollett whose work, *Humphrey Clinker*, he considered a “highly humorous story and very originally told” (Collins. *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* [Volume 1] 117). “It is precisely laughter,” Bakhtin declares, “that destroys the epic and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance”.

As he puts it:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. [EaN 23]

Laughter's ability to discombobulate the status quo here materialises in the shape of Mrs Merdle's irrepressible parrot who, 'peers' at its immediate world 'from above and below', seemingly looking 'into its centre', casting 'doubt' upon it, taking it apart, and then (by means of the creature's own hideous contortions), lays it bare to exposure and ridicule. For Bakhtin, this type of 'uncrowning', as he calls it, reflects "the zone of maximally familiar and crude contact" (EaN 23). In the plane of laughter, the object's "hierarchical ornamentation" is removed because laughter allows one to "disrespectfully walk around whole objects" thus affording not only the "back and rear portion of an object" a special significance, but also its normally inaccessible "innards" (EaN 23). In what he calls "a comical operation of dismemberment" the object is "broken apart, laid bare" and, in its nakedness, it becomes ridiculous, as does its "empty" clothing "stripped and separated from its person" (EaN 24).

Also typically 'uncrowning' is the narratorial dialogism contained in the repeated reference to Mrs Merdle's decorous but 'unfeeling' bosom in this encounter, particularly since, in the very next chapter almost the exact same words are used when Mr Merdle is described as having

provided that extensive bosom, which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold, some fifteen years before. [Even though] it was not a bosom to repose upon [. . .] it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon [and] like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage [and] the bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. [Book 1, Chap 21: 293]

So begins the narrator's audacious epithet, "the bosom" or "The Bosom" and from this point on, Mrs Merdle is frequently reductively referred to by only this label. So even though she appears to have won this round by summarily dismissing the sisters, the perception of her as 'The Bosom' (together with the parrot's antics) will henceforth colour the readers' view of her, stripping her of her 'hierarchical ornamentation' and laying her open to ridicule.

They came downstairs with *powder before them and powder behind, the elder sister haughty and the younger sister humbled, and were shut out into unpowdered Harley Street, Cavendish Square.*

'Well?' said Fanny, when they had gone a little way without speaking. '*Have you nothing to say, Amy?*'

'Oh, I don't know what to say!' she answered, distressed. 'You didn't like this young man, Fanny?'

'Like him? *He is almost an idiot.*'

'I am so sorry – don't be hurt – but since you ask me what I have to say, *I am so very sorry, Fanny, that you suffered this lady to give you anything.*'

'*You little Fool!*' returned her sister, shaking her with the sharp pull she gave her arm. 'Have you no spirit at all? But that's just the way! *You have no self-respect, you have no becoming pride.* Just as you allow yourself to be followed about by a contemptible little Chivery of a thing,' with the scornfullest emphasis, 'you would let your family be trodden on, and never turn.'

'Don't say that, dear Fanny. I do what I can for them.'

'You do what you can for them!' repeated Fanny, walking her on very fast. '*Would you let a woman like this, whom you could see, if you had experience of anything, to be as false and insolent as a woman can be – would you let her put her foot upon your family, and thank her for it?*'

'No, Fanny, I am sure.'

*'Then make her pay for it, you mean little thing. What else can you make her do? Make her pay for it, you stupid child; and do your family some credit with the money!'* Book I, Chap 20: 289]

Contextual dialogism is evident in the repeated metaphor of the 'powder', which is again parodically referred to during the Merdles' subsequent dinner party, and at which time it even sports capitalisation and alliteration of the first letter: "Powder! There was so much Powder in waiting, that it flavoured the dinner. Pulverous particles got into the dishes, and Society's meats had a seasoning of first-rate footmen" (Book 1, Chap 21: 294).

As the sisters leave the pompous 'powder' behind, being 'shut out into unpowdered Harley Street' the difference in attitude between them is palpable. Continuing with the notion that the "elemental force of social languages" can be 'sensed behind each utterance,' Bakhtin contends that these social languages each have an "internal logic and internal necessity" (DiN 356 – 57). The internal logic of Fanny's 'language' leads her haughtily to demand a response from her humbled sister, whose own internal logic dictates a natural reticence. However, when pushed for an answer, Amy does not give the response Fanny expects. Instead, she hesitantly enquires after Fanny's true feelings regarding Sparkler and, once apprised of these, she quietly voices her dismay at her sister's acceptance of Mrs Merdle's tokens of 'appreciation'. Cognate with Bakhtin's contention that a "dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces" (DiN 365), Fanny's belligerent retort (framed by belittling and offensive appellations) conveys the socio-ideological distance between herself and Amy who, in her opinion, has no 'self-respect' or 'becoming pride' and who 'would let [her] family be trodden on'. When Amy replies in the negative to her next question ('would you let her put her foot upon your family, and thank her for it?') Fanny's internal logic insists that the 'stupid child' should enjoy parting Mrs Merdle from her money every bit as much as she does.

They spoke no more all the way back to the lodging where Fanny and her uncle lived. When they arrived there, they found the old man practicing his clarinet in the dolefullest manner in a corner of the room. Fanny had a composite meal to make, of chops, and porter, and tea; *and indignantly pretended to prepare it for herself, though her sister did all that in quiet reality.* When at last Fanny sat down to eat and drink, *she threw the table implements about and was angry with her bread,* much as her father had been last night.

*'If you despise me,'* she said, bursting into vehement tears, 'because I am a dancer, why did you put me in the way of being one? *It was your doing. You would have me stoop as low as the ground before this Mrs Merdle, and let her say what she liked and do what she liked, and hold us all in contempt, and tell me so to my face. Because I am a dancer!'*

'O Fanny!'

'And Tip, too, poor fellow. She is to disparage him just as much as she likes, without any check – I suppose because he has been in the law, and the docks, and different things. *Why, it was your doing, Amy.* You might at least approve of his being defended.'

All this time the uncle was dolefully blowing his clarinet in the corner, sometimes taking it an inch or so from his mouth for a moment while he stopped to gaze at them, with a vague impression that somebody had said something. 'And your father, your poor father, Amy. *Because he is not free to show himself and to*

*speaking for himself, you would let such people insult him with impunity.* If you don't feel for himself because you go out to work, you might at least feel for him, I should think, knowing what he has undergone so long'. Poor Little Dorrit felt the injustice of this taunt rather sharply. The remembrance of last night added a barbed point to it. She said nothing in reply, but turned her chair from the table towards the fire. Uncle, after making one more pause, blew a dismal wail and went on again.

*Fanny was passionate with the tea-cups and the bread as long as her passion lasted, and then protested that she was the wretchedest girl in the world, and she wished she was dead.*

[Book I, Chap 20: 289 - 90]

Bakhtin advances the opinion that, even though it is the speaking person and his or her discourse that ultimately accounts for the uniqueness of the novelistic genre, characters in a novel “need not be represented *only* as speakers. No less than a person in drama or in epic, the person in a novel may *act* – but such action is always highlighted by ideology, is always harnessed to the character's discourse (even if that discourse is as yet only potential discourse)” (DiN 333 – 34). In other words, the individual *act* or actions of characters both expose and test their ideological positions and discourse. The dynamics of the above scene would certainly seem to corroborate his thinking as the recently socially-thwarted Fanny *acts out* her anger and shame on the table implements. She makes a *noisy* pretence at making the meal which, in fact, the thoughtful and efficient Amy *quietly* prepares. Whilst eating, Fanny vents her anger and frustration at the world on the tea-cups and the bread. Uncle, meanwhile, who is as close to an un-socialised or de-socialised being as can be imagined and who seems is incapable of comprehending any discourse but the barest, most direct instruction, sits characteristically mute and vacant-eyed, in the corner, dolefully practising his clarinet.

In Stam's terminology ideological combat is located “at the pulsating heart of discourse [. . .] whether in the form of political rhetoric, artistic practice, or everyday language exchange” (8). Likewise, oppression does not only come in the form of state repression but also in “the more subtle forms of face-to-face discursive interaction” (8). This latter form of combat is evident in Fanny's diatribe against Amy in which she instinctively appears to want to inflict on Amy the very same feeling of oppression she herself has been subjected to by Mrs Merdle. Hence, with renewed fury Fanny resumes her recent argument against Amy, Mrs Merdle and the entire world, it seems. With Mrs Merdle temporarily out of the picture she casts about for someone on whom to pin the blame for her state of mind, and sets upon the hapless Amy for foisting a dancing profession upon her in the first place. Prompted by Mrs Merdle's view of her and transferring her own (recently acquired) feeling of self-loathing into Amy's estimation of her, she all but accuses Amy of harbouring similarly adverse sentiments (‘If you despise me because I am a dancer [. . .] why did you put me in the way of being one?’). Perhaps recognising the vacuousness of this particular line of argument, she turns to what is really bothering her – and here she

exhibits a similar type of superiority-complex evident in her father: a feeling of displacement, of being relegated to a society to which she does not believe she belongs. Given her firm and abiding conviction that her birthright rightfully places her on at least the same footing as the patronizing Mrs Merdle, it is little wonder that she is grievously put out by Mrs Merdle's condescending diminishment of both herself and her family. The fact that her father has been imprisoned for so many years, in no way changes her view of the respect her birthright should command. That Tip is rapidly en route to becoming a ne'er-do-well is inconsequential to her argument that his honour should be defended. Consequently, she vents her rage on Amy for failing to take issue with the enormity of the insult they have just been handed, accusing her of not at least defending Tip and her father, even if she were disinclined to stand up for herself. Caught up in her own whimsical society, Fanny is utterly unable to comprehend Amy's acceptance of their situation; neither does she seem to care, in that moment of frenzy, that what she is saying is wholly untruthful and extremely hurtful to her sister.

After that, her crying became *remorseful*, and she got up and *put her arms round her sister*. *Little Dorrit tried to stop her from saying anything, but she answered that she would, she must!* Thereupon she said again, and again, *'I beg your pardon, Amy,'* and *'Forgive me, Amy,'* almost as passionately as she had said what she regretted.

*'But, indeed, Amy,'* she resumed when they were seated in sisterly accord side by side, *'I hope and I think you would have seen this differently, if you had known a little more of Society.'*

'Perhaps I might, Fanny,' said the mild Little Dorrit.

'You see, while you have been domestic and resignedly shut up there, Amy,' pursued her sister, *gradually beginning to patronise*, 'I have been out, moving more in Society, *and may have been getting proud and spirited – more than I ought to be, perhaps?*'

Little Dorrit answered *'Yes, O Yes!'* 'And while you have been thinking of the dinner or the clothes, I may have been thinking, you know, of the family. Now, may it not be so, Amy?'

Little Dorrit again nodded *'Yes,'* *with a more cheerful face than heart*. 'Especially as we know,' said Fanny, 'that there certainly is a tone *in the place to which you have been so true*, which does belong to it, and which does make it different from other aspects of Society. *So kiss me once again, Amy dear, and we will agree that we may both be right, and that you are a tranquil, domestic, home-loving, good girl.'*

[Book I, Chap 20: 290 – 91]

Many similarities exist between Fanny and George Eliot's Rosamond. Both are opinionated, selfish, socially displaced and intent on attaining their goals. Unlike the measured Rosamond, however, Fanny is passionate in all she says and does. Despite frequent criticisms and belittling remarks levelled at Amy, she wants to be understood, needs to be forgiven and wants to be loved by Amy. And although similarly single-minded in the pursuit of her goals, she, unlike Rosamond, is acutely aware of her own misconduct. As a result, a constant battle rages within her in which she alternately exerts her superiority over Amy, is vocal in her frustrations and takes random swipes at Amy's character, all of which end up in floods of remorseful tears, pleas for forgiveness and a desire to make amends when she realises she has overstepped the mark and hurt Amy's feelings. At the same time, ever-mindful of her 'rightful place in society' (she is



definitely her father's daughter!), Fanny does not refer to the prison by name choosing, instead, to euphemise it as 'that place to which you have been so true'. Perhaps this is what prompted John O. Jordan's remark that, "Were Amy to see herself as merely 'a common prison-child,' as her sister regards her, she would be incapable not only of helping others but of sustaining her own life" (71). Fanny is undeniably rash and unconsidered in much of what she says but to conclude that she actually regards her sister as little more than 'a common prison child' is surely symptomatic of the simplistic tendency to write Fanny off as inconsequential: a view that fails to recognise the deeply complex and well-developed character Dickens created. It is surely not typical to go to such extraordinary lengths to justify one's behaviour towards, beg forgiveness of and, at least, make a show of seeking advice from someone one regards in such diminished terms and, despite her patronising tone, Fanny even admits that Amy probably has just cause for believing that she has been getting overly 'proud and spirited'.

We are reminded that even agreement "has countless varieties, infinite shadings and gradations and enormously complex interactions" (MB 132) and Amy's hasty acquiescence to Fanny's admission, 'Yes, O, Yes!' constitutes one such shading, arising as it does out of her desperation to latch onto something the two can agree upon. For Bakhtin, each concrete act of understanding actively assimilates the word in question "into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement" (DiN 282). So it is with Amy, whose subsequent concurrence, given 'with a more with a cheerful face than heart' is motivated by her desire to placate Fanny. Actually, one could say that Fanny (despite her skewed reasoning) is here more forthright than Amy, whose sole motivation is to avoid further confrontation.

Fanny does at least try to make Amy see her point of view – one which, it can be argued, is both justified and justifiable. By the same token, something else that distinguishes her from someone like Rosamond, in *Middlemarch*, is her genuinely affectionate nature ('so kiss me again, dear Amy') and her ability to recognise that her view is not always the only one to be had ('we will agree that we may both be right'). Here, for the first time (and not the last) we see another side of Fanny emerge. As distinct from the self-absorbed creature who is dismissive and deeply unconcerned about anyone barring herself, we see that she is, after all, a rather more complicated character, capable of self-reflexivity and, at least, partial contrition. Of course, though, she has to have the final say.

### 2.3. Book II – “Riches”

We take up the narrative in Book II after Mr Dorrit’s release from the Marshalsea Prison. Complete with huge entourage, he and his family embark on a European tour through the Alps. Anxious to eradicate all traces of his lengthy incarceration and reclaim his ‘rightful’ place in the world, he employs the services of the ‘arch-varnisher’, Mrs General, to journey with them and school his daughters in the ways of fashionable society. Mrs General’s very name, as Philip Hobsbaum reminds us in *A Reader’s Guide to Charles Dickens*, “is symptomatic of discipline ushering rank and ceremony”. Consequently she is always in control and “never dismayed or creased” (201).

In person, Mrs General, *including her skirts which had much to do with it*, was of a dignified and imposing appearance; *ample, rustling, gravely voluminous; always upright behind the proprieties*. She might have been taken – had been taken – to the top of the Alps and the bottom of Herculaneum, without disarranging *a fold in her dress, or displacing a pin*.

*If* her countenance and hair had rather a *floury* appearance, as though from living in some *transcendently genteel* Mill, *it was rather because she was a chalky creation altogether*, than because she mended her complexion with violet powder, or had turned grey. *If* her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had *nothing to express*. *If* she had few wrinkles it was because *her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription* on her face. A cool, waxy, blown-out woman, *who had never lighted well*.  
[Book II, Chap 2: 502 – 03]

The first paragraph constitutes an example of hybridisation which, we will recall, is “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance” (DiN 358). If, for instance, one were to remove the italicized sections the tone would become almost monological (almost, because the reader would, in any case be likely to suspect some underlying irony). That is to say, a reading which omitted the italicized sections could quite easily have approximated a description Mrs General might have been inclined to offer *of herself, in her own language*. However, the description is undermined by another, satirical, voice (the italicized sections), one which cuts into and encroaches upon a monologic view and offers, instead, another (dialogic) perspective. That her rustling skirts are able to maintain their perfect appearance in even the most unlikely of circumstances, is linked to the formidable uprightness of the woman – an uprightness that is determined and dictated by her particular proprieties. As a result, not only is the tone of the passage affected by hybridisation but the parodical view given of Mrs General is also likely to colour our future impressions of her.

The dialogical element is subtly reinforced by the bracketing of each of the first three comments with the words ‘if’ and ‘it was because’. Mrs General is a ‘transcendently genteel’, ‘floury’ and ‘chalky creation’ whose countenance carries no evidence of a mind or person behind the mask. This description is enhanced by her having ‘nothing to express’ and the fact that her face bears

no visible trace of her mind (or self). The narrative voice thus sows the seeds of an idea that she is someone who can never, truly, be known and whose real voice can never truly be heard because all personal ideas and opinions have been muted or ironed out by her sense of what is socially acceptable. If, as Michael Holquist suggests, the ‘I’ is the “needle that stitches the abstraction of language to the particularity of lived experience” (28), then Mrs General appears to exist only as an abstraction.

This impression is reinforced by the final sentence which evokes some sort of ghastly wax effigy. In what John O. Jordan describes as Dickens’s “triadic modification” (146) – adjectives that, in *Little Dorrit* “come consistently bunched in threes, [such as] compressed, oppressive, bereft” (145), Dickens drives home his view of Mrs General by twice using a triplet of adjectives in a very short space of time. First “the petticoated Mrs General expands in pomposity across the very description of ‘ample, rustling and gravely voluminous’” (146) before being summarily contracted into a ‘cool, waxy and blown-out’ apparition of a woman, the belittling of whom continues.

Mrs General had *no opinions*. Her way of *forming a mind* was to *prevent it from forming opinions* – she had a little *circular* set of mental grooves or rails on which she started little trains of other people’s opinions, *which never overtook one another, and never got anywhere*.

Even *her propriety* could not dispute that there was *impropriety* in the world; but Mrs General’s way of *getting rid of it* was to put it out of sight, and *make believe* that there was no such thing. This was another of her ways of forming a mind – to cram all articles of difficulty into cupboards, *lock them up*, and say they had no existence. It was the *easiest* way, and, beyond all comparison, the *properest*.

[Book II, Chap 2: 503]

We begin to discern the kind of morality, ideals and behaviour Mrs General wishes to instil in her pupils. Ideological dialogism is added to parodical dialogism as Mrs General’s mindset is simultaneously provided and criticised. Her way of thinking is presented in a comical light for, whilst she holds firmly to the virtue of having no opinions, the subtext directs us toward the narrowness and stagnation of the type of mind that repeatedly travels the same circular route without ever getting anywhere.

Ideological double-voicing is extended and strengthened in the play of those words that belong to Mrs General: ‘propriety’ and ‘impropriety’ and those that belong to the narrator: ‘make believe’, ‘easiest’ and ‘properest’ (rather than the grammatically correct ‘most proper’) – language Mrs General would not think in and which cannot, therefore, belong to free, indirect discourse. Rather, they constitute a picture of her consciousness but with “a potential dialogue embedded in [it]” (DiN 324), albeit not one in which Mrs General could or would participate. The comic

aspect is reinforced by the sly hybrid insertion, ‘getting rid of it’, for which the narrator chooses the common language of the street in preference to the rather more refined tones of Mrs General’s own speech, which he has hitherto employed in describing her. (Had he wished to stay within her particular idiom he might, instead, have used something like ‘disposing of’ or ‘dispensing with’.) Hybridisation continues in ‘lock them up’ which, again, is a vulgarised version of ‘conceal’ (but is also an indication of Mrs General’s own imprisonment and therefore hints at *prosaic* pathos.)

As distinct from *poetic* pathos which is “expressed directly and without distance between the speaker and his discourse,” for Bakhtin, *prosaic* pathos “always appears with ‘quotation marks’; it must be double-voiced” (MB 356). Hybridisation is again carried over into the observation that Mrs General’s methods consist of not only the ‘properest’ way (which also, intertextually, harks back to ‘propriety’, that is rightness, as in the use of words) but also the ‘easiest’, to allow her to exist in a world of her own making. Together, these carefully chosen expressions increase our awareness that we may never be able to locate a real person or ‘self’ in Mrs General. The good lady’s view of what is proper is further undermined as the passage draws to a close.

Mrs General was not to be told of anything shocking. Accidents, miseries, and offences were never to be mentioned before her. *Passion was to go to sleep* in the presence of Mrs General, and blood was to change to *milk and water*. *The little that was left in the world, when all these deductions were made*, it was Mrs General’s *province* to varnish. In that formation process of hers, she dipped the *smallest* of brushes into the *largest* of pots, and varnished the surface of *every object that came under consideration*. The more cracked it was, the more Mrs General varnished it.

There was varnish in Mrs General’s voice, varnish in Mrs General’s touch, an atmosphere of varnish round Mrs General’s figure. Mrs General’s dreams ought to have been varnished – *if she had any* – lying asleep in the arms of the *good Saint Bernard*, with the feathery snow falling on his house-top.

[Book II, Chap 2: 503]

For Bakhtin, the novelistic hybrid is “*an artistically organized system for bringing different languages into contact with one another*” having, as its aim, “illumination of one language by means of another” (DiN 361). Not only is it “double-voiced and double-accented” but it is also “double languaged” in the sense that, in addition to having “two individual consciousnesses, two voices [and] two accents” it also has two, intentional “socio-linguistic consciousnesses [. . .] that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of an utterance”. Because intentional semantic hybrids are always internally dialogised, the two points of view are not simply “mixed” but are “set against each other dialogically,” thus causing a “collision between differing points of views on the world” (DiN 360).

Such is the nature of the above passage, in which the first two sentences appear to be straightforward, monologic observations, the intention of which is to simply supply additional information about Mrs General. However, when read in conjunction with the remainder of the excerpt, it soon becomes evident that these sentences initiate a process of hybridisation. Again, what starts out as something one can imagine Mrs General saying about herself (as it retains catch-phrases peculiar to Mrs General's own idiom), quickly descends into disparaging narratorial sentiments, couched in common opinion and common language: the idea of 'passion' and 'blood' (common language) becomes diluted with 'milk and water' (Mrs General's language) whilst 'province to varnish' has the distinctive idiolect of Mrs General's vocabulary and 'the little that was left in the world' after her considerable 'deductions' clearly belongs to the narrator, in whose opinion Mrs General strips away everything he considers to be real.

Alluding to the precision with which she uses the 'smallest of brushes' to attain her objective: to minutely varnish 'every object' within reach until it conforms to her narrowly inscribed set of social conventions, the voice of the narrator becomes increasingly strident and contemptuous. That the word, 'varnish' appears seven times (in one or other of its forms), in this short passage to describe Mrs General, is a clear indicator of the sentiments he wishes to convey. What begins as hybridisation, in which the two voices embedded in a single dialogue are implicit rather than overt, rapidly plunges into wholesale parody and mockery, with the result that one's final impression of the unimaginative Mrs General is of her in a dreamless sleep, enfolded in the rigid arms of (not another being but instead) a vast inanimate mountain range, 'the good Saint Bernard' – perhaps a representative of the elevated but cold society to which she claims allegiance and believes it is her duty to uphold.

After their mountain excursion the Dorrits travel to a hotel in the town of Martigny where Mr Dorrit is enormously put out when he discovers that his suite is not ready on account of its having been occupied the previous night. Furiously imagining that distinctions have been made between himself and other gentlemen, he threatens to ruin the innkeeper on account of his blatant disrespect. Slipping hurriedly upstairs so as to try to hasten their departure, the landlord encounters the offending party on their way out and, with a motion of his hand, signifies "the offended majesty of Mr Dorrit" (Book II, Chap 3: 514).

'Beg your pardon,' said the gentleman, detaching himself from the lady, and coming forward. 'I am *a man of few words* and a bad hand at an explanation – *but lady here* is extremely anxious that there should be no *Row*. *Lady – a mother of mine*, in point of fact – wishes me to say that she hopes no *Row*.'

Mr Dorrit, still *panting under his injury*, saluted the gentleman, and saluted the lady, *in a distant, final, and invincible manner*.

*'No, but really – here, old feller; you!'* This was *the gentleman's way* of appealing to *Edward Dorrit, Esquire*, on whom he pounced as a great and providential relief. 'Let you and I try to make this all right, *Lady so very much wishes no Row.*'

*Edward Dorrit, Esquire*, led a little apart by the button, *assumed* a diplomatic expression of countenance in replying, 'Why you must confess, that when you bespeak a lot of rooms beforehand, and they belong to you, it's not pleasant to find other people in *'em.*'

'No,' said the other, 'I know it isn't. I admit it. Still, let you and I try to make it all right, and *avoid Row.* The fault is not this chap's at all, but my mother's. Being a remarkably *fine woman with no bigodd nonsense about her* – well educated, too – *she was too many for this chap. Regularly pocketed him.*'

'If that's the case –' Edward Dorrit, Esquire, began.

'*Assure you 'pon my soul 'tis the case.* Consequently,' said the other gentleman, retiring on his main position, 'why *Row?*'

[Book II, Chap 3: 514]

According to Bakhtin, one of the forms for incorporating and organising heteroglossia in the novel is by means of the language of the characters which, he says, is "verbally and semantically autonomous," with each character's speech possessing its own "belief system" (DiN 315). Sparkler's manner of speech is a peculiar kind of shorthand in which he continually omits pronouns and articles ('beg your pardon', 'but lady here', 'assure you'). His 'gentleman's' lingo consists of addressing Tip as 'here, old feller; you!' and his mother as 'lady', 'lady here' or 'a mother of mine' (how many does he have, one might ask?). Furthermore, according to him his mother has 'no bigodd nonsense about her' and has proved 'too many' for the innkeeper whom she 'regularly pocketed', but who 'wishes no Row'. His idiosyncratic method of expressing himself is notably different from the various 'languages' used by the Dorrit family, Mrs General and Mrs Merdle – languages that, despite their idiolectal differences, nevertheless all conform to conventional grammatical forms.

Having said that, Edward Dorrit, we notice, *assumes* an expression of diplomacy as he responds to Sparkler in *his* own newly adopted brand of cultivated 'fashionable' speech, dropping the beginnings of words ('it's not pleasant to find other people in 'em'). Bakhtin insists, however, that no language can be entirely one's own since each "is the speech of another in another's language" (DiN 315). Lying as it does, "on the borderline between oneself and the other" language becomes "half someone else's (DiN 293), a phenomenon apparent in Sparkler as he unconsciously mimics Edward and begins to dispense with the beginnings of words ('pon my soul 'tis the case').

Language may also serve to refract authorial intentions. Because it is not entirely one's own it may constitute a second language for the author, to the extent that it can influence authorial speech, "sprinkling it with another's words (that is, the speech of a character perceived as the concealed speech of another) and in this way introducing into it stratification and speech diversity" (DiN 315). For instance, Mr Dorrit is depicted as 'panting under his injury' as he

greet Mrs Merdle in a ‘distant, final and invincible manner’ while the word ‘Row’ is capitalised so as to accentuate Sparkler’s odd manner of speech. Additionally, reflecting the way in which Edward sees himself and wishes to be seen as others, the author here chooses to forgo the familiar nickname ‘Tip’ in favour of the significantly more substantial and distinguished ‘Edward Dorrit, Esquire’. The newly adopted appellation does, of course, constitute an example of humorous authorial dialogism, but Bakhtin is quick to point out that even where there is no comic element such as parody or irony and no narrator, posited author or narrating character, the basis for style in the novel still rests with speech diversity and language stratification. Even where the author’s voice seems to be “unitary and consistent, direct and unmediatedly intentional”, Bakhtin makes the point that beneath the surface of an apparently smooth “single-languaged” system one can detect “prose’s three dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and is its determining factor” (DiN 315).

‘Edmund,’ said the lady from the doorway, ‘I hope you have explained, or are explaining, to the satisfaction of this gentleman and his family that the civil landlord is not to blame?’

‘Assure you, ma’am,’ returned Edmund, *‘perfectly paralysing myself with trying it on.’* He then looked *steadfastly* at Edward Dorrit, Esquire, for some seconds, and suddenly added, *in a burst of confidence*, ‘Old feller! Is it all right?’

‘I don’t know, after all,’ said the lady, *gracefully advancing a step or two* towards Mr Dorrit, ‘but that I had better say myself at once, that I assured this good man I took all the consequences on myself of occupying one of a stranger’s suite of rooms during his absence, for just as much (or as little) time as I could dine in. I had no idea the rightful owner would come back so soon, nor had I any idea that he had come back, or I should have hastened to make restoration of my ill-gotten chamber, and to have offered my explanation and apology. I trust in saying this –’

*For a moment the lady, with a glass at her eye, stood transfixed and speechless before the two Miss Dorrits. At the same moment, Miss Fanny, in the foreground of a grand pictorial composition, formed by the family, the family equipages, and the family servants, held her sister tight under one arm to detain her and with the other arm fanned herself with a distinguished air and negligently surveyed the lady from head to foot.*

*The lady, recovering herself quickly – for it was Mrs Merdle and she was not easily dashed – went on to add that she trusted in saying this, she apologised for her boldness, and restored this well-behaved landlord to the favour that was so very valuable to him. Mr Dorrit, on the altar of whose dignity all this was incense, made a gracious reply; and said that his people should – ha – countermand his horses, and he would – hum – overlook what he had at first supposed to be an affront, but now regarded as an honour. Upon this The Bosom bent to him; and its owner, with a wonderful command of feature, addressed a winning smile of adieu to the two sisters, as young ladies of fortune in whose favour she was much prepossessed, and whom she had never had the gratification of seeing before.*

Not so, however, Mr Sparkler. *This gentleman, becoming transfixed at the same moment as his lady-mother, could not by any means unfix himself again but stood stiffly staring at the whole composition with Miss Fanny in the foreground.* On his mother’s saying, ‘Edmund, we are quite ready; will you give me your arm?’ he seemed, by the motion of his lips, to reply with some remark comprehending the form of words in which *his shining talents* found the most frequent utterance, but he relaxed no muscle. *So fixed was his figure that it would have been matter of some difficulty to bend him sufficiently to get him in the carriage-door, if he had not received the timely assistance of a maternal pull from within.* He was no sooner within than the pad of the little window in the back of the chariot disappeared and *his eye usurped its place. There it remained as long as so small an object was discernible, and probably much longer, staring (as though something inexpressibly surprising should happen to a codfish) like an ill-executed eye in a large locket.*

*This encounter was so highly agreeable to Miss Fanny, and gave her so much to think of with triumph afterwards, that it softened her asperities exceedingly.* When the procession was again in motion next day, she occupied her place in it with a new gaiety; and showed such a flow of spirits indeed, that Mrs General looked rather surprised.

Mrs Merdle's peremptory inquiry of her son and his hasty deferential reply to her remind us of Bakhtin's contention that languages are not stratified only into formal linguistic markers (such as dialects) but also into languages that are socio-ideological so that, even within the same social circle, there are discernible differences in the way in which language is used (TDI xix). Whilst the language of Mrs Merdle is infused with power and self-assurance, Sparkler's hurried assurances smack of obeisance to the voice of maternal authority. Bakhtin is of the opinion, too, that speech diversity and stratification "will spread wider and penetrate to ever deeper levels so long as a language is alive and still in the process of becoming" (TDI xix) and Sparkler's somewhat peculiar turn of phrase, 'perfectly paralysing myself with trying it on' is one such demonstration of an ever-increasing lexicon.

For Bakhtin, dialogue in a novel "is determined by the very socio-ideological evolution of languages and society [. . .] a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born" (DiN 365). Perceiving the inconvenienced party to be a gentleman of considerable means, Mrs Merdle immediately sets about smoothing things over by adapting her idiom to accommodate communication between dignitaries, and graciously explains that the gentleman's temporary displacement was entirely her doing – the beleaguered landlord being quite unable to withstand her strength of her will. A profusion of parodic riches follow as her florid puffed-up speech is summarily curtailed when, through the agency of her ever-present eyeglass, she catches sight of the Dorrit sisters. From here on in, there is no unmediated direct speech in this fragment but parody is still very much in evidence in the mediated reported speech that follows.

Thoroughly aware of the effect her presence will have on Mrs Merdle, Fanny 'greet[s]' her by fanning herself 'with a distinguished air' and affecting an air of easy indifference. At the same time, relishing Mrs Merdle's flabbergasted astonishment and obvious discomfort, she forcibly deters Amy from acknowledging their prior acquaintance with the said lady, preferring see how the formidable matriarch reacts. Despite having been temporarily dislodged (without so much as a word passing between them), the old battle-lines are redrawn when Mrs Merdle smoothly and consciously resumes the niceties of social interchange. Mr Dorrit, of course, is blissfully unaware of anything but the gratification to his dignity afforded him by the inestimable 'Bosom' who, sufficiently recovered from her confusion, bestows a 'winning smile of adieu' upon his handsome daughters who, despite their *never* having met before, have instantly made a favourable impression on her. Aside from his lips registering silent shock, Fanny's paralysed admirer yields wordlessly to his mother's will as she frog-marches him towards the carriage and



tugs him in. Quite obviously, the entire episode is perceived somewhat differently by the various participants.

Ruminating on Bakhtin's 'law of placement' in dialogism, Michael Holquist recalls Bakhtin's 'just-so' story' which, he says, "uses seeing as a means for grasping what is essentially a non-visual situation" (21). The following is an account of an observer looking at another observer:

You can see things behind my back that I cannot see, and I can see things behind your back that are denied to your vision. We are both doing essentially the same thing, but from different places: although we are in the same event, that event is different for each of us. Our places are different not only because our bodies occupy different positions in the exterior, physical space, but also because we regard the world and each other from different centers in cognitive time/space. [21]

The above description certainly accounts for physical differences in the characters' perception, but what of their different understanding of events from the dialogue that ensues? Bakhtin considers dialogue in the novel to be "of a special sort," largely because it can never, he says, "be exhausted in pragmatically motivated dialogues of characters". Instead, it is "pregnant with an endless multitude of dialogic confrontations" (DiN 364 – 65). A major difference between the novel and the drama, therefore, can be located in the novel's ability to transcend (particularly through the narrator), the purely pragmatic dialogues of characters and, in so doing, illustrate the "endless, deep-lying discourse of languages" (DiN 365). "In order to assess and divine the real meaning of others' words in everyday life," writes Bakhtin, "the decisive factor is "who precisely is speaking, and under *what* concrete circumstances?" (DiN 340).

When Mrs Merdle makes her appearance, her first words are to Sparkler. This seems a fairly straightforward transaction. However, Bakhtin stresses the importance of the entire speaking situation, that is, "who is present during it, with what expression or mimicry is it uttered, [and] with what shades of intonation" (DiN 341). After having perceived Mr Dorrit to be a man of substance, Mrs Merdle quickly redirects her attention towards him, addressing him directly rather than through the conduit of her ineffectual son. However, following her sighting of Fanny and Amy, the circumstances under which she is speaking change dramatically – she is suddenly aware of two more shocking and unwelcome interlocutors and, swiftly reassessing her position, she settles on the most pragmatic line of approach. Reiterating Bakhtin's contention that the word is a "two-sided act [. . .] determined by *whose* word it is and for *whom* it is meant" Danow suggests that, within a given utterance, the word exists "as a result of a dependent, considered choice" (36) or, as Bakhtin would have it, "Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other' [because] a word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor' (MPL 86). Accordingly, Mrs Merdle's response is carefully orchestrated;

whilst framing her words in dulcet tones specifically designed to placate Mr Dorrit, her response is simultaneously designed to transmit a clear message of non-recognition to the sisters.

Reflecting on the nature of power, Robert Stam submits that it “is exercised in the right to speak, the right to interrupt, the right to remain silent” (9). If Fanny’s silence in the face of Mrs Merdle’s ‘snub’ appears to indicate uncharacteristic submission, her tight restraining grip on Amy and insolent stare at Mrs Merdle signify otherwise: that she is wholly up to the mark of taking on Mrs Merdle. Taking her cue from Mrs Merdle, she engages single-mindedly in the game she obviously intends to prolong for as long as it suits her to do so. A plan for revenge on her arch enemy begins to take shape after her having presumably taken in Sparkler’s continued dumbstruck admiration of her to the extent that his ‘eye’ plants itself in the back window like ‘an ill-executed eye in a large locket’ as the carriage recedes into the distance. The event in its entirety becomes highly agreeable to Fanny, who ‘had so much to think of with triumph afterwards’. If round one went in favour of Mrs Merdle, then round two must surely go the way of Fanny, or *Miss Fanny*, as she is now described.

After having been, for some weeks, employed in her new ‘province’ of varnishing – bringing to fruition social perfection in Amy and Fanny – Mrs General is consulted by Mr Dorrit who is troubled by Amy’s inability to adapt to the family’s new, elevated social position.

Mr Dorrit, in a *resplendent* dressing-gown and cap – *the dormant grub that has so long bided its time among the Collegians had burst into a rare butterfly* – rose to receive Mrs General. A chair to Mrs General. *An easier chair, sir; what are you doing, what are you about, what do you mean? Now leave us!*  
[Book II, Chap 5: 525]

The above passage is yet another fine example of parodical hybridisation: it commences with what might have been merely a denotative description (but for the subtle undermining of the word ‘resplendent’) then becomes explicitly connotative as the narratorial voice cuts a swathe into Mr Dorrit’s perception of his own gentlemanly status. Within a framework that begins with what might approximate Mr Dorrit’s own image of himself and concludes with his own direct speech, the narrator supplies his own take on the former prisoner: ‘a dormant grub’ that had ‘suddenly burst’ into a rare butterfly”. That Mr Dorrit’s confidence in his social status hangs precariously in the balance and requires constant fortification is patently obvious in his brusque instructions to his manservant and almost paranoid desire for the latter to leave the room. Anticipating a rather delicate conversation with Mrs General regarding the reasons behind the need for social education for his daughters, he has little desire to be overheard by a person less

apt to gloss over inconsistencies than Mrs General, not to mention one who is unlikely to keep his suspicions to himself!

How interesting that Dickens here dispenses with the customary inverted commas to denote direct speech – an omission that broaches a kind of ‘multi-voicedness’ – Mr Dorrit knows his manner and words are about to be interpreted by Mrs General (something he is prepared for), is simultaneously aware of the lurking presence of his manservant by whom he does not wish to be interpreted (something he is afraid of). Despite Dorrit’s words being presented to us in direct speech, they are quite clearly mediated, first by the narrator and then by the author who, in omitting the speech marks, implies an internal dialogic that precedes the actual spoken words.

Dialogism dominates the passage, therefore, in a fascinating way, with the speech pattern simultaneously uncovering some of the ways in which Mr Dorrit sees himself, the ways in which he desires to be seen by both Mrs General and his manservant, the way the *narrator* interprets Mr Dorrit’s interpretation of himself and, finally, the author’s subtle diminishment of the said gentleman. Ideological double-voicing continues into Mr Dorrit’s ensuing conversation with Mrs General.

‘Mrs General,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘*I took the liberty* –’

‘By no means,’ Mrs General interposed. I was quite at your disposition. I had had my coffee.

‘*I took the liberty*,’ said Mr Dorrit again, *with the magnificent placidity of one who was above correction*, ‘to *solicit the favour* of a little private conversation with you, because I feel rather worried respecting my – ha – my younger daughter. You will have observed a great difference of temperament, madam, between my two daughters?’

Said Mrs General in response, crossing her gloved hands (*she was never without gloves, and they were never creased and always fitted*) ‘There is a difference.’

‘May I ask to be favoured with your view of it?’ said Mr Dorrit *with a deference not incompatible with majestic serenity*.

‘Fanny,’ returned Mrs General, ‘has *force* of character and *self-reliance*. Amy *none*.’

[Book II, Chap 5: 525 - 26]

This passage both reinforces the ideological dialogism of the preceding passage and extends it to include Mrs General and we, once again, become privy to the sets of social ideals held by the respective parties. That their encounter is intricately hybridised is evident from the way in which, firstly, they address each other and, secondly, by their joint awareness of the impression each wishes to convey to the other. Although Mr Dorrit chooses from the heteroglossia a ‘language’ that befits him as a gentleman, he is no doubt also aware that the expressions, ‘solicit the favour of’ and the twice-repeated ‘I took the liberty of’ would find a place in Mrs General’s lexicon. However, both their carefully prepared ‘surfaces’ are parodically undermined by the narrator as it becomes obvious that it is not only Mr Dorrit who wishes to convey ‘majestic’ and

‘magnificent placidity’ and ‘serenity’ but so, too, does Mrs General, who will not be seen without perfectly fitted and uncreased gloves.

In the previous passage the narrator alludes to Mrs General’s inscrutable face. He now adds the fact of her permanently concealed hands. Given the commonly-held notion that hands are vital sources for expressing oneself to another, I would suggest that her gloved hands are also early indicators of the fact that, in Bakhtinian terms, she limits the extent to which she gives of herself and, consequently, limits the extent to which she is capable of being ‘found’ in and by another. What we do discover about her is that she values ‘force of character’ and ‘self-reliance’ and that these are qualities she is able to discern in Fanny but not in Amy. Her view of Amy is forcibly opposed by the narrator, who vents his indignation in no uncertain terms.

*None? O Mrs General, ask the Marshalsea stones and bars. O Mrs General, ask the milliner who taught her to work, and the dancing-master who taught her sister to dance. O Mrs General, Mrs General, ask me, her father, what I owe her; and hear my testimony touching the life of this slighted little creature from her childhood up!*

*No such aduration entered Mr Dorrit’s head.* He looked at Mrs General, seated in her usual erect attitude on her coach-box behind the proprietries, and he said in a thoughtful manner, ‘*True, madam.*’

[Book II, Chap 5: 526]

Bakhtin makes the point that, in novels, shifts from common language to parody and shifts to the direct authorial word may be gradual or quite abrupt (DiN 302). The pathos of the abrupt narratorial interruption in the above passage yields a startling instance of narratorial intervention in which the narrator goes so far as to substitute his own response for what should have been Mr Dorrit’s. That is to say, he ‘adopts’ the tone he feels Mr Dorrit *should have* used and says the words Mr Dorrit *should have* spoken had the latter been able to locate his heart beneath the carefully cultivated social surface under which it takes cover. The narrator concludes, in what also appears to be his own ideology that, lamentably, ‘no such aduration entered Mr Dorrit’s head’.

Discussing the ways in which a novelist may turn up various authorial poses, Bakhtin writes that he may “interfere with the conversations of his heroes,” or even depict “real moments of his own life” (EaN 27), to the extent that he may even directly force it to “reverberate with his own ‘truth’ which occurs when the author completely merges his voice with the common view” (DiN 302). He alludes to this incorporation of the author and/or narrator as purveyors of a *particular* verbal-ideological belief system, a *particular* worldview and *particular* value judgments and intonations – “‘particular’ both as regards the author, his real direct discourse, and also as regards ‘normal’ literary narrative and language” (DiN 312) as being a vastly significant feature in novelistic

writing. Oddly enough, it is this very *particularity* of viewpoint that succeeds in distancing the posited author or narrator from the real author. Using someone else's view of the world is a highly productive means of enabling the author to shed new light on the object of representation, revealing "new sides or dimensions in it". At the same time it can reveal in a new way, the "expected literary horizon" that serves as a literary backdrop for the "teller's tale" (DiN 312 – 13). As Bakhtin muses, "Behind the narrator's story we read a second story" – that of the author, who not only decides how the narrator tells stories, but also "tells us about the narrator himself," and so allowing us to sense "two levels at each moment in the story": the level of the narrator and the level of the author (DiN 313 – 14).

J. Hillis Miller is of a similar opinion believing that a novel is not simply "an objective narrative" but also "the expression of the unique personality and vital spirit of its author (*Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* viii). One obvious horizon against which Dickens tells his tale is his own "childhood experience of alienation" (*The Form of Victorian Fiction* 54) as he too, had a father who was subjected to similar incarceration in a debtor's prison. Another is the extent to which he loved and was protective of his children. Amongst several testimonials in Philip Collins's *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (Volume 1), Dickens's son, Alfred Tennyson, remembers him as "The Kindest and Most Considerate of Fathers" (155), who was "so good and gentle with us" (156) while his daughter Mamie (Mary), speaks of him as being "One Apart from All other Beings" (141), someone "who was always considerate, always gentle with children about their small problems" (141), and the tender, loving care he showed children" (143).

New sides to Mr Dorrit continue to be shown as idiolectical double-voicing becomes evident in the word, 'testimony' – a word normally associated with the 'high' language of legal or religious institutions to indicate truth-telling. The truth is, of course, something Mr Dorrit dare not and cannot reveal. It is this inability to be honest that complicates his response and denies Amy a proper defence. Having said that, even though he sacrifices Amy by capitulating to Mrs General's opinion, the fact that his manner is 'thoughtful' could imply that he has some conscience in choosing the easiest course of action – one that avoids discussion of the circumstances under which both girls grew up.

Having aired a particular viewpoint, the narrator resumes a more conventional role by returning to the actual conversation in which Mrs General directs her observations toward Fanny.

‘I would not,’ said Mrs General, ‘be understood to say, observe, that there is nothing to improve in Fanny. But there is material there – perhaps, indeed *a little too much*.’

‘Will you be kind enough, madam,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘to be – *ha* – more explicit? I do not quite understand my elder daughter’s having – *hum* – too much material. What material?’

‘Fanny,’ returned Mrs General, ‘at present *forms too many opinions. Perfect breeding forms none, and is never demonstrative*.’

*Lest he himself should be found deficient in perfect breeding*, Mr Dorrit *hastened* to reply, ‘Unquestionably, madam, you are right.’ Mrs General returned, in her *emotionless* and *expressionless* manner, ‘I believe so.’ [Book II, Chap 5: 526]

In the above exchange, Mrs General continues to advance her socio-ideological ideals regarding acceptable behaviour. The perceived locus for correction in Fanny lies in the opposite direction to that of Amy in that, according to Mrs General, whilst ‘perfect breeding’ forms no opinions Fanny is altogether too vocal in her opinions. Her pronouncement and its manner of delivery (‘emotionless and expressionless’) are further examples of double-voicing, belonging half to the self and half to the other (DiN 293). They have a wholly positive charge if taken to convey Mrs General’s impression of herself, and a wholly negative one from the narrator’s point of view.

Mr Dorrit’s final acquiescence in Mrs General’s views is, of course, also double-voiced, particularly when taken together with his initial, tentative, ‘ha – hum’ reaction to the perceived criticism of Fanny to which, it seems, he was about to take umbrage then, later, ‘hastens’ to correct himself in case ‘he himself should be found deficient in perfect breeding’!

Vaguely aware that he has been caught off-guard and seconded into going along with Mrs General’s estimation, he finds himself suddenly anxious to justify the behaviour of his daughters.

‘But you are aware, my dear madam,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘that my daughters had the misfortune to lose their lamented mother when they were very young; and that, in consequence of my not having been until lately the recognised heir to my property, they have lived with me as a comparatively poor, though always proud, gentleman, in – ha hum – *retirement*!’

‘I do not,’ said Mrs General, ‘lose sight of the circumstance.’

‘Madam,’ pursued Mr Dorrit, ‘of my daughter Fanny, under her present guidance and with such an example constantly before her –’

(*Mrs General shut her eyes.*)

‘– I have no misgivings. There is adaptability of character in Fanny. But my younger daughter, Mrs General, rather worries and vexes my thoughts. I must inform you that she has always been my favourite.’

‘*There is no accounting*,’ said Mrs General, ‘*for these partialities*.’

‘*Ha* – no,’ assented Mr Dorrit. ‘No. Now, madam, I am troubled by noticing that *Amy is not, so to speak, one of ourselves*. She does not care to go about with us; she is lost in the society we have here; our tastes are evidently not her tastes. Which,’ said Mr Dorrit, summing up with *judicial* gravity, ‘is to say, in other words, that *there is something wrong in – ha – Amy*.’

‘May we incline to the supposition,’ said Mrs General, *with a little touch of varnish*, ‘that something is referable to the *novelty of the position*?’

‘Excuse me, madam,’ observed Mr Dorrit, *rather quickly*. ‘The daughter of a gentleman, though – *ha* – himself at one time *comparatively far from affluent – comparatively* – and herself reared in – *hum* – *retirement*, need not of necessity find this position so very novel.’

‘*True*,’ said Mrs General, ‘*true*.’

[Book II, Chap 5: 526 – 27]

Added to the continued use of idiolectal and ideological dialogism, linguistic dialogism becomes increasingly apparent in this passage inasmuch as both Mr Dorrit and Mrs General appear to slip easily into each other's euphemistic mode of expression. Returning to Bakhtin's assertion that each particular word carries previous meanings and intentions (DiN 279), it is intriguing that Mr Dorrit's use of the word 'retirement' is accepted by Mrs General without question, but the notion of Mr Dorrit's position being novel is one he simply cannot permit to slide by without explanation. However, save for Mr Dorrit's occasional anxious need to 'clarify' certain points, he and Mrs General are able to converse in a similar language – one of generalities rather than specifics and one which is thus able to circumvent any real disclosure of each to the other.

In lieu of a verbal response to Mr Dorrit Mrs General simply shuts her eyes. In that it constitutes an unmistakable response a mannerism like this can be as dialogical as an extensive answer. This specific aspect of dialogism is alluded to by David Danow who, musing on Bakhtin's concept and understanding of the word (or utterance), writes that it "embraces virtually the whole range of human verbal communication" to the point that even a sigh is a possible mode of dialogic response (14). One might argue that while Mr Dorrit (even in his 'judicial gravity') cannot offer his true 'testimony', Mrs General's notion of truth-telling consists of simply shutting her eyes to it. Perfectly content to accept Mr Dorrit's flimsy and somewhat disingenuous explanation of his family's having spent the bulk of their lives out of the social arena in 'comparatively' (twice-repeated) 'far from affluent' circumstances, the exact or even approximate location of his (again twice-employed euphemism) 'retirement', does not in the least concern her. She merely mirrors his idiosyncratic repetitions, intoning, 'True, true' in response to what would normally be picked up on as an obvious obfuscation of the facts. Neither, it would seem, is she in the least interested in Mr Dorrit's nervous 'ha – hum' tendency, which must surely imply to the discerning listener a wish to smudge the reality of his former life. (It is perhaps worth mentioning here that *Little Dorrit* originally had a working title of *Nobody's Fault* and that Mr Dorrit's whole sense of self is orientated towards reclaiming his 'god-given right' to a place in society, having been, he believes, deprived of it *through no fault of his own*.)

Parodical ideological dialogism continues to dominate as Amy is singled out as not being 'one of ourselves', the logical corollary to which is that there must be something wrong with her! In the following passage Amy is summoned into Mr Dorrit and Mrs General's combined presence so that they can begin together to address the perceived flaws in her character.

‘Amy,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘you have just now been the subject of some conversation between myself and Mrs General. We agree that you scarcely seem at home here. *Ha* – how is this?’

*A pause.*

*‘I think, father, I require a little time.’*

*‘Papa is a preferable mode of address,’* observed Mrs General. ‘Father is rather *vulgar* my dear. The word *papa*, besides, *gives a pretty form to the lips. Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism are all very good words for the lips; especially prunes and prism. You will find it serviceable, in the formation of a demeanour, if you sometimes say to yourself in company – on entering a room, for instance – papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism.’*

*‘Pray, my child,’* said Mr Dorrit, ‘attend to the – *hum* – *precepts* of Mrs General.’

*Poor* Little Dorrit, with a rather *forlorn glance at that eminent varnisher, promised to try.*

‘You say, Amy,’ pursued Mr Dorrit, that you think you require time. Time for what?’

*Another pause.*

‘To become accustomed to the novelty of my life, was all I meant,’ said Little Dorrit, *with her loving eyes upon her father; whom she had very nearly addressed as poultry, if not prunes and prism too, in her desire to submit herself to Mrs General and please him.* [Book II, Chap 5: 528 – 29]

What immediately strikes one in the above exchange is that, as distinct from Mr Dorrit and Mrs General’s veiled idiolect, Amy’s discourse is an attempt to be painfully honest. In an earlier exchange between Fanny and Mrs Merdle (Book I, Chap 20: 287), in which Amy was little more than a mute bystander, we observed her inability to engage in the complicated idiolect of people who say one thing but mean another. The observation is here reinforced by her ‘forlorn glance at that eminent arch-varnisher’ and her timid undertaking to try to acquit herself in a manner more pleasing to her interlocutors. With considerable difficulty, she searches for the reason for their displeasure and fashions as truthful a response as is possible under the circumstances. Having said that, there are two significant pauses before she formulates her replies to the two questions she is asked. These pauses are clear markers of what Wendell V. Harris calls ‘*psychological dialogism*’ (447) and bear testimony to Amy’s internal struggle to articulate her feelings without giving offence. While trying desperately hard to express herself truthfully, she is inwardly aware of the range of ways in which her responses might be received; her inner conflict and the tone of her eventual response militate against any supposition that her language is either monologic or neutral.

Responding to Bakhtin’s essay, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” David Danow suggests that “the speaker’s ‘speech will’ determines the choice of a particular speech genre” (16 and SG& 15). For instance, in order to convey one particular message rather than another, we choose specific modes of speech to suit the occasion. Even though the speaker is obliged to communicate more-or-less within the framework of standardized speech genres, by introducing tone or ‘expressive intonation’ into his or her speech, the speaker is able to communicate an opinion, an ‘emotionally evaluative attitude’ toward the referent. Thus, he concludes, “For Bakhtin there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance”. On the contrary any possibility of neutrality “is consistently countered or negated by the speaker effecting a



deliberately chosen intonation that belongs to the utterance as a constitutive, defining feature” (16).

Amy’s unarticulated pauses and carefully worded answers are similarly suggestive of her emotional attitude toward her interlocutors. The gravity of the situation is lightened, however, by parodical double-voicing as the alliterated ‘p’ motif, initiated by Mrs General, is taken up by her father in bemused deference to the ‘arch varnisher’ (‘Pray my child . . . attend to the – hum – precepts’) and culminates in Amy’s very nearly addressing her beloved father ‘as poultry, if not prunes and prism too, in her desire to submit herself to Mrs General and please him’. Dickens is particularly adept at relieving serious situations with laughter, which is probably one of the many reasons why his writing was appreciated by Bakhtin who values laughter’s ability to transcend seemingly hopeless situations. “Everything that is truly great,” he insists, must contain an element of laughter. Otherwise it becomes threatening, terrible, or pompous; in any case it is limited” (“From Notes Made in 1970 – 71”. SG& 134 – 35).

Mr Dorrit frowned, and looked anything but pleased. ‘Amy,’ he returned, ‘it appears to me, I must say, that you have had abundance of time for that. Ha – *you surprise me. You disappoint me. Fanny has conquered any such little difficulties, and – hum – why not you?*’

‘I hope I shall do better soon,’ said Little Dorrit.

‘I hope so,’ returned her father. ‘I – ha – I most devoutly hope so Amy. I sent for you, in order that I might say – hum – impressively say, *in the presence of Mrs General*, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us, on – ha – on this or any other occasion,’ *Mrs General shut her eyes*, ‘that I – ha hum – am *not pleased with you*. You make Mrs General’s *a thankless task*. You – ha – *embarrass me* very much. You have always (as I have informed Mrs General) been my *favourite child*; I have always made you a – hum – *a friend and companion*; in return, I beg – I – ha – I *do* beg, that you accommodate yourself better to – hum – circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your – your station.’

*Mr Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual, being excited on the subject and anxious to make himself particularly emphatic.*

‘I do beg,’ *he repeated*, ‘that this may be attended to, and that you will seriously take pains and try to conduct yourself in a manner both becoming your position as – ha – *Miss Amy Dorrit*, and satisfactory to myself *and Mrs General*. [Book II, Chap 5: 529 – 30]

Once again, Amy is unfavorably compared to Fanny who seems to have taken the (euphemistic) ‘little difficulties’ in her stride. But unlike Fanny, who cares not a whit for what either he or Mrs General have to say, he shares with Amy an intense need for validation. Just as she will do anything to please him, the callousness of his words to her are indicative of his own overarching need to impress Mrs General (the yardstick for the world at large) as he seeks to impose on Amy a new (alien) type of conduct and consciousness.

There can be no neutral words, Bakhtin insists, because language “has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents”. All words, therefore “have the ‘taste’ of a

profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour” (DiN 293). Mr Dorrit’s choice of words, when he twice implores Amy to ‘accommodate’ herself better to ‘circumstances’ and ‘dutifully do what becomes [her] station’, are no exception, conveying as they do his immediate and past circumstances, his current ideology and his underlying intentions at this particular moment in time. In carefully selected euphemisms, what he implies to her (and conceals from Mrs General) is that she is a constant reminder of a past life he wishes to erase from his memory.

Bearing in mind Bakhtin’s view that each word “tastes of the context or contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life” (DiN 293). Mr Dorrit’s efforts to be ‘particularly emphatic’ here cause his periodic ‘ha – hum’ interpolations to become even ‘more fragmentary than usual’ and seem to be not so much an indication of his ineffectuality and/or nervousness (as they were previously) but something more – embarrassment? Shame, even? Despite the need to appear peremptory and authoritative, it is as if somewhere, in the recesses of his consciousness, he is vaguely aware of his unfair treatment of the long-suffering and faithful Amy, whom he now attempts to placate (‘you have always been my favourite child [. . .] a friend and companion’).

Morson and Emerson reflect in “Who Speaks for Bakhtin,” that, whereas carnival travesties by making “sense from nonsense and nonsense from sense” in a “systematic parody of systems,” modern satire “is ‘reduced laughter,’ a ‘laughter that does not laugh’” (*Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* 12). Nineteenth century humour seems to fall somewhere between these two extremes. At times Dickens is simply hilarious, particularly whilst poking fun at undesirable people or bungling and inept institutions but at other times, as in the above passage, his humour borders on sorrow – a ‘laughter that does not laugh’.

*That lady shut her eyes again*, on being again referred to, then, slowly opening them and rising, added these words:

‘If Miss Amy Dorrit will direct her own attention to, and will accept of *my poor assistance* in, the formation of a surface, Mr Dorrit will have no further cause of anxiety. May I take this opportunity of remarking, as an instance in point, that it is *scarcely delicate to look at vagrants* with the attention which I have seen bestowed upon them by *a* very dear young friend of mine? They should not be looked at. *Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at*. Apart from such a habit standing in the way of that graceful *equanimity of surface which is so expressive of good breeding*, it hardly seems compatible with *refinement* of mind. *A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid and pleasant*.’ Having delivered this *exalted sentiment*, Mrs General made a *sweeping obeisance*, and retired with an *expression of mouth indicative of Prunes and Prism*.

[Book II, Chap 5: 530]

Bakhtin is convinced that, rather like utterances, gestures are not usually neutral but carry a silent intonation. What may therefore appear, at first glance, to be a meaningless action is often a

complete and highly expressive utterance (MB 134). Mrs General's repeated eye-shutting is a case in point. Residing within it is immense dialogic potential; a kind of 'wordless microdialogue' (MB 247) which silently communicates her ideology and view of events.

Given Mrs General's world-view, it could be argued that her stated undertaking in respect of the girls – that of the 'formation of a surface' – is the single most crippling deterrent to the attainment of selfhood. For Bakhtin, the self is not simply given to us. Rather, "we *all* must create ourselves" (Holquist 28 – 9). Selfhood, in other words, is worked out in an ongoing and never-ending process that involves a particular response to each situation and is unique to each person or character. But Mrs General's very name marks her as being an unlikely candidate for *particularity*. She has created for herself a kind finished product, and her only recourse is to pass on to her pupils, parrot-fashion, that which is *generally* accepted as 'good breeding' in society – and that most certainly does not include paying attention to vagrants or to anything else 'disagreeable'. Refinement of mind, she insists, is defined by its 'ignorance' of anything that does not include her favoured list of words that all commence with pursed and puckered lips.

Insofar as Mrs General's mode of expression is mockingly turned against her in 'exalted sentiment' and 'a mouth indicative of Prunes and Prism', it is evident that the potential relationship of the author to his character is expressed in "a dialogue of languages" in which authorial intentions are expressed but in a refracted way (Holquist 62). Bakhtin goes so far as to say that in the comic novel this dialogue of languages between the author and his characters leads to the incorporated languages and socio-ideological belief systems being "unmasked and destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality [and] doomed to death and displacement" (DiN 311 – 12).

In Mrs General's limited worldview, some of the 'disagreeable things' upon which one's gaze should never fall acquire names and faces when, during the course of family breakfast, Mr Dorrit's brother, Frederick, mentions that he and Amy had chanced upon a certain lady and gentleman whom they had met previously on the Great Saint Bernard. Unable to recall their names he appeals to Tip to help him out. Fanny also tosses in her penny's worth.

'I remember 'em well enough,' said the latter.

'I should think so,' observed Miss Fanny, with a *toss of her head* and a *glance at her sister*. 'But they would not have been recalled to our remembrance, I suspect, if Uncle hadn't *tumbled* over the subject.'

'My dear, what a curious phrase,' said Mrs General. 'Would not *inadvertently lighted upon, or accidentally referred to, be better?*'

'Thank you very much, Mrs General,' returned the young lady, 'no, I think not. On the whole *I prefer my own expression.*'

This was always Miss Fanny's way of receiving a suggestion from Mrs General. *But she always stored it up in her mind and adopted it at another time.* [Book II, Chap 5: 534]

In keeping with the contention that even the slightest of gestures may constitute double-voicing, Fanny's glance at Amy accompanied by a 'toss of her head' are indications of the ideology within which Fanny operates. Evidently she wishes to convey her disapproval of Amy having befriended Pet Gowan whose former status, as the daughter of a mere businessman (Mr Meagles), she considers to be vastly beneath their own. Although Fanny here *appears* to echo Mrs General's worldview, her gestures (the 'toss of her head') and her choice of words ('tumbled') may also be interpreted as being calculatedly subversive in regard to the latter. She is all too aware that the manner and idiolect she deliberately adopts will invoke the disapproval of Mrs General, whose subsequent 'corrections' she 'politely' ('Thank you very much') but firmly ('no, I think not') declines, insisting that she prefers her own way of talking.

Commenting on Bakhtin's understanding of the word "language," Morson and Emerson submit that "language is always languages" and that there are "always many different ways of speaking, many 'languages,' reflecting the diversity of social experience, conceptualizations, and values" (MB 140). While Mrs General habitually strives for linguistic unity and order, Fanny is, here, intent on using her own preferred idiom. Unlike Amy, however, she is able to readily switch from one 'language' to another and she thus stores Mrs General's suggestions up in her mind for future use. In addition to the 'force of character and self reliance' previously alluded to by Mrs General (Book II, Chap 5: 525 - 26), Fanny displays another trait: her dual awareness of her inner feelings and of the social image she is determined to create.

'I should have mentioned our having met Mr and Mrs Gowan, Fanny,' said Little Dorrit, 'even if Uncle had not. I have scarcely seen you since, you know. I meant to have spoken of it at breakfast, because *I should like to pay a visit to Mrs Gowan, and to become better acquainted with her, if Papa and Mrs General do not object.*'

'*Well, Amy,*' said Fanny, '*I am sure I am glad to find you at last expressing a wish to become better acquainted with anybody in Venice. Though whether Mr and Mrs Gowan are desirable acquaintances, remains to be determined.*'

'Mrs Gowan I spoke of, dear.'

'No doubt,' said Fanny. 'But you can't separate her from her husband, I believe, without an Act of Parliament.'

'Do you think, Papa,' inquired Little Dorrit, *with diffidence and hesitation, 'there is any objection to my making this visit?'*

'Really,' he replied, 'I – ha – *what is Mrs General's view?'*

Mrs General's view was, that not having the honour of any acquaintance with the lady and gentleman referred to, *she was not in a position to varnish the present article.* She could only remark, *as a general principle observed in the varnishing trade, that much depended on the quarter from which the lady under consideration was accredited to a family so conspicuously niched in the social temple as the family of Dorrit.*

At this remark the face of Mr Dorrit *gloomed* considerably. He was about (connecting the accrediting with an obtrusive person of the name of Clennam, whom *he imperfectly remembered in some former state of existence*) to *black-ball the name of Gowan* finally, when Edward Dorrit, Esquire, came into the

conversation, with his glass in his eye, and the preliminary remark of '*I say – you there! Go out, will you!*' – which was addressed to a couple of men who were handing the dishes round, *as a courteous intimation that their services could be temporarily dispensed with.* Those menials having obeyed the mandate, Edward Dorrit, Esquire, proceeded.

'Perhaps it's a matter of policy to let you all know that these Gowans – *in whose favour, or at least the gentleman's, I can't be supposed to be much prepossessed myself* – are *known to people of importance, if that makes any difference.*' 'That, I would say,' observed the fair varnisher, '*makes the greatest difference. The connection in question, being really people of importance and consideration* –'

'As to that,' said Edward Dorrit, Esquire, '*I'll give you the means of judging for yourself.* You are acquainted, perhaps, with the famous name of Merdle?' [Book II, Chap 5: 535 - 36]

Bakhtin advances the argument that the realm of constant activity is the everyday, and it is from this sphere that all social change and creativity originate. In "Response to a Question from the *Novyi Mir* Editorial Staff he directs his attention to the ability of the author of prose to capture what he calls, "the most ordinary, standard, everyday utterance" (SG& 9). His overarching interest in the link between prosaic language and social and personal ethics led him to conclude that novels may be an even more valuable source for discussing ethics than either philosophers' accounts (which, in his view, tend to be too schematic and short on detail) or real-life situations (in which numerous particulars, such as each person's state of mind before the encounter, cannot be known) (MB 27). Great novels, in his estimation, are far superior, offering "case studies extending over hundreds of pages and locating the moments to be considered in the network of all concerned persons, together with their histories and perceptions, and describing all these events within their multivalent social milieu" (MB 27). The social clap-trap that ensues regarding the advisability of Amy's timid request to be allowed to visit Pet Gowan is a case in point, in which the narrator humorously engages in dialogising the interlocutors' various responses.

As always, Amy's first concern is not to discompose her family – she seeks only to please, never to offend. Shortly before, Mr Dorrit had rebuked Amy for being the only one of his children who seemed unable to wipe the 'accursed experience' of their time at the Marshalsea, 'off the face of the earth' (Book II, Chap 5: 532), hence her anxiety to give him no further cause for concern. Unsurprisingly, the voluble Fanny, for whom family status is paramount, is the first to advance an opinion. She mockingly commends Amy for wanting 'to become better acquainted with anyone in Venice', but is disdainful toward the Gowans whose desirability as acquaintances, she questions. As already stated, Fanny is very much her father's daughter but, whereas he carries his past incarceration around him like a permanent shroud which he seems to be unable to shrug off despite his valiant efforts, she is not similarly encumbered. Having had a taste of how the Merdles of society live she is intent on attaining an equally exalted social position the progress of which, she firmly believes, will be severely impeded by fraternising with the likes of Pet Gowan.

Mr Dorrit is similarly anxious to preserve family dignity but less sure of his own judgment and, typically, he puts the question to Mrs General whose reply is not presented in the form of direct speech. Far more effective, in this case, is the parodic hybridisation of the narrator who, using a mixture of Mrs General's idiom and a chosen one of his own, reports that she is also unfortunately 'not in a position' (her idiom) 'to varnish the present article' (his idiom) on account of her having 'no knowledge of the family in question' (her idiom). However 'as a general principle' (her idiom), 'observed in the varnishing trade' (his idiom) 'much depended on the quarter from which the lady under consideration was accredited to a family' (her idiom) 'so conspicuously niched in the social temple' (his idiom) 'as the Dorrit family' (her idiom). This type of reported speech constitutes an obvious example of what Bakhtin means when he says that the novelist speaks "with quotation marks" (MB 321). Contained within his chosen language at any specific time is an awareness of many possible languages to choose from. In this way the novelist distances himself from his own language, or as Morson and Emerson put it, "One senses that the novelist is saying: 'I myself am not speaking directly; perhaps I would speak quite differently'" (MB 321). There are occasions when the author uses language rather like a poet, that is, to express his immediate semantic intentions but, when the author does not "meld completely" with the words he uses, choosing rather to accent them in a particular way – the intentions of the speaker (or reported speech) become refracted to produce humour, irony, parody and so forth (DiN 299). What one encounters, therefore in the novel "and what is essential to its task, is a *play* of distances from languages" (MB 321).

The play on languages continues in the 'gloom[ing]' of Mr Dorrit's face as he vaguely recollects a connection of the Gowan name to Arthur Clennam, whom he now shuns and resents for being part of the past he wishes to forget. But, just as he is about to cast aspersions on the Gowan name Edward (who appears to have been an uninterested onlooker during the debate, more interested in unceremoniously shooing the waiters out the room) finally enlightens the gathering as to the elevated station of the Gowans. Although he does not think much of the gentleman, he says, the Gowans are well-connected. His addendum, 'if that makes any difference', does not exactly specify, but it does signal his own amused indifference to the social deliberations of the group. To Mrs General, of course, it makes 'the greatest difference'.

***'The great Merdle!' exclaimed Mrs General.***

*'The Merdle,'* said Edward Dorrit, Esquire, 'They are known to him. Mrs Gowan – I mean the dowager, my polite friend's mother – is intimate with Mrs Merdle, and I know these two to be on their visiting list.'

'If so, a more undeniable guarantee could not be given,' said Mrs General to Mr Dorrit, ***raising her gloves and bowing her head, as if she were doing homage to some invisible graven image.***

‘I beg to ask my son, from motives of – ah – curiosity,’ Mr Dorrit observed, *with a decided change in his manner*, ‘how he becomes possessed of this – hum – timely information?’

‘It’s not a long story, sir,’ returned Edward Dorrit, Esquire, ‘and you shall have it out of hand. To begin with, Mrs Merdle is the lady you had the parley with at *what’s-his-name place*’.

‘Martigny,’ interposed Miss Fanny *with an air of infinite languor*.

‘Martigny,’ assented her brother, with a slight nod and a slight wink; in acknowledgement of which, Miss Fanny *looked surprised, and laughed and reddened*.

‘How can that be, Edward?’ said Mr Dorrit. ‘You informed me that the name of the gentleman with whom you conferred was – ha – Sparkler. Indeed you showed me his card. Hum. Sparkler.’

‘No doubt of it, father; but it doesn’t follow that his mother’s name must be the same. Mrs Merdle was married before, and he is her son. She is in Rome now; where probably we shall know more of her, as you decide to winter there. Sparkler is just come here. I passed last evening in company with Sparkler. Sparkler is a very good fellow on the whole, though rather a bore on one subject, in consequence of being tremendously smitten with a certain young lady.’ Here Edward Dorrit, Esquire, eyed Miss Fanny through his glass, with a face much twisted, and not ornamentally so, in part by the action of keeping his glass in his eye, and in part by the great subtlety of his smile.

‘Under these circumstances,’ said Mr Dorrit, I believe I express the sentiments of – ha – *Mrs General, no less than my own*, when I say that there is no objection, but – ha hum – quite the contrary – to gratifying your desire, Amy. I trust that I may – ha – hail – this desire,’ said Mr Dorrit, in an encouraging and forgiving manner, ‘as an auspicious omen. *It is quite right to know these people. It is a very proper thing.* Mr Merdle’s is a name of – ha – world-wide repute. Mr Merdle’s undertakings are immense. They bring him in such *vast sums of money* that they are regarded as – hum – *national benefits. Mr Merdle is the man of this time. The name of Mr Merdle is the name of the age.* Pray do everything on my behalf that is civil to Mr and Mrs Gowan, for we will – ha – *we will certainly notice them!*’ [Book II, Chap 5: 536 – 37]

The minute Edward alludes to social connections, Mrs General becomes acutely appreciative of the merits of an association with the Gowans – so much so, that when Edward casually drops the name ‘Merdle’ into the mix (so that they may judge for themselves) she, for the first, actually for the *only* time in the novel, gives in to a spontaneous exclamation of awe (‘The great Merdle!), before paying silent tribute to him ‘as if she were doing homage to some invisible graven image’. The change in the atmosphere of the room is palpable, with Mr Dorrit becoming suddenly intensely interested in Edward’s story, which, after hearing, he sagely concludes (on his own and Mrs General’s behalf) that it would certainly be to their advantage to acknowledge the Gowans.

The entire exchange, from the moment when the Gowan name is first invoked with some distaste (534) to the present turnabout in attitude, provides a marvellous example of what Bakhtin means when he says that, unlike sentences, utterances take place in a given context constituted by various factors which include, amongst others, “the social relations between the speakers and their relation to outsiders” (MB 291). An utterance, therefore, indicates “a set of values,” “of perceptions and ways of perceiving”. It outlines “a field of possible, likely, or desirable actions,” and adopts “an appropriate tone” in which to “negotiate a set of purposes” (MB 291).

Edward’s position is more difficult to gauge in this passage. The offhand tone he uses when relaying information regarding the Gowans may, or may not be double-voiced. On the one hand, he seems to care not one jot about the social deliberations that so absorb his father and Mrs

General, and what he says appears, to some degree, to be single-voiced. However, there are other factors to take into consideration when he speaks, or is spoken about. Regarding the latter, the repeated use of the glorified appellation, *Esquire*, after his name (used a total of six times in this and the preceding passage) strongly suggests narratorial parody, particularly when set against the impolite and peremptory way in which he treats the ‘menial’ waiters. Also, in communicating his acquaintance with Sparkler, it is clear that he has a dual set of purposes – one being to simply supply the facts and the other to lure Fanny into the conversation by carelessly affecting to have forgotten where the two families previously met and surprising her with a knowing wink when she supplies the location. He then compounds her embarrassment by looking at her with a knowing smile and pronounces Sparkler a bore for being ‘tremendously smitten with a certain lady’. One is immediately struck by the fact that the power-relations between Fanny and Edward are quite different from those between Fanny and Amy. In actual fact, Edward is the only person who is allowed to get away with teasing her, and her only response here is to blushingly laugh off his comments and ignore his mocking looks in her direction. The other striking thing is that Edward’s careless use of language (‘what’s-his-name-place’) courts no censure from the ever-correct Mrs General for whom any attempt to ‘varnish’ Edward would be to overstep the terms of her contract with Mr Dorrit.

The ultimate irony in the passage, however, is reserved for the adulation Mr Merdle receives from both Mr Dorrit and Mrs General, with the former being especially vocal in singing the praises of the very person who will ultimately relieve him of his own fortune which, in hindsight, provides a degree of hybridity to Mr Dorrit’s tributary remarks about the man in question, whose immense ‘undertakings’ bring him in ‘such vast sums of money that they are regarded as – hum – national benefits.’ His statement, ‘Mr Merdle is the man of this time. The name of Mr Merdle’s is the name of the age’ also reflects what Bakhtin would call “the common view”. In Bakhtin’s judgement, a characteristic of the English Comic Novel is its “specific treatment of ‘common language’ (DiN 301). Common language is the language used by a given social group to define ‘public opinion’: the opinion of the group investigated by the novel (MB 330). As such, it carries “the *ongoing point of view* and the going *value* (DiN 301 – 02). Embedded, however in Mr Dorrit’s overblown, sycophantic view of Mr Merdle’s accomplishments and worth, is that his name is soon to be associated with villainy and theft, with the result that he is cast off by the very society (or public opinion) that currently sings his praises.



Bakhtin himself drew on several examples from *Little Dorrit* in order to illustrate his ideas about novelistic language. The example and explanation that follow show one of the ways in which the author chooses to maximise his distance from the common language and puts into a Bakhtinian context Mr Dorrit's overinflated opinion of Mr Merdle:

It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one. The rarest dishes, sumptuously served; the choicest fruits, the most exquisite wines; marvels of workmanship in gold and silver, china and glass; innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell, and sight, were insinuated into its composition. *O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed* – in one word, what a rich man! [Book 2, Chap 12: 618]

In Bakhtin's view the above passage constitutes "a typical double-accented, double-styled *hybrid construction* which begins in a "parodic stylization of high epic style". This is followed by "an enthusiastic glorification of Merdle, a chorus of his admirers in the form of the concealed speech of another (the italicized portion)," the point of which is "to expose the real basis for such glorification, [and] to unmask the chorus's hypocrisy: 'wonderful,' 'great,' 'master,' 'endowed' can all be replaced by the single word 'rich'" (DiN 304). He continues:

This act of authorial unmasking, which is openly accomplished within the boundaries of a single simple sentence, merges with the unmasking of another's speech. The ceremonial emphasis on glorification is complicated by a second emphasis that is indignant, ironic, and this is the one that ultimately dominates in the final unmasking of words of the sentence. [DiN 304]

Referring back to the present passage, Note 5 in the superscript of my edition of *Little Dorrit* reads: 'Dickens certainly intends the unconscious irony of this to reflect Mr Dorrit's own preoccupation with money, and more widely the quality of life in 'Clennam and Flintwinch' – and the Marshalsea' (Notes 908). I would add to this, "the unconscious irony" of the unmasking of Mr Dorrit's hypocrisy contained in his decision to 'notice' a family on the sole basis of their connection to a man who later proves to be a cheat, liar and swindler of gargantuan proportions.

This magnificent accordance of Mr Dorrit's recognition settled the matter. It was not observed that Uncle had pushed away his plate, and forgotten his breakfast; but he was not much observed at any time, except by Little Dorrit. The servants were recalled, and the meal proceeded to its conclusion. Mrs General rose and left the table. Little Dorrit rose and left the table. When Edward and Fanny remained whispering together across it, and when Mr Dorrit remained eating figs and reading a French newspaper, *Uncle suddenly fixed the attention of all three by rising out of his chair, striking his hand upon the table, and saying, 'Brother! I protest against it!'*

*If he had made a proclamation in an unknown tongue, and given up the ghost immediately afterwards, he could not have astounded his audience more. The paper fell from Mr Dorrit's hand, and he sat petrified, with a fig half way to his mouth.*

'Brother!' said the old man, conveying a surprising energy into his trembling voice, *'I protest against it!'* I love you; you know I love you dearly. In these many years I have never been untrue to you in a single thought. Weak as I am, I would at any time have struck any man who spoke ill of you. But, brother, brother, brother, *I protest against it!'*

*It was extraordinary to see of what a burst of earnestness such a decrepit man was capable.* His eyes became bright, his grey hair rose on his head, markings of purpose on his brow and face which had faded

from them for five-and-twenty years, started out again, and there was an energy in his hand that made its action nervous once more.

‘My dear Frederick!’ exclaimed Mr Dorrit faintly. ‘What is wrong? What is the matter?’

‘*How dare you,*’ said the old man, pointing to her sister’s place, ‘*how dare you do it? Have you no memory? Have you no heart? Where’s your affectionate and valuable friend? Where’s your devoted guardian? Where’s your more than mother? How dare you set up superiorities against all these characters combined in your sister? For shame, you false girl, for shame!*’

‘*I love Amy,*’ cried Miss Fanny, sobbing and weeping, ‘*as well as I love my life*’ – *better than I love my life. I don’t deserve to be so treated. I am as grateful to Amy, and as fond of Amy, as it’s possible for any human being to be. I wish I was dead. I was never so wickedly wronged. And only because I am anxious for the family credit.*’

‘*To the winds with the family credit!*’ cried the old man, with a great deal of scorn and indignation. ‘*Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what we have seen, setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment’s disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment’s pain. We may know that it’s a base pretension by its having that effect. Brother, I protest against it in the sight of God!*’

*As his hand went up above his head and came down on the table, it might have been a blacksmith’s.* After a few moments’ silence, it had relaxed into its usual weak condition. He went round to his brother with his ordinary shuffling step, put the hand on his shoulder, and said, in a softened voice, ‘William, my dear, I felt obliged to say it; forgive me, for I felt obliged to say it!’ and then went, *in his bowed way*, out of the palace hall, just as he might have gone out of the Marshalsea room. [Book II, Chap 5: 537 – 39]

Bakhtin inclines towards a view that life is a perpetually ongoing and “unfinalizable dialogue” (MB 59). Exploring Bakhtin’s advancement of the term ‘unfinalizability’, Morson and Emerson ascribe to it a “complex of values central to his thinking: “innovation, ‘surprisingness’, the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity” (MB 36 – 7). Consequently, Bakhtin laid much store by the polyphonic author’s ability to create characters that have the potential to surprise, not only themselves but also other characters, and sometimes even the author. “What life needs above all is something unexpected,” quip Morson and Emerson (MB 38). By way of illustration, they allude to Dostoevsky’s underground man who hisses that “two times two makes four is, after all, to me simply a piece of insolence. ...I admit that two times two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are going to give everything its due, two times two makes five is sometimes also a very charming little thing” (*Notes from Underground* 30; trans. emended. MB 38).

Not quite so ‘charming’ but, nevertheless, every bit as surprising, is the uncharacteristic outburst of the generally bemused and befuddled Frederick Dorrit who, in arguably the longest and most impassioned speech of his entire existence, delivers not only a scathing criticism of Amy’s immediate interlocutors but also heaps scorn on the so-called ‘family credit’ and the questionable values of the society in which they live. The mere fact of his protesting at all creates an astonished silence in the room and prompts the narratorial comment, ‘If he had made a proclamation in an unknown tongue, and given up the ghost immediately afterwards, he could not have astounded his audience more’. To his stunned audience, the ordinarily withdrawn and timid creature shouts, “I protest” seven times and thrice turns on Fanny with ‘How dare you?’, in

an indictment against her for being ‘false’, for having ‘no heart’ or ‘affection’ in ‘setting up superiorities’ against her ‘affectionate and valuable friend’, her ‘devoted guardian’, her ‘more than mother’. Whereas Uncle’s character has appeared up until now as static, fixed, and ‘finalized’, here he appears as ‘unfinalized’, as one who is yet capable of exhibiting what Bakhtin might have referred to as, ‘potentiality’, ‘freedom’ and ‘creativity’.

I have mentioned previously (with regard to narratorial comments about Mr Dorrit’s failure to defend Amy in Book II, Chap 5: 526), that Bakhtin regards the incorporation of the author and/or narrator as purveyors of, amongst other things, ‘particular value judgements and intonations’ as a vastly significant feature in novel writing (DiN 312). On that occasion opinion was strenuously advanced by means of free, indirect speech on the part of the narrator. In this scene, the author/narrator utilises Frederick Dorrit to convey another worldview or belief system belonging to someone else. Having said that, there is no doubt that Frederick Dorrit’s invective is also representative of Dickens’s own sentiments regarding falseness, injustice and unfairness of any kind: social, emotional and political. Time and time again in his novels Dickens berates one institution or other, one school tie or other, the social elite as opposed to the downtrodden, on whose side he always comes down.

Commenting on the type of man his employer was, his amanuensis was said to remark:

Dickens was an odd fellow regarding the company he sought. I have known him, while I was employed by him, to go down to the Seven Dials, about the worst place in London, and sleep and eat there. He roasted his herring where the rest did, and slept with the poorest. He loved low society. He never seemed so happy as when seated in a poor coffee house, with a crowd of the lower classes talking around him.

[William Edrucht and another, “Office Staff Memories.”  
Philip Collins. *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (Volume 2) 194]

It is not surprising therefore, that Dickens uses the unlikely and neglected Frederick Dorrit as a mouthpiece to call into question the Dorrits’ skewed priorities, their misplaced pride and their ingratitude to Amy. Uncle angrily submits that setting up ‘any pretension’ that disadvantages Amy or gives her ‘a moment’s pain’ is sufficient proof of its baseness to invoke ‘a judgement’ on the family. The very person they have been interrogating, as to the properness of her views, should, in his opinion, be used as a barometer for measuring whether his accused are capable of fair, decent and generous living.

Fanny receives the brunt of Uncle’s diatribe, although, in truth, despite her mocking and careless manner of expression, she is probably Amy’s only real consolation in this alien world; she constantly spends time with Amy, openly discusses her plans with Amy, seeks her opinion (even

if only to reject it out of hand). Also, it cannot be denied that Amy is content with playing second-fiddle to her forceful sister. Therefore, inasmuch as her uncle is justified in accusing her, Fanny too, has a point when she protests against being ‘wickedly wronged’.

*All this time Fanny had been sobbing and crying, and still continued to do so.* Edward, beyond opening his mouth in amazement, had not opened his lips, and had done nothing but stare. Mr Dorrit also had been utterly discomfited, and quite unable to assert himself in any way. Fanny was now the first to speak.

*‘I never, never, never was so used!’* she sobbed. ‘There never was anything so harsh and unjustifiable, so disgracefully violent and cruel! Dear, kind, quiet little Amy, too, *what would she feel if she could know that she had been innocently the means of exposing me to such treatment! But I’ll never tell her!* No, good darling, *I’ll never tell her!*’ This helped Mr Dorrit to break his silence.

‘My dear,’ said he, ‘I – ha – approve of your resolution. It will be – ha-hum – much better not to speak of this to Amy. It might – hum – it might distress her. Ha. No doubt it would distress her greatly. It is considerable and right to avoid doing so. We will – ha – keep this to ourselves.’

‘But the cruelty of Uncle!’ cried Miss Fanny. ‘O, *I never can forgive the wanton cruelty of Uncle!*’

‘My dear,’ said Mr Dorrit, recovering his tone, though he remained unusually pale, ‘I must request you not to say so. *You must remember that your uncle is – ha – not what he formerly was. You must remember that your uncle’s state requires him – hum – great forbearance from us, great forbearance!*’

‘I am sure,’ cried Fanny, piteously, ‘it is only charitable to suppose that there *must be something wrong in him somewhere, or he never could have so attacked Me, of all the people in the world.*’

‘Fanny,’ returned Mr Dorrit in a deeply *fraternal* tone, ‘you know, with his innumerable good points, what a – hum – wreck your uncle is; and I entreat you by the fondness that I have for him, and by the fidelity that you know I have always shown him, to – ha – to draw your own conclusions, and to *spare my brotherly feelings.*’

This ended the scene; Edward Dorrit, Esquire, *saying nothing throughout*, but looking, to the last, perplexed and doubtful. Miss Fanny awakened much affectionate uneasiness in her sister’s mind that day by passing the greater part of it in *violent fits of embracing her, and in alternately giving her brooches, and wishing herself dead.* [Book II, Chap 5: 539 – 40]

In delineating differences between the language of poetry and the language(s) of the novel Bakhtin maintains that, whereas the novelist attempts “to represent, even exaggerate, heteroglossia,” the poet “escapes it in order to write in a language that is timeless” (MB 321). As distinct from the writer of novels, the poet usually speaks alone, not needing “interaction with other languages in order to say what he wants to say” (MB 321). In this way, he or she selects, and is the voice of, his own society. Whilst the poet “depersonalises ‘days’ in language,” for the novelist, who deals with language “still warm” from “struggle and hostility” (DiN 331), each day represents “another socio-ideological semantic ‘state of affairs’, another accentual system with its own slogans, its own ways of assigning blame and praise”. Consequently prose “often deliberately intensifies the difference between [days], gives them embodied representation and dialogically opposes them to one another in unresolvable dialogues” (DiN 291).

Furthermore, Bakhtin is adamant that all the languages of heteroglossia, however unique, have one thing in common: each signals a specific point of view on the world, or “forms of conceptualizing the world in words”. As such, he says, they may all be “juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated

dialogically” (DiN 291 – 92). Such differing worldviews are evident in the specific choice of language used by the various people at the breakfast table: Mrs General is nothing if not ‘proper’ and her choice of idiom is as carefully washed out as her appearance and belief system; Mr Dorrit’s fretful anxiety to reclaim his rightful place in society, though feeling somewhat like a fish out of water, emerges in his perpetually hesitant but affectedly dignified, ‘ha – hum’, manner of expression. On the other hand, Edward’s somewhat lackadaisical way of speaking clearly echoes his slipshod attitude to life and to those around him, whilst the nurturing Amy always articulates her thoughts with great care and difficulty so as not to offend her listeners. The usually monosyllabic utterances of Uncle clearly mark him as a social recluse and quite the opposite to the voluble aspiring socialite, Fanny, whose eloquence is generally tailored to meet the needs and goals of each particular moment of each day.

At the present time, attended only by her brother and father, Fanny gives vent to feelings of self-pity and outrage against her uncle for his wanton cruelty to her. ‘I never, never, never was so used!’ she sobs, theatrically, sounding more like the suffering heroine of a melodrama than someone who is genuinely distraught at being accused of being unkind to her sister. Rather like many real-life culprits who consider only their own needs, she is utterly unable to comprehend that her actions may give rise to offence and, consequently, warrant censure of any sort. Her conclusion is that there must be something radically wrong with uncle, whose unwarranted and unprovoked attack on ‘Me (note the capitalisation) of all the people in the world’ she swears never to forgive.

Whilst not wishing to launch a full-scale apologetic on her behalf, I would venture that somewhere, in the midst of her self-pitying rant, there is a grain of truth – she *does* love Amy, if not better than her own life, as she claims (538) then certainly better than she loves anyone else. For, despite her irritation with Amy’s inability and/or unwillingness to align her attitudes with her own, her father’s, or even her brother’s, it is only and always Amy to whom she turns for friendship, affection and approval. Consequently, she vows never to tell ‘Dear, kind, quiet, little Amy’ about the incident. Naturally there will always be some doubt as to whether she is prompted by shame, by anger, or by genuine concern for Amy’s inevitable distress. Whilst sincerely appearing to believe that she is taking the high moral ground, her apparent altruism is called into question by ‘what would [Amy] feel if she could know that she had been innocently the means of exposing *me* to such treatment!’ (Emphasis added). Something I do wish to point out, however, is that, even though Fanny is as intent on her quest for acceptance into elite society

as is Rosamond in *Middlemarch*, unlike the unapproachable and unswayable Rosamond, her own heart and ‘self-conflictedness’ dictate the need for understanding and affection from Amy. Whereas Rosamond faithfully and insensitively applies the dictums of her mentor, Mrs Lemon, every day and without thought of the feelings of those around her, Fanny’s ever-changing moods and responses reveal her as someone who is able to recognise the vacuity of Mrs General and her suggestions, who is able to reflect on her own behaviour, and who is able to care for others, particularly Amy. She always immediately regrets the careless and hurtful things she says to Amy. Consequently, in the wake of uncle’s tirade – perhaps sensing some justification in his personal attack on her – a measure of penitence enters into her initial reaction of shock, anger and denial and she spends the rest of the day alternating between violent fits of petting Amy, bestowing gifts of contrition on her, and ‘wishing herself dead’.

The kind of language used by Fanny is markedly different from that used by her father who, ever mindful of decorum, addresses Fanny in subdued tones. He agrees with her about withholding information from Amy but implores her not to speak ill of uncle who requires ‘great forbearance from us, great forbearance’ on account of his not being ‘what he formerly was’. In short, despite uncle’s being a ‘hum – Wreck’, his innumerable good points and Mr Dorrit’s own brotherly love for him, dictate that Fanny should spare her father’s ‘brotherly feelings’. Presumably Mr Dorrit’s ‘brotherly love’ emanates from uncle’s own ‘fidelity’ towards himself and not vice versa, as Mr Dorrit would seem to imply. That his appeal is issued ‘in a deeply fraternal tone’ (as opposed to a paternal one) is suggestive of their being co-conspirators – he knows he ultimately has no control over the headstrong Fanny, other than to seek her compliance.

Indeed, all those present react differently to uncle’s indictment – Fanny’s anger and outrage borders on hysteria, Mr Dorrit’s response is subdued, but firmer than usual as he tries to persuade Fanny to try to overlook Uncle’s eccentricities and peculiar views and Edward remains ‘perplexed and doubtful’ throughout. Even his silence is of a completely different sort to the usual, sardonic attitude he has been known to affect. In a word he, too, is rendered speechless and, although it is impossible to tell exactly how, and to what extent, his worldview will change in the long term, what is certain is that, on this day, and at this particular moment, it most definitely has.

In the interests of ‘family credit’ the sisters are duly encouraged to visit the Gowans and we take up the narrative on their return journey.

They had not glided on for many minutes, *when Little Dorrit became aware that Fanny was more showy in manner than the occasion appeared to require*, and, looking about for the cause through the window and through the open door, saw another gondola evidently in waiting on them.

As this gondola attended their progress *in various artful ways*; sometimes shooting on ahead, and stopping to let them pass; sometimes, when the way was broad enough, skimming along side by side with them; and sometimes following close astern; *and as Fanny gradually made no disguise that she was playing off graces upon somebody within it, of whom she at the same time feigned to be unconscious*; Little Dorrit at length asked who it was?

To which Fanny made the short answer, 'That *gaby*.'

'Who?' said Little Dorrit.

'My dear child,' returned Fanny (in a tone suggesting that before her Uncle's protest she might have said, 'You little fool, instead'), 'how slow you are! *Young Sparkler*.'

She lowered her window on her side, and, leaning back and resting her elbow on it negligently, fanned herself with a *rich Spanish fan of black and gold*. The attendant gondola, having skimmed forward again, with some swift trace of an *eye in the window*, *Fanny laughed coquettishly* and said, 'Did you ever see *such a fool*, my love?' [Book II, Chap 6: 549]

As I have already mentioned, there are numerous ways in which to enter into dialogue – not all involving verbal articulation. Fanny suddenly becomes 'more showy' than the occasion merits and, casting about for the reason, Amy spots another gondola close by, apparently attempting to enter into a sort of frolicking 'dialogue' with their own boat. After its opening gambit of being 'evidently in waiting of them', Sparkler's boat begins 'conversing' in earnest by 'attending their progress in various artful ways' including 'shooting on ahead' then 'stopping to let them pass', sometimes 'skimming' alongside them, then falling back behind. Fanny's 'reply' is to employ her 'rich Spanish fan of black and gold' to good effect (as a theatrical prop) as she assumes the persona of a somewhat bored, well-to-do lady and fans herself with supreme indifference to the frenetic display by the other gondola. At the same time, she has a dual awareness of Amy, to whom she openly and unselfconsciously reveals her tomfoolery. In fact, having an immediate audience, who is aware of both messages (the cool, unaffected image she portrays for Sparkler, and her merciless toying with the simpleton (or 'gaby', as she calls him), makes the game all the more enjoyable for her.

Thoroughly enamoured with her role, she plays it with aplomb: not only does she consider Sparkler to be a 'gaby' and 'young fool' but she also calls Amy a 'child' and 'slow'. However, contextual dialogism makes an appearance when, recalling her uncle's uncharacteristic outburst the day before regarding her disgraceful treatment of Amy (540), she stops short of referring to Amy, too, as a 'little fool'. Contextual dialogism continues in the ongoing comedy of Sparkler's 'eye' once again being framed in a window.

Many 'languages' are thus being used to convey a host of different messages to different interlocutors. As Bakhtin writes, "Prose consciousness feels cramped when it is confined to only

one out of a multitude of heteroglot languages” (DiN 324), and Fanny’s multiple responses, together with the narrator’s account of her behaviour, is one such instance of the ability of prose consciousness to break through the confines of a single language system.

‘Do you think he means to follow you all the way?’ asked Little Dorrit.

‘*My precious child,*’ returned Fanny, ‘I can’t possibly answer for what an *idiot* in a state of desperation may do, but I should think it highly probable. It’s not such an enormous distance. *All Venice would scarcely be that, I imagine, if he’s dying for a glimpse of me.*’

‘And is he?’ asked Little Dorrit in *perfect simplicity*.

‘Well, my love, that really is an awkward question for *me* to answer,’ said her sister. ‘I believe he is. You had better ask Edward. He tells Edward he is, I believe. *I* understand he makes a perfect spectacle of himself at the Casino, and that sort of place, *by going on about me*. But you had better ask Edward if you want to know.’

‘I wonder he doesn’t call,’ said Little Dorrit after thinking a moment.

‘My dear Amy, *your wonder will soon cease*, if I am rightly informed. I should not be at all surprised if he called to-day. The *creature* has only been waiting to get his courage up, I suspect.

‘Will you see him?’

‘Indeed, my darling, *that’s just as it may happen*. Here he is again. Look at him. *O you simpleton!*’

Mr Sparkler had, undeniably, a weak appearance; with his *eye in the window* like a knot in the glass, and no reason on earth for stopping his bark suddenly, except the real reason.

[Book II, Chap 6: 549 – 50]

A point of interest in the above passage resides in the difference between Amy and Fanny who, in reply to a series of simple and direct questions from Amy with regard to Sparkler, continues to tutor her sister in the ways of the world. Supremely confident in her prowess and ability to lure the ‘idiot’ Sparkler, she ‘imagines’ that ‘he is dying for a glimpse’ of her and it would not surprise her in the least if ‘the creature’ called that very day once he had gotten his courage up. When Amy asks if Fanny will see him, her answer is that it is highly likely and she should rather wait and see what happens.

One of the many things Bakhtin enjoys about the novel is that it understands time as it is lived. Not only is the present affected by past events, but, even more importantly, because it is always orientated towards the future, “presentness” is “never whole” but “demands continuation” by constantly moving into the inconclusive future, and so becomes similarly inconclusive (EaN 30). “Presentness,” as Morson and Emerson explain “is also by its nature open in the sense that it can lead to many different futures; one cannot properly narrate the present backwards, from the point toward which it ultimately happened to lead, because it did not *have* to lead there” (MB 423). Whilst Fanny ‘expects’ things to go to plan, she pays lip-service to the fact that the future holds many possibilities. Using this as an excuse to divert the conversation away from her having to answer Amy directly, she assures her sister that her ‘wonder’ is likely to ‘soon cease’ as events play out.



Right on cue, the inimitable eye (never both eyes) appears once more in the window, ‘like a knot in the glass’ as Sparkler (‘the simpleton’) brings his gondola to a sudden halt for no earthly reason, ‘other than the real reason’ (of attempting a ‘discourse’ with Fanny).

‘When you asked me if I will see him, my dear,’ said Fanny, *almost as well composed in the graceful indifference of her attitude as Mrs Merdle herself, ‘what do you mean?’*

‘I mean,’ said Little Dorrit – ‘I think *I rather mean what do you mean, dear Fanny?*’

Fanny laughed again, *in a manner at once condescending, arch, and affable*; and said, putting her arm round her sister in a *playfully affectionate way*:

‘Now tell me, my little pet. *When we saw that woman at Martigny, how did you think she carried it off? Did you see what she decided on in a moment?*’

‘No, Fanny.’

‘Then I’ll tell you, Amy. *She settled with herself, now I’ll never refer to that meeting under such different circumstances, and I’ll never pretend to have any idea that these are the same girls.* That’s her way out of a difficulty. What did I tell you when we came away from Harley Street that time? She is as insolent and false as any woman in the world. *But in the first capacity, my love, she may find people who can match her.*’

A significant turn of the Spanish fan towards Fanny’s bosom indicated with great expression where one of these people was to be found.

‘Not only that,’ pursued Fanny, ‘but she gives the same charge to *Young Sparkler; and doesn’t let him come after me until she has got it thoroughly into his most ridiculous of all ridiculous noddles (for one really can’t call it a head), that he is to pretend to have been first struck with me in the Inn Yard.*’

‘Why?’ asked Little Dorrit.

‘Why? Good gracious, my love!’ (*again very much in the tone of You stupid little creature*) ‘how can you ask? *Don’t you see that I may have become a rather desirable match for a noddle?* And don’t you see that *she puts the deception upon us, and makes a pretence, while she shifts it from her own shoulders* (very good shoulders they are too, I must say),’ observed Miss Fanny, glancing *complacently* at herself, ‘of considering our feelings?’

‘*But we can always go back to the plain truth.*’

‘Yes, but if you please we won’t,’ retorted Fanny. ‘No, I am not going to have that done, Amy. *The pretext is none of mine; it’s hers,* and she shall have enough of it.’

In the triumphant exaltation of her feelings, Miss Fanny, using her Spanish fan with one hand, squeezed her sister’s waist with the other, *as if she were crushing Mrs Merdle.*

‘No,’ repeated Fanny. ‘She shall find me go her way. She took it, and I’ll follow it. And, with the blessing of fate and fortune, *I’ll go on improving that woman’s acquaintance until I have given her maid, before her eyes, things from my dressmaker’s ten times as handsome and expensive as she once gave me from hers!*’

[Book II, Chap 6: 550 – 51]

When Bakhtin insists that utterances are quite different from sentences, what he means is that, even though utterances invariably contain words and sentences, their defining features are not exhausted by the former. This is because, in the traditional sense, a sentence is a unit of language whereas an utterance is a unit of *speech communication* (MB 125). The word ‘communication’ implies the transmission of a thought to someone. Such communication is demonstrated in the direct speech in the first two paragraphs in which both Amy and Fanny clearly expect responses from each other to the questions posed. As Morson and Emerson put it, “one can respond to an utterance, but one cannot respond to a sentence” (MB 126). This is because a sentence, in Bakhtin’s view, has only abstract meaning, or *potential* to mean. *Real* meaning, on the other hand, takes place “when that potential is exploited for a particular purpose on a particular occasion” (MB 127).

Discerning meaning is thus not always a straightforward affair. We expect as much from Fanny, who often says things merely for effect. With Amy, it is somewhat different; although she appears to say what she means, her very tentativeness and diffidence towards people in general (and towards Fanny in particular), sometimes serve to obfuscate meaning, and here we see both girls having actively to probe the other's words so as to establish not only the overt meaning of the other's discourse, but also to uncover any additional, covert or underlying, meanings and/or intentions.

Given that, in his opinion, all discourse is to some extent dialogic Bakhtin does concede that some utterances are more monologic than others. Consequently, he distinguishes between what he calls single-voiced 'words of the first type', single-voiced 'words of the second type' and double-voiced words, or 'words of the third type' (MB 147). Discourse of the first type is characterised as being 'direct', 'unmediated' and 'referentially oriented', recognising "only itself and its object, to which it strives to be maximally adequate" (PDP 186 – 87). One could argue that, when Fanny explains to Amy what Mrs Merdle 'had decided in a moment' at Martigny she is communicating in discourse of the first type: she believes she is using the most efficient way to accomplish her purpose – that of informing Amy that Mrs Merdle had chosen the most pragmatic course of action by settling "with herself".

Words of the second type (or what Bakhtin calls 'represented' or 'objectified' discourse) include a narratorial representation of a character's words, in the way which he or she believes to be "characteristic or typical of the character as an individual or a member of a social group" (MB 149). Morson and Emerson consider the crucial fact about this type of discourse is that "the character's speech is not shaped by his or her awareness of a second speech center". As they quip, "The hero is alive and speaking in his or her own world" (MB 149). At this level, Amy is portrayed as being hesitant, concerned, and uncomfortable ('I think, I rather mean, what do you mean, dear Fanny?') while Fanny is shown to be confident, opinionated, and clearly in control ('What do you mean?', 'Now tell me, my little pet', 'Then I'll tell you'). From both characters' points of view, their words belong to the first type; they say what they want to say – by referring to an object, asking a question and seeking or giving a reply. However, another speech centre is also in existence in discourse of the second type: "invisibly present but detectable by the reader, [it] represents the character's way of speaking and makes it an object for an audience, as it is not for the character himself" (MB 149). This invisible speech centre makes us aware that Fanny

has unconsciously continued in her ‘society lady’ role as she holds forth to Amy, whilst Amy’s bewildered responses intensify our awareness of her simplicity and naivety. In words of the second type, the characters’ speech “has no awareness of a second speech centre” (MB 149), and Bakhtin refers to this type of discourse as having become itself “an object” unaware of “being watched” and thus sounding “as if it were direct single-voiced discourse” (PDP 189).

Words of the third type, or double-voiced words, are divided by Bakhtin into two categories: passive double-voiced words which can be either unidirectional (as in stylization) or varidirectional (as in parody), and active double-voiced words. Stylization occurs when the author utilises “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” (PDP 189). As distinct from parody, in which, as Bakhtin puts it, “the author and the other want to go in different directions” (MB150), in stylization the author is not especially hostile to, or critical of his or her object, but is yet able to show the speaking person in a particular light. Hence, whilst Fanny is seen to be increasingly belligerent toward Mrs Merdle and insulting of Sparkler, into whose ‘most ridiculous of all ridiculous noddles’ his mother has planted the notion that the parties have never met before, she is not parodied by the narrator. Actually, Bakhtin submits that, in this type of double-voicing, the author may want “the voice of the other to be heard and himself to be heard agreeing with and perhaps even reinforcing that voice” (MB 151). The different standards held by the two girls and the difference in their respective temperaments is exacerbated by Fanny’s outright rejection of Amy’s suggestion that they could ‘always go back to the plain truth’ and her insistence that they go along with Mrs Merdle’s fabrication. Fanny is determined to perpetuate the ‘pretext’ which, she says, did not originate with her. She concludes her declaration with a fierce and detailed avowal of how she intends to make Mrs Merdle lie on the metaphorical bed of her own making.

Abundant parody exists in the passage. However, its origins are not so much in *direct* speech as they are in the narratorial asides, in which various aspects of Fanny’s complex character are humorously (but not judgementally) conveyed. For example, we are informed that she is ‘almost as well composed in the graceful indifference of her attitude as Mrs Merdle herself’. Then, too, her manner towards Amy is ‘at once condescending, arch, and affable’ but, shortly after, she addresses her ‘very much in the tone of ‘You stupid little creature’, before ‘glancing complacently at herself’. Finally, ‘in the triumphant exultations of her feelings’ she squeezes Amy’s waist ‘as if she were crushing Mrs Merdle.’ All the while, the Spanish fan busily plays a

part in her assumed role as it is waved about, flourished and finally pointed at her own bosom, to indicate precisely where the ‘insolent and false’ woman may have met her match. While Fanny may sometimes appear to be as dishonest and false as Mrs Merdle, this is not actually so. She is well aware of the different roles she assumes and makes no effort to conceal her enjoyment in them from Amy, to whom she is, nevertheless, demonstrably truthful about her future intentions with regard to Mrs Merdle.

Bakhtin draws no absolute distinction between passive and active double-voiced words, insisting that there are many gradations between them (MB 155), some of which fall into the grey area of being neither one nor the other. There are few examples of active double-voiced words in the passage, but one might argue that the active spills over into the passive when Fanny parodies what she imagines Mrs Merdle to have said to herself in Martigny (‘now I’ll never refer to that meeting under such different circumstances, and I’ll never pretend to have any idea that these are the same girls’). However, an ironic twist exists simply because she is unaware of a second speech centre – that of the narrator – which simultaneously makes her the object of systematic, albeit gentle, double-voicing. What is certain, however, is that she is not mistaken in her assessment of Mrs Merdle’s intentions. What may exist in this passage, therefore, is what Morson and Emerson refer to as ‘hidden dialogicality’. As they explain: “If we imagine a conversation between two persons in which the statements of one have been omitted in such a way that the conversation’s overall sense is preserved, then the omitted speaker’s words may have left deep traces on the speech we do hear” (MB 156). In this way the conversation may be “shaped by the invisible other” (MB 156).

Notwithstanding the passage’s inherent humour, when Fanny holds forth on the subject of Mrs Merdle it is clear that she bitterly resents the woman. Her speech to Amy about what she intends for Mrs Merdle can, therefore, also be interpreted as being an intensely serious conversation in which “each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person” (PDP 197). For it is precisely her recall of Mrs Merdle’s ‘unspoken words’ that triggers Fanny’s strong reaction and, although, at one level, she is ostensibly talking to Amy (in a role-playing capacity), at another level (in terms of actual content), she is really ‘talking to’ Mrs Merdle. When she gathers that she has suddenly become ‘rather a desirable match’ for Sparkler, she is determined to turn the tables on the matriarch by, amongst other things, bestowing upon Mrs Merdle’s maid garments ‘ten times more handsome and expensive as she once gave from hers’.

Little Dorrit was *silent; sensible* that she was not to be heard on any question affecting the family dignity, *and unwilling to lose to no purpose her sister's newly and unexpectedly restored favour*. She could not concur, but she was silent. *Fanny well knew what she was thinking of; so well*, that she soon asked her.

Her reply was, 'Do you mean to encourage Mr Sparkler, Fanny?

Encourage him, my dear?' said her sister, smiling contemptuously, 'that depends upon what you call encourage. *No, I don't mean to encourage him. But I'll make a slave of him.*'

Little Dorrit glanced seriously and doubtfully in her face, but Fanny was not to be so brought to a check. She furled her *fan of black and gold, and used it to tap her sister's nose; with the air of a proud beauty, and a great spirit, who toyed with and playfully instructed a homely companion*. 'I shall make him fetch and carry, my dear, and I shall make him subject to me. *And if I don't make his mother subject to me, too, it shall not be my fault.*'

'Do you think – dear Fanny, don't be offended, *we are so comfortable together now* – that you can quite see the end of that course?'

'*I can't say that I have so much as looked for it yet*, my dear,' answered Fanny, with *supreme* indifference; '*all in good time*. Such are my intentions. *And really they have taken me so long to develop, that here we are at home*. And Young Sparkler at the door, inquiring who is within. *By the merest accident, of course!*'

[Book II, Chap 6: 551 – 52]

Fanny immediately discerns her sister's silence as reservation. Sensing Amy's dismay – disapprobation even – she seems to need to be vindicated by Amy and thus doggedly pursues the subject under discussion. Amy knows that there is no point in arguing with her sister about matters concerning the family's dignity but, perhaps the greater reason for her silence is that is that she does not want to risk losing, for no good reason, something she values more: Fanny's approval. As we may recall, this is not the first time Amy fails to challenge Fanny and neither will it be the last. Notwithstanding her rumbustious and capricious nature it can be argued that Fanny is more forthright than Amy, who seems willing to avoid confrontation at whatever cost to herself.

We become aware of another discourse sliding in as Fanny is once again alluded to in the language of the popular melodrama as having 'the air of a proud beauty' and 'great spirit' as she taps her 'homely' sister on the nose with her ornate fan and playfully instructs her with regard to her future intentions. In novels, what is happening '*now*' is paramount to the author's depiction of his or her characters. As Morson and Emerson point out, "the author understands his characters in each present moment by imagining futures that are, at that moment, conceivable for them" (MB 247). So, when Amy questions the possible outcome of Fanny's articulated course of action: to make a slave out of Sparkler and to make his mother subject to herself, Fanny gainsays, with supreme indifference, her sister's attempt at projecting future events. 'All in good time,' she intones, 'Such are my intentions', adding with a touch of self-mockery that they have taken her so long to develop that they have already arrived home!

Clearly, at this point in time, Fanny is content with conceiving a future in which her hastily-made plans extend only to enslaving Sparkler and making Mrs Merdle pay. She is confident that time and opportunity will supply the ongoing detail. Amy, on the other hand, is portrayed as being unable to act (or even converse) spontaneously. Hence, she exercises extreme caution in all her dealings and is here seen to be wrestling with the details of Fanny's plans, especially since she has misgivings about what she senses Fanny is actually saying: that she intends to cultivate Sparkler's affections.

Much to Fanny's amusement, the first part of her plan falls neatly into place when 'by the merest accident, of course!' Sparkler's figure is perceived at their door apparently enquiring if anyone is in.

In effect the *swain* was standing up in his gondola, card-case in hand, affecting to put the question to a servant. This conjunction of circumstances led to his immediately afterwards presenting himself before the young ladies in a posture, which in ancient times would not have been considered one of favourable augury for his suit; since the gondoliers of the young ladies, having been put to some inconvenience by the chase, so neatly brought their own boat in the gentlest collision with the bark of Mr Sparkler, as *to tip that gentleman over like a larger species of ninepin, and cause him to exhibit the soles of his shoes to the object of his dearest wishes: while the nobler portions of his anatomy struggled at the bottom of his boat in the arms of one of his men.*

However, as Miss Fanny called out with much concern, Was the gentleman hurt, Mr Sparkler rose more restored than might have been expected, and stammered for himself with blushes, 'Not at all so.' *Miss Fanny had no recollection of having ever seen him before*, and was passing on, with a *distant inclination of her head*, when he announced himself by name. Even then *she was in a difficulty from being unable to call it to mind*, until he explained that he had had the honour of seeing her at Martigny. *Then she remembered him and hoped his mother was well.* [Book II, Chap 6: 552]

Despite his being variously derided by Fanny as a 'gaby', 'young fool', 'idiot', 'creature', 'simpleton', and a 'noddle', up until this point, *narratorial* description of the pursuing Sparkler has been restricted to his 'weak appearance and his recurring 'eye in the window' (550). The owner of the eye is now subjected to the narrator's scrutiny. He is introduced to us as being a 'swain', holding his card-case and 'affecting' to ask something of the Dorrits' servant. 'Swain' is an interesting choice of word for a young man, having connotations also of a lover, a rustic or a peasant and, therefore suggestive of passive double-voicing, particularly in the light of the ensuing comedy – a hilarious account of the hapless Sparkler presenting himself feet first to the object of his desire.

Decisively capitalizing on the myth originated by Mrs Merdle (and very much in the *manner* of Mrs Merdle) Fanny expresses 'distant' concern, as she would to a stranger, before continuing indoors. Even after Sparkler announces himself by name she affects to have no recollection of

him until he reminds her of their meeting at Martigny. Only then does she ‘remember’ him sufficiently to enquire after, who else but, his mother.

The discourse between Fanny and Sparkler becomes all the more interesting when contextualized against various discourses used between Mrs Merdle and Fanny in which a continual battle for authority and domination has prevailed. Small wonder, then, that Sparkler’s recollection of their initial meeting in London is forcibly obliterated from his memory by his being ambushed (on separate occasions) by the combined authority of these two redoubtable forces. “The authoritative word,” says Bakhtin, “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally” (DiN 342). Bakhtin goes on to describe the authoritative word as being “indissolubly fused with its authority” which can be anything from a religion or institution to a person, adding that one cannot “agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part” (DiN 343). Faced, therefore, with the indisputable authority arising from the unholy alliance formed between two indomitable forces, any opposing argument made by the diffident Sparkler is doomed to fail and so, from this point on, he simply accepts, wholesale, their version of events.

‘Thank you,’ stammered Mr Sparkler, ‘*she’s uncommonly well – at least, poorly.*’

‘In Venice?’ said Miss Fanny.

‘In Rome,’ Mr Sparkler answered. ‘I am here by myself, *myself*. I came to call upon Mr Edward Dorrit myself. Indeed, upon Mr Dorrit likewise. *In fact, upon the family.*’

Turning *graciously* to the attendants, Miss Fanny inquired whether her papa or brother was within? The reply being that they were both within, Mr Sparkler humbly offered his arm. Miss Fanny accepting it, was squired up the great staircase by Mr Sparkler, who, if he still believed (*which there is not any reason to doubt*) that *she had no nonsense about her, rather deceived himself*. [Book II, Chap 6: 552 – 53]

Bakhtin repeatedly alludes to the nature of language being heteroglot and thus representing, at any given moment, “the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions,” not only between the present and the past, but also between “different socio-ideological groups,” “tendencies,” and “circles” (MB 291). We have seen how Fanny is able to slide quite comfortably between the idiolects of one social group and another but Sparkler struggles with formulating replies in a language suited to a particular occasion and company. In response to Fanny’s enquiry after his mother, his words appear to be waging an internal war with one another. He starts off by articulating the conventional social response (‘she’s uncommonly well’) but cannot quite see this type of response through to the end. Rather like Amy his innate candour impels him in the direction of truth and the stock reply trails off into a direct contradiction. But this real, reconsidered response is ignored by Fanny who is more interested in the whereabouts of Mrs Merdle than she is in his quirks of conscience. He answers that Mrs Merdle is in Rome and

repeats that he is by himself. Whilst, on one level, the repetition may simply signify a habit common among those who are not particularly adept at discourse, on another level, inner dialogic may also be present for there can be no doubt that he wishes to emphasise to Fanny that his mother is not with him. In other words, at the present time, he does not fall under her domain, her say-so and, consequently, he can do as he pleases.

Shortly thereafter, there follows another correction – he says he has come to see Edward, and Mr Dorrit but quickly changes that to include the whole family. Despite having been surrounded all his life by wealth and snobbery, it is obvious that he has not quite mastered the idiolect of the social elite as he, once again, awkwardly amends his first, conventional response to one that is more truthful. None of this goes unnoticed by Fanny who, still playing to perfection the part of the seasoned society lady, graciously receives him in a manner befitting of Mrs Merdle herself. The account of Fanny being squired up the stairs by the humble Sparkler is thus decisively and doubly parodic; having not one, but two referential objects: Fanny, whose deception is duly noted by the narrator, and Sparkler who labours under the fatally flawed notion that Fanny has ‘no nonsense about her’.

[. . .] *Mr Dorrit welcomed the visitor with the highest urbanity and most courtly manners. He inquired particularly after Mrs Merdle. He inquired particularly after Mr Merdle. Mr Sparkler said, or rather twitched out of himself in small pieces by the shirt collar, that Mrs Merdle having completely used up her place in the country, and also her house at Brighton, and being, of course, unable, don't you see, to remain in London when there wasn't a soul there, and not feeling herself this year quite up to visiting about at people's places, had resolved to have a touch at Rome, where a woman like herself, with a proverbially fine appearance, and with no nonsense about her, couldn't fail to be a great acquisition. As to Mr Merdle, he was so much wanted by the men in the city and the rest of those places, and was such a doosed extraordinary phenomenon in Buying and Banking and that, that Mr Sparkler doubted if the monetary system of the country would be able to spare him; though that his work was occasionally one too many for him, and that he would be all the better for a temporary shy at an entirely new scene and climate, *Mister Sparkler did not conceal*. As to himself, Mr Sparkler conveyed to the Dorrit family that he was going, *on rather particular business*, wherever they were going.*

This *immense conversational achievement* required time, but was effected. Being effected, Mr Dorrit expressed his hope that Mr Sparkler would shortly dine with them. Mr Sparkler received the idea so kindly that Mr Dorrit asked what he was going to do that day, for instance? As he was going to do nothing that day (*his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified*), he was secured without postponement; being further bound over to accompany the ladies to the Opera in the evening.

At dinner-time Mr Sparkler rose out of the sea, like *Venus's son taking after his mother*, made a *splendid appearance* ascending the great staircase. If Fanny had been charming in the morning she was *now thrice charming*, very becomingly dressed in her most *suitable colours*, and with an air of negligence upon her that doubled *Mr Sparkler's fetters, and riveted them*. [Book II, Chap 6: 553 – 54]

Bakhtin advances the view that “the novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language” that is, a perception “that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language” because it has been made conscious of the “vast plenitude” of national and social languages. Whilst all these languages are capable of being “languages of truth,” they are, at the same time, all “relative, reified and limited” simply because they are languages of cross-sections of daily life (DiN 366 –



67). Hence, the ideas depicted and expressed in the novel are orchestrated “by the diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices” that flourish under various conditions such as, “social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles, of passing fashions” (DiN 262 – 63). In a successful novel, even the language of the author is not exempt from dialogization, becoming itself “a carrier of social values”. As such, it is subject to being “contested, contestable, and contesting” as one of the many languages in a “Galilean linguistic universe” (MB 314).

In the excerpt above, the author chooses to relay the communication between Mr Dorrit and Sparkler by way of indirect, reported speech which becomes a means to convey his own view of the idiosyncrasies of his characters. For Bakhtin, the comic style of writing demands “a lively two-and-fro movement” in the author’s relation to language, “a continual shifting of the distance between author and language, so that first some, then other aspects of language are thrown into relief” (DiN 301). As he says, the style would be monotonous if the author did not exaggerate “now strongly, now weakly, one or other aspect of the ‘common language’, sometimes abruptly exposing its inadequacy to its object and sometimes, on the contrary, becoming one with it, maintaining an almost imperceptible distance” ( DiN 302). In so doing, however, the author’s idiolect also becomes subject to scrutiny, thus deepening and enriching one’s sense of the potentials contained within languages. For instance, when Sparkler ‘doubts if the monetary system of the country would be able to spare [Mr Merdle]’, it is clear that the type of elegant phraseology used does not emanate directly from Sparkler (whose speaking style is vastly different). Rather, it provides both a double-voiced ‘take’ on Sparkler as well as simultaneously drawing attention to itself as a self-conscious, narratorial construct which mimics Mr Dorrit’s use of language.

Similarly self-conscious is Mr Dorrit’s reported speech, in which one senses his desire to be accepted into the social circle of the Merdles. Notwithstanding the unfortunate gaps in his social life, in welcoming Sparkler with the ‘highest urbanity’ and ‘most courtly manners’ he assumes the manner of the consummate gentleman, inquiring ‘particularly’ after Mrs Merdle and inquiring ‘particularly after Mr Merdle’. At the other end of the scale, the socially inept and naïve Sparkler does not ‘conceal’ but, as nervous people are often apt to do, he offers vast amounts of irrelevant information regarding his parents, ‘twitched out of himself in small pieces

by the shirt collar'. Utilizing the idiolect of the elite, Mr Dorrit expresses 'his hope that Mr Sparkler would shortly dine with them'.

By contrast, Sparkler's chosen idiolect (his 'no nonsense' and 'proverbially fine' mother, having 'used up' her two residences, having resolved 'to have a touch at Rome' and the 'doosed' extraordinary phenomenon of his stepfather in 'Buying and Banking') reflects a different social aspect, perhaps characteristic of passing fashions within his age group and social circle. But even more significantly, the awkwardness of his expression marks him as a kind of novelistic ingénu or fool. Having just said that he was on 'rather particular business' (business that just happens to coincide with whatever the Dorrits are doing), he then foolishly contradicts himself by saying that 'he was doing nothing that day' (dialogised by the narrator as 'his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly suited') and accepts with alacrity Mr Dorrit's invitation to dine, and the latter's suggestion that Sparkler accompany his daughters to the Opera that evening.

The inclusion of some sort of fool is, in Bakhtin's opinion, a central aspect of the novel as a genre, with each novel structuring its particular image of the fool along the lines of "one or other aspect of stupidity and incomprehension" (DiN 404). Another typical phenomenon occurring in novelistic prose is the pairing of "incomprehension with comprehension, of stupidity, simplicity and naiveté with intellect" (DiN 403). Incomprehension "bestranges" (makes strange, defamiliarizes) the world" (MB 361) and when the novelist regards the world through the eyes of a fool he or she is taught "a sort of prose vision, the vision of a world confused by conventions of pathos and by falsity" (DiN 404). Therefore, by shining a light on stupidity, the novel paradoxically teaches "prose intelligence" or "prose wisdom" (DiN 404). Sparkler's basic incomprehension of falsity affords one such occasion for teaching prose intelligence. His lack of understanding of undertones, of finely nuanced meanings of language or actions, heightens our own awareness of these qualities whilst his simple, face-value acceptance of everything both amuses us and warns us that only fools fall into similar kinds of traps. His subconscious equation of Fanny with his mother is a case in point. From his limited perspective they are not so very different from each other – both are outwardly handsome, both command his affection and both have 'no nonsense' about them. From the reader's perspective, however, it is plain to see that they both have a great deal of 'nonsense' about them and we perceive that he is completely and conclusively dominated by his mother and is rapidly en route to becoming similarly controlled by Fanny, whose negligent air as she ascends the staircase in her 'most suitable

colours' and 'thrice charming' attitude doubles and rivets his 'fettters'. However, despite Sparkler's naiveté generally misleading him, oddly it also enables certain insights such as a dim awareness of a vague similarity between the two women.

*Descending* into the sea again after dinner, and *ascending* out of it at the Opera staircase, preceded by one of their gondoliers, like an attendant Merman, with a great linen lantern, they entered their box, and Mr Sparkler entered into an evening of agony. The theatre, being dark, and the box being light, several visitors lounged in during their representation; in whom Fanny was so interested, and in conversation with whom *she fell into such charming attitudes*, as she had *little confidences with them, and little disputes* concerning the identity of people in distant boxes, that *the wretched Sparkler hated all mankind*. But he had two consolations at the close of the performance. *She gave him her fan to hold* while she adjusted her cloak, and it was his *blessed privilege* to give her his arm downstairs again. These *crumbs of encouragement*, Mr Sparkler thought, would just keep him going; *and it is not impossible that Miss Dorrit thought so too*. [Book II, Chap 6: 555 – 56]

There is nothing unusual in the act of 'descending' into, and 'ascending' from out of the sea in order to get from one location to another in a city linked by a series of canals, but the words take on new meanings as the naïve and gullible Sparkler is caught up in a sea of confusion, see-sawing helplessly between ecstasy and agony as the redoubtable Fanny closes in and tightens her hold on him. As Bakhtin sees it, the real action of novels constitutes "a complex play of values and tones, as discourses and their speakers orient themselves to each other [and] the most important place where this complexity is developed is in the voice of the author" (MB 326). So it is in the above passage in which there is no direct speech between Fanny and Sparkler but, as reported speech, it is decidedly dialogic, as Fanny cynically ensnares the uncomprehending and 'wretched' Sparkler.

Bakhtin envisages stupidity or incomprehension in the novel as always being implicated in language, at the heart of which "always lies a polemical failure to understand someone else's discourse, someone else's pathos-charged lie that has appropriated the world" (DiN 403). As Morson and Emerson put it: "the fool *fails to understand* pathos-charged discourses that have become habitual" (MB 360). As a character in a novel, the fool thus provides "a way to explore the nature of people's inner life" (MB 402) and when "transformed into the *chudak* (odd-ball, crank), the fool becomes an important means for exposing the internal man" (FTC 164). Despite being somewhat too conventional to quite fit the bill of 'fool', 'oddball' or 'crank', Sparkler obviously has no understanding of the verbal shenanigans Fanny conducts, no inkling of the fact that her remarks are, in fact, carefully calculated, down to the occasional morsel she feeds him; he simply believes that he is as far from her thoughts as her actions seem to signify. Her role of tormentor to his tormented – arch-schemer to his unsuspecting candour – is cemented by Sparkler's willingness to accept that her 'crumbs of encouragement' were just about sufficient to

‘keep him going’ and the narrator’s wry comment that ‘it is not impossible that Miss Dorrit thought so too’.

Mrs General, always on her coach-box keeping the *proprieties* well together, took *pains* to form a surface on her very dear young friend, and Mrs General’s very dear young friend *tried hard to receive it*. Hard as she had tried in her laborious life to attain many ends, *she had never tried harder than she did now, to be varnished by Mrs General*. It made her anxious and ill at ease to be operated upon by that smoothing hand, it is true; *but she submitted herself to the family want in its greatness as she had submitted herself to the family want in its littleness*, and yielded to her own inclinations in this thing no more than she had yielded to her hunger itself, in the days when she had saved her dinner that her father might have his supper.

One comfort that she had under the *Ordeal by General* was more sustaining to her, and made her more grateful than to a less devoted and affectionate spirit, not habituated to her struggles and sacrifices, might appear quite reasonable; and indeed, it may often be observed in life, that *spirits like Little Dorrit do not appear to reason half as carefully as folks who get the better of them*. The continued kindness of her sister was this comfort to Little Dorrit. It was *nothing to her that the kindness took the form of tolerant patronage*; she was used to that. It was nothing to her that it *kept her in a tributary position*, and showed her in attendance on the flaming car in which Miss Fanny sat on an elevated seat, exacting homage; she sought no better place. Always admiring Fanny’s beauty and grace, and readiness, and not now asking herself how much of her disposition to be strongly attached to Fanny was due to her own heart, and how much to Fanny’s, she gave all the sisterly fondness *her great heart contained*.

The *wholesale* amount of *Prunes and Prism* which Mrs General infused into the family life, combined with the *perpetual plunges* made by Fanny into society, left but a very small residue of *any natural deposit* at the bottom of the mixture. *This rendered confidences with Fanny doubly precious to Little Dorrit*, and heightened the relief they afforded her.

‘Amy,’ said Fanny to her one night when they were alone, after a day so tiring that Little Dorrit was quite worn out, though Fanny would have taken another dip into society with the greatest pleasure in life, *‘I am going to put something in your head. You won’t guess what it is, I suspect.’*

‘I don’t think that’s likely, dear,’ said Little Dorrit.

‘Come, *I’ll give you a clue*, child,’ said Fanny. *‘Mrs General.’*

Prunes and Prism, in a thousand combinations, having been wearily in the ascendant all day – everything having been surface and varnish and show without substance – Little Dorrit looked as if she had hoped that Mrs General was safely tucked up in bed for some hours.

‘*Now, can you guess, Amy?*’ said Fanny.

‘*No, dear. Unless I have done anything,*’ said Little Dorrit, *rather alarmed, and meaning anything calculated to crack varnish and ruffle surface.*

Fanny was so *very much amused* by the misgiving, that she took up her favourite fan (being then seated at her dressing table with her armoury of *cruel* instruments about her, most of them *reeking from the heart of Sparkler*), and tapped her sister frequently on the nose with it, *laughing* all the time.

‘Oh, our Amy, our Amy!’ said Fanny. *‘What a timid little goose our Amy is!* But this is nothing to laugh at. On the contrary, I am very cross, my dear.’

‘*As it is not with me, Fanny, I don’t mind,*’ returned her sister smiling. [Book II, Chap 7: 556 - 58]

In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Holquist describes “official discourse” as “resisting communication” by virtue of its being, “at its purest a utopian language so compelling that no one would speak anything else”. He explains that this type of discourse, in its extreme form, is “totalitarian,” in its assumption that no other languages (and, consequently, selves), exist beyond the one it conceives of as “normative”. Refusing to recognise alterity and abhorring difference, it seeks “a single, collective self”. For him, official discourse constitutes “autism of the masses” – a collective sort of autism in which people are unable to properly communicate with others “because they (apparently) are not aware of them. In the totalitarian state”, he argues, “language seeks to drain the first person pronoun of any particularity” (52). An obvious case in point is Mrs

*General* who, both lacking and abhorring any *particularity*, is intent on a single mission: that of infusing so much ‘Prunes and Prism’ into family life so as to leave little ‘natural deposit at the bottom of the mixture’. As Holquist reminds us, “Official languages, even those that are not totalitarian, are masks for ideologies of many different kinds, but they all privilege *oneness*; the more totalitarian (monologic) will be the claims of its language” (52 – 3).

Of the two sisters, it comes as no surprise that the unaffectedly natural, sincere, and eager-to-please Amy becomes the ideal target for wholesale instruction from Mrs General. In her literary biography, *Charles Dickens*, Lyn Pykett picks up on Amy’s propensity for smoothing things over, observing that even though “the centre of the novel’s redemptive plot” can be located in Amy’s “childlike self-sacrificing, self-effacing femininity,” there are negative effects arising from these qualities – one of these being her complicit role in perpetuating her father’s “selfish delusions” of gentility. By concealing the “harsh truths of her own and her sibling’s lives from him,” Pykett argues that “Little Dorrit ‘varnishes’ the cracked surfaces of life just as thoroughly as Mrs General does” (154). She has a good point – despite its being a hopeless cause, Amy tries to appease those around her by trying desperately hard to be ‘varnished’, by submitting to those around her and by avoiding confrontation at all costs, especially with Fanny, whose ‘continued kindness’ to her is her ‘one comfort’ under the ‘Ordeal by General’. We are told that ‘spirits’ such as Amy are not able ‘to reason half as carefully, as the folks who get the better of them’. Clearly Mrs General can be added to the extensive list of those who ‘get the better’ of her. Although Pykett makes no mention of the inequality of Amy and Fanny’s relationship (she makes no mention of Fanny at all), it is obvious that Fanny, too, holds sway over her. Narratorial dialogic is evident in the suggestion that Amy’s loyalty and sisterly love for Fanny are more likely to emanate from her own good heart rather than from Fanny’s virtues.

The difference between the sisters’ reasoning powers is apparent when Fanny introduces the subject of Mrs General. She knows that Amy will not have the slightest idea as to what she is about to ‘put in’ her ‘head’ and takes to teasing her almost as mercilessly as she has teased Sparkler, ‘tapping her frequently on the nose’ with her current weapon of choice (her favourite fan) from among her ‘armour of cruel instruments’ – cruel because her array of feminine accoutrements have been recently put to use to lure and torture Sparkler simultaneously. Amy’s apprehensive misgivings so vastly amuse Fanny that, whilst not exactly equating Amy with the ‘fool’ Sparkler, she does parody her (‘Oh our Amy, our Amy!’) and laughingly refer to her as a ‘timid goose’. Amy, by contrast, is so afraid to ‘crack varnish and ruffle surface’, that she, rather

like Sparkler, would far rather submit to ridicule than disapproval. Consequently she experiences enormous relief when she realises that she is not the current target of her sister's disapproval.

Amy's apparent lack of perception is perhaps more common than Fanny's keenly developed nose for slight change. In fact, Bakhtin puts forward the idea that events that occur frequently appear normal and are often the most difficult to notice. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations*, "The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something because it is always before one's eyes. And this means that we fail to be struck by what, when seen, is most striking and most powerful)" (para. 129). Morson and Emerson observe that it is "in this sense," that "Bakhtin's various theories of language, the novel, the self, and society reflect his concern with prosaic events" (MB 34).

Dissatisfied with Amy's underdeveloped understanding of what is 'before one's eyes', in respect of Mrs General, Fanny remonstrates with her:

'Ah, but I do mind,' said Fanny, 'and so will you, Pet, when I enlighten you. *Has it never struck you, Amy, that Pa is monstrously polite to Mrs General?*'

Amy, murmuring '*No,*' *looked quite confounded*

'No; I dare say not. But he is,' said Fanny. 'He is, Amy. And remember my words. *Mrs General has designs on Pa!*'

'Dear Fanny, do you think it possible that Mrs General has designs on any one?'

'Do I think it possible?' retorted Fanny. 'My love, I know it. I tell you she has designs on Pa. And more than that, I tell you *Pa considers her such a wonder, such a paragon of accomplishment, and such an acquisition to our family, that he is ready to get himself into a state of perfect infatuation with her at any moment.* And that opens a pretty picture of things, I hope? Think of me with Mrs General for a Mama!'

Little Dorrit did not reply, 'Think of me with Mrs General for a Mama;' but she looked anxious, and seriously inquired what had led Fanny to these conclusions.

'*Lord, my darling,*' said Fanny, *tartly.* '*You might as well ask me how I know when a man is struck with myself! But, of course I do know. It happens pretty often; but I always know it. I know this in much the same way, I suppose. At all events, I know it.*'

'You never heard Papa say anything?'

'Say anything?' repeated Fanny. '*My dearest, darling child,* what necessity has he had yet awhile, to say anything?'

'And you have never heard Mrs General say anything?'

'My goodness me, Amy,' returned Fanny, '*is she the sort of woman to say anything? Isn't it perfectly plain and clear that she has nothing to do at present but to hold herself upright, keep her aggravating gloves on, and go sweeping about? Say anything? If she had the ace of trumps in her hand at whist, she wouldn't say anything, child. It would come out when she played it.*'

'At least, you may be mistaken, Fanny. Now may you not?'

'O yes, *I may be*' said Fanny, '*but I am not.* However, I am glad you can contemplate such an escape, my dear, and I am glad that you can take this for the present with sufficient coolness to think of such a chance. It makes me hope that you may be able to bear the connection. I should not be able to bear it, and I should not try. *I'd marry young Sparkler first.*'

'*O, you would never marry him, Fanny, under any circumstances.*'

'*Upon my word, my dear,*' rejoined that young lady *with exceeding indifference,* 'I wouldn't positively answer even for that. There's no knowing what might happen. *Especially since I would have many opportunities, afterwards of treating that woman, his mother, in her own style. Which I most decidedly should not be slow to avail myself of, Amy.*'

No more passed between the sisters then; but *what had passed gave the two subjects of Mrs General and Mr Sparkler great prominence in Little Dorrit's mind, and thenceforth she thought very much of both.*  
[Book II, Chap 7: 558 – 59]

The conversation appears to be an example of what Harris calls *overt* dialogism (447) as it appears to constitute a simple verbal exchange between two people. However, it soon becomes apparent that the exchange is a more complex one. To begin with there is a sharp contrast between Amy's measured and hesitant approach and Fanny's rather more colourful idiolect, in which she consciously parodies not only her father, who considers Mrs General to be such 'a paragon of accomplishment and such an acquisition to our family' (delivered in his particular idiolect) that he is 'monstrously polite' and 'ready to get himself into a state of perfect infatuation with her at any moment' (Fanny's rendition), but also Mrs General, who does nothing but 'hold herself upright, keep her aggravating gloves on, and go sweeping about'. The freedom of expression Fanny gravitates towards when she is in Amy's company is quite marked – one simply cannot imagine her using this type of vernacular in the presence of someone she may wish to impress. Clearly, she does not need to impress Amy, whom she constantly undermines, albeit affectionately, with her constant use of the epithets 'Pet', 'dearest', 'darling' and 'child', and whom she 'tartly' instructs in the art of discernment. Intuitively recognising what is really at work behind Mrs General's carefully constructed façade, she discerns that her father is easy prey for the cagey Mrs General who plays her cards close to her chest. It may be easy to fool Amy and their father but Fanny is determined not to be similarly taken in by her schemes.

Despite Amy's natural tendency to relate to, and be understood by others or, in Bakhtinian terms, to be found "in and through the other" (PDP 287), it does not follow that this qualifies her to assess character accurately. Put another way, although Amy frequently enables people to become more fully themselves through their interaction with her, she has a tendency to take people at face value and is thus not always able to acknowledge the flaws in those whose minds and hearts are not similarly motivated by generosity and kindness. That is not to say that she does not experience instant aversion towards blatantly evil characters such as Blandois, but she is unable to articulate those thoughts in a reasoned and logical manner. Fanny, on the other hand is far more adept at identifying and giving voice to specific and astute observations, regarding people's idiosyncrasies, intentions, weaknesses and flaws. As she explains to Amy: she simply 'knows' these things about her moon-struck father and Mrs General just as clearly as she is able to intuit a romantic interest in herself.

The conclusion of the conversation between the sisters clearly defines what is important to each girl. Whilst Amy is appalled at her sister's assertion that she'd rather marry Edmund Sparkler than suffer a connection between their father and Mrs General, Fanny sees possibilities in a future with the bumbling Sparkler, not the least of which is that an alliance with him would afford her the chance to avenge herself on his mother. In Bakhtinian terms, one might say that she sees the future as being open to various possibilities (EaN 30). As she says, 'There's no knowing what might happen' and she 'wouldn't answer positively' to the likelihood of her not marrying Sparkler.

Discussing the way in which characters are developed in novels, Bakhtin directs our attention to the difference between what he calls monologic and polyphonic authors. Whilst, in his opinion, monologic authors never relinquish their points of view to that of their characters, in a polyphonic work, once the characters (initially created by the author) come into being, they are able to "partially escape his control and prevent him from knowing in advance how they will answer him" (MB 240). Characters thus become, "*not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*" (PDP 7). He initially hailed Dostoevsky as the only truly polyphonic author, one who changed the novel by creating characters who were "governed neither by plot (as in the epic) nor by an impersonal authorial idea (as in monologic works," feeling that his characters developed their own ideas, "at a distance from the author" (MB 9). Rather than simply being represented as "characters," Dostoevsky's heroes became real "personalities" (MB 263) with autonomy to voice opinions and viewpoints that hold sway over those of the narrator. He later expanded his position on polyphony to extend to "all novels and to all prose gravitating toward the novel" (MB 249 – 50). Other authors have since cultivated different methods to achieve a polyphonic approach and like Dostoevsky they, too, rely on one or other form of 'surprisingness" (MB 259). In other words, when characters make choices or engage in dialogue that are surprising to the reader, they reveal an *openendedness* – a type of *eventfulness*, or creative process which distinguishes them as "personalities" as opposed to being mere "characters".

Clearly, Dickens intended Fanny to be seen as a personality deserving of ongoing interest and study. In fact, in one of his various 'mems', he reminds himself to "work through Fanny, suspicion of Mrs General's having a design on Mr Dorrit. Also the Sparkler affair [his infatuation with Fanny]". His note is followed by an additional reminder: "Lead, very carefully on" (Slater 441). One might argue, therefore, that rather like Amy, Dickens may not have



approved or recommended Fanny's decisions but, like Dostoevsky, he was able to surrender to a dialogic conception of the truth by 'allowing the consciousness of a character to be truly 'someone else's consciousness'' (MB 239 and PDP 7).

One of the few comments I was able to locate regarding Fanny appears to overlook her potential for surprise and opts instead for a somewhat mundane interpretation of her actions and character. In Alan Shelston's *Dickens: Dombey and Son and Little Dorrit*, Lionel Trilling simply observes that "Fanny sells herself to the devil, damns herself entirely in order to torture the woman who had once questioned her social position" (151). Fanny's apparent 'exceeding indifference' does seem to suggest that she is nonchalant about selling herself to the devil for very little return but I incline towards a view that her careless attitude is carefully constructed to conceal an inner agitation. What Fanny's admission to Amy that she would 'marry young Sparkler first' *does* show, in my view, is that she is able to interact on a surprisingly natural level with Amy – one that reveals her interiority and personality. This suggests that, whether or not Fanny acknowledges it at this point, what constitutes her selfhood is partially mediated by Amy, the only person to whom Fanny is able, at times, to articulate her innermost fears and desires (notwithstanding the fact that, more often than not, her chosen idiolect hovers between exaggerated carelessness and high drama). Of course one could also argue that Amy, who has much to learn about the ways of the world, is also mediated by Fanny who proves to be a keen observer of the way Amy acts and thinks and is highly skilled at eliciting responses from Amy.

In the passage that follows the family have removed to Rome where another of Fanny's skills emerges when she is afforded the opportunity of treating Mrs Merdle 'in her own style'.

*Another modification of Prunes and Prism insinuated itself on Little Dorrit's notice* very shortly after their arrival. They received an early visit from Mrs Merdle, who led that extensive department of life in the Eternal City that winter; and the skilful manner in which she and Fanny fenced with one another on the occasion, *almost made her quiet sister wink, like the glittering of small-swords.*

'So delighted,' said Mrs Merdle, 'to resume an acquaintance *so inauspiciously begun at Martigny.*'

'*At Martigny, of course,*' said Fanny. 'Charmed, I am sure!'

'I understand,' said Mrs Merdle, 'from my son Edmund Sparkler, that he has already improved that chance occasion. *He has returned quite transported from Venice.*'

'*Indeed?*' returned the *careless* Fanny. '*Was he there long?*'

'I might refer that question to Mr Dorrit,' said Mrs Merdle, turning the bosom towards that gentleman; 'Edmund having been so much indebted to him for rendering his stay agreeable.' 'Oh, pray don't speak of it,' returned Fanny. 'I believe *Papa* had the pleasure of inviting Mr Sparkler twice or thrice, - but it was nothing. We had so many people about us, and kept such open house, that if he had that pleasure, it was less than nothing.' 'Except, my dear,' said Mr Dorrit, 'except - ha - as it afforded me unusual gratification to - hum - show by any means, however slight and worthless, the - ha, hum - high estimation in which, in - ha - common with the rest of the world, I hold so distinguished and princely a character as Mr Merdle's.' *The bosom* received this tribute in *its* most engaging manner.

Mr Merdle,' observed Fanny, *as a means of dismissing Mr Sparkler* into the background, 'is quite a theme of Papa's, you must know, Mrs Merdle.'

‘I have been – ha – disappointed, madam,’ said Mr Dorrit, to understand from Mr Sparkler that there is no great – hum – probability of Mr Merdle’s coming abroad.’

‘Why indeed, said Mrs Merdle, ‘he is so much engaged and in such request, that I fear not. He has not been able to get abroad for years. *You, Miss Dorrit, I believe have been almost continually abroad for a long time.*’

‘*Oh dear yes,*’ drawled Fanny with the greatest hardihood. ‘*An immense number of years.*’

‘So I should have inferred,’ said Mrs Merdle.

‘*Exactly,*’ said Fanny.

‘I trust, however,’ resumed Mr Dorrit, ‘that if I have not the – hum great advantage of becoming known to Mr Merdle on this side of the Alps or Mediterranean, I shall have the honour on returning to England. It is an honour I particularly desire and shall particularly esteem.’

‘Mr Merdle,’ said Mrs Merdle, *who had been looking admiringly at Fanny through her eye-glass,* ‘will esteem it, I am sure, no less.’

[Book II, Chap 8: 566 – 67]

Continuing with my proposition that, to a certain extent, Amy is meditated by Fanny, it becomes apparent from the outset of this passage that Fanny has had an influence on the way in which Amy begins to perceive people and events. The first sentence intimates that, following their previous conversation about Mrs General and Mrs Merdle, Amy has been given pause for thought, and is now able to discern a certain similarity between Mrs General and Mrs Merdle – one that has to do with her recognition that Mrs Merdle uses a ‘modification’ of Mrs General’s “Prunes and Prism” as a means through which she conducts her shallow discourse. Unlike the unimaginative and static Mrs General, Mrs Merdle exhibits formidable skill for word power-play but, like Mrs General, she demonstrates no hint of growth, of “surprisingness” or of a developing selfhood. The shift in Amy’s awareness is accentuated by the fact that she finally begins to appreciate, retrospectively, the ‘skilful manner’ in which Fanny and Mrs Merdle had ‘fenced with one another’ in Harley Street, with Fanny consciously adopting Mrs Merdle’s idiolect as a means of countering the matriarch’s arguments. Here, Fanny’s similar use of mimicry bedazzles her ‘quiet sister’ to the extent that it makes Amy ‘wink, like the glittering of small swords’ as the fiction of their first encounter ‘inauspiciously begun at Martigny’ is introduced by Mrs Merdle and seamlessly perpetuated by Fanny. Her response, “At Martigny of course’ and afterthought, ‘Charmed, I am sure!’ carefully observe the niceties of Mrs Merdle’s idiom but simultaneously serve as a deliberately double-voiced rejoinder (laced with venom) and covert reminder to Mrs Merdle of their prior meeting at Harley Street.

A major point of interest is that each of the three participants (Mrs Merdle, Fanny and Mr Dorrit), has his or her own, quite disparate and disguised agenda – agendas that begin to emerge in a conversation which ostensibly obeys the rules of polite and benign exchange but which is actually fraught with innuendo, ambiguity and personal desire, especially for Fanny who wants nothing more than to beat Mrs Merdle at her own game. Still smarting from their first encounter she is determined to exact retribution on the woman who had once tried to buy her off.

It becomes immediately obvious that Mrs Merdle, who has consciously ‘forgotten’ Fanny’s beginnings, now sees her as a likely and desirable match for her bungling son and is anxious to promote the match. Fanny, who presumably immediately recognises this desire, seizes upon her god-given opportunity to torment the woman. She does so by affecting careless ignorance of Sparkler’s ecstatic feelings and feigning forgetfulness of his visits on account of his being just one of the great number of visitors entertained by her father in Venice. In an earlier passage we learned that Fanny was fond of refusing Mrs General’s recommendations but stored them up for use at a later time (Book II, Chap 5: 334). This meeting constitutes such an occasion. In one fell swoop, Fanny devalues Sparkler and, deploying a combination of Mrs General’s preferred idiolect and certain techniques she has learned from Mrs Merdle herself, she, oh so politely, puts down her interlocutor. Thus thwarted by Fanny, Mrs Merdle has no recourse but to thank *Mr Dorrit*, and not Fanny, for making Sparkler’s stay ‘agreeable’.

Mr Dorrit, of course, is characteristically oblivious to the overtones, undertones, insinuations, hints and implications of conversation between the two women and, brushing off his hospitality as the least he could do for someone with ties to so ‘distinguished and princely’ a character as Mr Merdle, he diverts the conversation away from Sparkler and toward the object of *his* desire, whose acquaintance he is desperate to make. Granted that it is only later that Mr Merdle is unmasked and seen for what he really is we are, nevertheless, reminded of Bakhtin’s suggestion that “the unmasking of expressions in common language” has a tendency to “infect the words unmasked with alien intentions” with the result that subsequent use of those words bears “a reminder of the kind of irony to which they have been subjected” (MB 331 – 32). Mr Dorrit uses the accolades ‘distinguished’ and ‘princely’ quite naturally and his view is in accordance with common opinion at the time, but later, these same epithets take on an ironic, even sinister meaning when Mr Merdle is exposed as a fraudster and thief. Morson and Emerson make the point that this “influx of sense” can continue over into later scenes and infect both author’s and other character’s inner speech, ‘unawares’ (MB 332). Mr Dorrit’s method of trying to secure a meeting with Mr Merdle is to impress, compliment and, generally, pander to Mrs Merdle and we are informed, in an act of narratorial dialogism intended to dehumanise her, that ‘*The bosom* received this tribute in *its* most engaging manner’(emphasis added). As Morson and Emerson observe, “In describing characters to whom he is unsympathetic, Dickens will use [. . .] ‘objectionable’ words to set up a dialogue of values” (MB 332).

The fiction begun at Martigny and here endorsed by Fanny becomes a ‘fact’ tacitly agreed upon by the erstwhile adversaries when Fanny coolly confirms Mrs Merdle’s ‘belief’ that she has been ‘almost continually abroad for a long time’. Mrs Merdle’s choice of the word ‘abroad’ is an interesting euphemism. Discussing Bakhtin’s dialogical view of the dynamics of discourse, David Danow muses that aside from dictionary definitions, “there is no such thing as ‘the word as such’” and that “as a ‘living thing’ the word is always contextual,” bearing an ‘actual meaning’ that corresponds to the intention of the addressor at each individual utterance – none of which will entirely coincide” (39). Whilst the uttered word of an individual at a given moment, “owes its ‘composition’ – its nuances, connotations, and the meanings already adhering to it – to previous usage by numerous other individuals” it is simultaneously directed toward the “as yet unuttered responsive word of still others” (39). The word is thus orientated “both toward the past [. . .] and toward the future, as a reply anticipating some further response” (39). It can be either accepted or rejected or “ironically turned back on itself” (40); it opens up some possibilities for dialogue and forecloses on others. Even though the actual word ‘abroad’ has not previously been used by Fanny and Mrs Merdle in conversation with each other, one may conclude that the implication is covertly communicated by Mrs Merdle (who seeks a response) and understood by Fanny, whose hardy response, “Oh dear yes,” is designed, in turn to deny Mrs Merdle the satisfaction of discomfiting her.

Absence of narratorial commentary (is this intentional?) cannot help but leave one wondering what, if anything, Mr Dorrit makes of this turn of conversation. Because he is so self-involved, because he is so singularly driven by his own needs and desires, it is probably safe to conclude that, other than being fortified by Mrs Merdle’s assurance that her husband would doubtless find it an equal pleasure to meet Mr Dorrit, he neither senses nor expects anything unusual about their conversation. What Mr Dorrit does not perceive, is that her flattering response to him is preceded by a lingering and admiring look at Fanny.

Fanny’s conversation with Mrs Merdle makes her even more determined to cultivate Sparkler’s affections and her continued careless encouragement results in her being universally acknowledged as the object of his affections. She consequently discovers herself to be “sufficiently identified with the gentleman to feel compromised by his being more than usually ridiculous” (Book II, Chap 14: 645) and she finds it necessary to come to his rescue on a number of occasions. This turn of events results in the first of only three occasions, I believe, in which the narrator offers a sympathetic account of her predicament. We learn that, while coming to Sparkler’s rescue, “she was ashamed of him, undetermined whether to get rid of him or more

decidedly encourage him, distracted with apprehensions that she was every day becoming more and more immeshed in her uncertainties and tortured by misgivings that Mrs Merdle triumphed in her distress” (Book II, Chap 14: 645).

With this tumult in her mind, it is no subject for surprise that *Miss* Fanny came home one night in a state of agitation from a concert and ball at Mrs Merdle’s house, and on her sister affectionately trying to soothe her, pushed that sister away from the toilette-table at which she sat angrily *trying to cry*, and declared *with a heaving bosom* that she *detested everybody*, and she *wished she was dead*.

‘Dear Fanny, what is the matter? Tell me.’

‘Matter, you little *Mole*,’ said Fanny, ‘if you were not the *blindest of the blind*, you would have no occasion to ask me. The idea of *daring to pretend to assert that you have eyes in your head*, and yet ask me what’s the matter!’

‘Is it Mr Sparkler, dear?’

‘*Mis-ter Spark-ler!*’ repeated Fanny, with unbounded scorn, *as if he were the last subject in the Solar system that could possibly be near her mind*. ‘*No, Miss Bat, it is not.*’

*Immediately afterwards she became remorseful for having called her sister names; declaring with sobs that she knew she made herself hateful, but that everybody drove her to it.*

[Book II, Chap 14: 645 - 46]

Hybridisation can be used with such subtlety as to make it almost unnoticeable. The opening sentence is a case in point, where a single word transforms a simple statement into a hybridised one. Consequent to Fanny’s dynamic entry into the higher echelons of the social milieu, the narrator briefly (and might I add, rather wickedly) elevates her name, prefacing it with the title, ‘Miss’, before returning to his habitual mode of addressing her by only her first name. *Miss* Fanny is not only the name by which she is introduced and referred to in society but also one she obviously relishes. The narrator’s parodical voice is evident in the suddenness with which he uses the nomenclature and then abruptly dispenses with it. Furthermore, what is carried over in the above passage is the rather more ‘stagey’ aspect of the epithet, as unlike Amy, Fanny seems incapable of doing anything in a simple way. Even the *act* of crying is a matter of internal dialogue and an effect she seeks to simulate with her ‘heaving bosom’, but finds that she cannot quite pull it off. In his essay, “Tolstoy’s Absolute Language”, Gary Saul Morson makes the point that, for Bakhtin, language in the novel can never be completely “ideologically neutral or free of values; it is always someone’s language and bears the mark of its speakers and anticipated listener’s unspoken attitudes” and once it is placed in a novel “the literary language necessarily enters into complex dialogic relations with the speech of the characters it reports, paraphrases and selects” (*Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* 124). This dialogic complexity is evident with Fanny, who is one of the many ‘stage’ characters in Dickens, a novelist who loved the theatre and often performed in it. Thus, theatrical staginess is an idiolect with which he would have been very familiar.

As the sisters' conversation unfolds Fanny's 'staginess' continues; she uses hyperbole to convey her state of mind – wishing she were 'dead' and 'detesting' everyone around her. Her penchant for labelling Amy is resumed – she is exaggeratedly rude about Amy's inability immediately to discern her own predicament (calling her, by turns, a 'mole' and a 'bat') and parodies Amy's reference to her fiancé as *Mr Sparkler*, an appellation she clearly views as ridiculous, given her scornful reiteration of his name ('Mis-ter Spark-ler!'). As Michael Holquist remarks in *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, in any given conversation, even when one repeats the words of the other, because both speakers are "different from each other [. . .] the utterance each makes is always different from the other's (40). Bakhtin takes this suggestion a step further, making the point that during the process of transmitting another's words "the entire complex of discourse as well as the personality of the speaker may be expressed and even played with (in the form of anything from an exact replication to a parodic ridiculing and exaggeration of gestures and intonations) (DiN 341). One might conclude, therefore, that Fanny's repetition of Amy's words here constitutes one such 'parodic ridiculing and exaggeration of gestures and intonations' and deliver a double blow, that fells both Amy and Sparkler in a single, hyperbolic stroke.

Actually, hyperbole oscillates between Fanny and the narrator. 'Heaving bosom' is a hybrid construction in which the narrator draws on the language of melodramatic popular romance in order to parody Fanny. In Bakhtinian terms the description of Fanny would qualify as "another's speech in another's language" (DiN 324) and, as such, it becomes a marker for Fanny's exaggerated self-dramatization. (Of course, the mention of Fanny's 'heaving bosom' also rather wickedly foreshadows the fact that she will become the daughter-in-law of Mrs Merdle or, as the narrator likes to call her, "The Bosom".) Other instances of hyperbole like 'wished she were dead' and 'drove her to it' are proffered in Fanny's idiolect but, inflected by the narrator's prior use of 'theatrical' language to describe her, they reveal her self-conscious creation of herself as suffering heroine, and suggest the way in which she uses that persona to avoid confronting her real feelings. However there is also a sense that (supported by the fact that she dissolves into a natural flow of tears as a result of her immediate and genuine remorse at having been so rude to Amy) Fanny's emotional see-sawing reflects a degree of self-reflexivity. We are reminded of Bakhtin's contention that "I cannot become myself without another" (PDP 287), as we become increasingly aware of the degree to which Fanny's concept of self is mediated through Amy, whose simple, calming presence and unconditional love occasionally unlock in her an ability to reflect critically upon herself.

Unfortunately her potential for self-knowledge and, consequently, for real growth invariably give way to righteous indignation and self-justification as she continues to blame everyone but herself for her problems.

‘I don’t think you are well to-night, dear Fanny.’

‘*Stuff and nonsense!*’ replied the young lady, turning angry again; ‘I am as well as you are. Perhaps I might say better, and yet make no boast of it.’

Poor Little Dorrit, not seeing her way to the offering of any soothing words that would escape repudiation, deemed it best to remain quiet. *At first Fanny took this ill too; protesting to her looking glass*, that of all the trying sisters a girl could have, she did think the most trying sister was a *flat sister*. That she knew she was at times a wretched temper; that she knew she made herself hateful; that when she made herself hateful, nothing would do her half the good as being told so; but that, *being afflicted with a flat sister*, she never *was* told so, and the consequence resulted that she was absolutely tempted and goaded into making herself disagreeable. Besides (*she angrily told her looking glass*), she didn’t want to be forgiven. And this was the Art of it – that she was always being placed in the position of being forgiven, whether she liked it or not. Finally she burst into violent weeping, and, when her sister came and sat close at her side to comfort her, said, ‘*Amy, you’re an Angel!*’ [Book II, Chap 14: 646]

In the above passage the narrator adopts free indirect speech to accentuate how hyperbole and staginess continue to dominate Fanny’s mode of expression. Her tendency to blame others for her finding herself in predicaments of her own making is just one example of the kind of circuitous reasoning Fanny uses to justify her actions. Even Amy’s bemused silence is seen by Fanny as contributing to her woes. Her continual bad temper is directly attributed to the fact that she receives no correction from Amy and she is thus ‘goaded’ into making herself even more ‘disagreeable’. In the *Middlemarch* section, I explore the dialogic connotations of the many aspects of silence but would here like to mention only that Fanny receives Amy’s silence in an entirely different light from the way in which it was intended by Amy. Consequently, she bemoans the fact that she has a ‘flat sister’: one who does not adequately express her views and emotions. Her accusation, of course, sets her in a parodical light against Amy whose very evenness of temperament shows up Fanny’s tempestuousness (real and affected) in a poor light.

However, within the space of just a page from the narrator’s initial mediating remarks about Fanny, he offers another glimpse of Fanny’s innermost feelings. Actually, a double mediation takes place when Fanny’s own thoughts are *directly* revealed as she *internally* addresses her reflection in the mirror. This particular phenomenon is a salient factor in determining the meanings of an utterance is what Bakhtin calls its ‘*addressivity*’ – being always directed at someone, an utterance always has an addressee who also contributes to its meaning (Danow 17). The addressee is not necessarily another person, because the discursive mind of a single individual is able to converse with itself through thought or inner-speech. This kind of mental activity serves to establish the self as both addressor and addressee (as self and other) and has the

effect of “limiting our own authorship or dividing it in two” (PDP 184). Danow submits, therefore that “no clear distinction is made between inwardly and outwardly manifested speech; both are seen as a product of dialogic interaction. The other, in other words, may be oneself” (23). Invoking Bakhtin’s concept of seeing ourselves in “the mirror of others’ words,” Robert Stam writes that simply looking at oneself in the mirror constitutes, in itself, a complex dialogical act which implies “an intricate intersection of perspectives and consciousness” because, he says, “consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of others’ consciousness” (4 – 5). Looking in the mirror, therefore, has a similar effect to seeing ourselves through the eyes of others. This view can be either supportive (as with friends and family) or hostile (as with our enemies). Additionally, we may see ourselves through what Stam refers to as “the more abstract panoptical ‘eyes’ of [ . . . ] culture, with its implicit norms of fashion and acceptable appearance” (5). It would seem that when Fanny addresses the mirror she apprehends her reflection through the ‘imagined eyes’ of at least some, if not all, of the examples listed above.

In similar vein, when Fanny says: ‘Amy, you’re an Angel’, one could argue that the addressee could be Amy, Fanny (who does not want to be forgiven) or both. The word ‘Angel’ is, itself, double-voiced as it is both theatrical/hyperbolic (Fanny’s affected social language) and sincere (her genuine language of sisterhood). That Fanny suddenly decides to call Amy by her real name is also double-voiced in the sense that it indicates a shift in Fanny’s consciousness as she *prepares* herself to take on an entirely new role.

‘But I tell you what, *my Pet*’, said Fanny, when her sister’s gentleness had calmed her, ‘it now comes to this; that things cannot and shall not go on, and that there must be an end of this, one way or another.’

As the announcement was vague, though very peremptory, Little Dorrit returned, ‘Let us talk about it.’

‘Quite so, *my dear*’, assented Fanny, as she dried her eyes. ‘Let us talk about it. I am rational again now, and *you shall advise me*. Will you advise me, *my sweet child*?’

Even Amy smiled at this notion, but she said, ‘I will, Fanny, as well as I can.’

‘Thank you, *dearest Amy*’, returned Fanny, *kissing her*. ‘*You are my anchor*.’

Having embraced her *Anchor* with great affection, Fanny took a bottle of sweet toilette water from the table, and called to her maid for a fine handkerchief. She then dismissed that attendant for the night, and went on to be advised; dabbing her eyes and forehead from time to time to cool them.

‘My love,’ Fanny began, ‘our characters and points of view are sufficiently different (*kiss me again darling*), to make it very probable that I shall surprise you by what I am going to say. What I am going to say, my dear, is, that notwithstanding our property, we labour, socially speaking, under disadvantages. You don’t quite understand what I mean, Amy?’

‘I have no doubt that I shall,’ said Amy, mildly, ‘after a few words more.’

‘Well, my dear, what I mean is, that we are all, after all, newcomers into fashionable life.’

‘I am sure, Fanny,’ Little Dorrit interposed in her zealous admiration, ‘no one need find that out in you.’

‘Well, *my dear child*, perhaps not,’ said Fanny, ‘though it’s most kind and most affectionate in you, *you precious girl*, to say so.’ Here she dabbed her sister’s forehead, and blew upon it a little. ‘But you are,’ resumed Fanny, ‘as is well known, the *dearest little thing* that ever was!’ [Book II, Chap 14: 646 - 47]

In this passage Fanny plays the ‘maiden aunt’ who affectionately fusses over and kisses Amy (from whom she also demands kisses). Amy’s ‘status’ is simultaneously elevated from that of a



mole and a bat to ‘a pet’, the ‘dearest’ most ‘precious little thing’ and a ‘sweet’ and ‘precious girl’ and ‘anchor’. Fanny even begs advice whilst, at the same time making it perfectly clear that Amy is sorely in need of instruction in the ways of life from the much older and wiser personage she deems herself to be. This predilection for role-playing is something she has in common with Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch*. Bakhtin has strong views in regard to ‘acting out a role’ but I prefer to reserve for Chapter Three my discussion of the multiple implications of pretending to be someone one is not (‘pretendership’), when I examine Rosamond’s character in detail. My current aim here is to draw attention to Fanny’s capacity to *switch* roles as the urge takes her – something Rosamond is wholly incapable of. Although both characters have a similar ideological bent, I hope to show that, in many ways, Fanny is a much more complex and volatile character than the recalcitrant Rosamond who never loses sight of her single elected life-role and end-goal even when pretending to solicit advice – as when, for example she plays the ‘simple country girl’ to Lydgate’s worldliness.

The word ‘anchor’ seems an apt way to describe Amy because, of course, she does provide the flighty Fanny with the stability of unconditional love, against which Fanny is able to vent her frustrations. However this label also becomes clearly double-voiced when the narrator reaccents Fanny’s words and himself playfully adds the nomenclature, ‘The Anchor’ to the long list of names recently conferred upon Amy by Fanny. Furthermore, as we shall see, ‘anchor’ is subsequently contextualised (further into the passage) as a kind of running metaphor to describe Fanny’s designation of Amy in the alternating roles of both naïve pupil and steadying influence.

After having delivered her ‘verdict’ on Amy, Fanny embarks on an assessment of the other members of her family.

‘To resume, *my child*. Pa is extremely gentlemanly and extremely well-informed, *but he is, in some trifling respects, a little different from other gentlemen of his fortune*: partly on account of what he has gone through, poor dear: partly, I fancy, on account of its *often running in his mind that other people are thinking about that, while he is talking to them*. Uncle, *my love*, is altogether unrepresentable. Though *a dear creature to whom I am tenderly attached*, he is, socially speaking, shocking. Edward is frightfully expensive and dissipated. *I don’t mean that there is anything ungenteel in that itself* – far from it – but I do mean that *he doesn’t do it well*, and that he doesn’t, if I may so express myself, get the money’s worth in the sort of dissipated reputation that attaches to him.’

‘*Poor Edward!*’ *sighed Little Dorrit, with the whole family history in the sigh.*

‘Yes. And poor you and me, too,’ returned Fanny, rather sharply. ‘Very true! Then, my dear, we have no mother, and we have a Mrs General. And I tell you again, darling, that Mrs General, *if I may reverse a common proverb and adapt it to her, is a cat in gloves who will catch mice*. That woman, I am quite sure and confident, will be our mother-in-law.’

‘I can hardly think, Fanny –’ Fanny stopped her.

‘Now don’t argue with me about it, Amy,’ said she, ‘because *I know better*.’ *Feeling that she had been sharp again, she dabbed her sister’s forehead, and blew upon it again.* ‘To resume once more, my dear. It then becomes a question with me (*I am proud and spirited, Amy*, as you very well know: *too*

*much so, I dare say) whether I shall make up my mind to take it upon myself to carry the family through.'*

'How?' asked her sister anxiously.

*'I will not,' said Fanny, without answering the question, 'submit to be mother-in-lawed by Mrs General; and I will not submit to be, in any respect whatever, either patronised or tormented by Mrs Merdle.'*

*Little Dorrit* laid her hand upon the hand that held the bottle of sweet water, with a still more anxious look. Fanny, *quite punishing her own forehead with the vehement dabs* she now began to give it, fitfully went on.

'That he has *somehow or other, and how is of no consequence*, attained a very good position, no one can deny. That it is a very good connection, no one can deny. And as to the question of clever or not clever, *I doubt very much whether a clever husband would be suitable to me. I cannot submit. I should not be able to defer to him enough.*'

[Book II, Chap 14: 647 – 48]

Having been temporarily granted a measure of wisdom, Amy is almost immediately relegated to the role of pupil as Fanny, once again resuming the mantle of 'lecturer', begins to call her by affectionate diminutives as she delineates her family's inadequacies. That Amy would never dream of thinking, let alone speaking, about her family in such terms but fails to remonstrate with Fanny for her critique, reinforces the view that Fanny's powers of observation are on the mark. The real difference between the sisters' worldviews is largely ideological: whereas Amy expresses only pity, Fanny views her family as a stumbling block to her own advancement in society – even Edward, whose 'dissipation' could be seen as being 'genteel if he were only to do it properly – and she is quick to take issue with Amy's expression of sorrow. A multifaceted aspect of Fanny continues to be presented as she repeatedly oscillates between sharp retort, contrition, high drama and astute recognition of her own nature, her precarious position in society and her determination to achieve her ambitions.

Advancing to Mrs General, Fanny once again shows herself to be a witty and shrewd judge of character. Reversing the proverb, 'A cat in gloves catches no mice', to 'a cat in gloves who will catch mice', she takes stock of Mrs General's customary demeanour and specific intentions. In fact the adage 'it takes one to know one' may well apply in this case: just as Fanny knows she is bent on taking her place in society (even though her plan to accomplish this is probably best achieved by ensnaring the ridiculous and ineffectual Sparkler), so too, can she see that Mrs General is intent on catching her 'mouse'. Because Mrs General's intentions are so carefully hidden behind the inscrutable exterior upon which layer upon layer of 'varnish' is applied, Fanny's sinister and cynical allegation comes as a shock to the far more gullible and less discerning Amy, who tends to take most things at face value and who is quite sure her sister is incorrect in her assessment. In its altered form spoken by Fanny, the proverb becomes a hybrid construction in which we are simultaneously aware of what it should be ('A cat in gloves catches no mice) and of Fanny's reinterpretation to describe Mrs General. Because the adapted proverb

now emanates from Fanny, not only does the cat become a particular cat but so, too, does ‘mice’ relate quite specifically to Mr Dorrit (if we choose to hear only Fanny’s voice) but also to Mr Sparkler (if we include the narrator’s voice, behind Fanny’s). In the introduction to this chapter I observed that by simply equating ‘dialogy’ with ‘intertextuality’, Tzvetan Todorov’s interpretation of dialogy may be too narrow. David Danow concurs that the *aspect* of dialogy commonly referred to as ‘intertextuality’ is a strictly metaphorical component of dialogy in which, in a ‘figurative’ sense only, the dialogic principle is present in the “interrelations and interconnections between texts”. He outlines the connection between ‘intertextuality’ and ‘dialogy’ in the following terms: “Just as no word or utterance may be said to exist in isolation, but is born in response to the dialogic word of the other, so is each text a responsive text” (128). Also commenting on the novel’s ability to “manifest the most complex possibilities of quasi-direct speech,” Michael Holquist observes that novels are “overwhelmingly intertextual, constantly referring, within themselves, to other works outside them” which, he adds, “they obsessively quote” in one or other form (DBW 88).

Even though Fanny appears to dismiss out of hand the ‘dialogic word of the other’, I tend towards a view that Amy’s mere presence is a vital source for the formulation of Fanny’s plans. Even her apparent disregard for Amy’s occasional interjections is conflicted. When Amy begins to voice her anxieties she is summarily cut short by her ‘instructor’ who immediately ameliorates her sharp vocal response by dabbing perfumed water on Amy before resuming her ‘lecture’ in an amended, more loving tone. In this sense, Fanny becomes both *addressor* and *addressee* as she is afforded the opportunity to ‘hear’ with someone else’s ears the sound of her own self-justification. But the bravado with which she begins to articulate her plan to ‘carry the family through’ (consisting largely of her determination to be ‘neither mother-in-lawed’ by Mrs General nor patronised by Mrs Merdle) is belied by the vehement and agitated manner with which she applies the soothing water to her own forehead before arriving circuitously at the ultimate objective of her conversation with Amy: the prospect of marrying the ridiculous Sparkler whose stupidity she ‘defends’ in terms of her self-knowledge (that she would never be able to defer to a ‘clever husband’).

One of the few detailed references to Fanny I located has much to do with her thus ‘carry[ing] the family through’. This appears in Frank and Queenie Leavis’s *Dickens: The Novelist*. Despite their stated lack of sympathy for Fanny, the Leavises do explore some of the reasons behind her inexorable and indomitable drive towards social recognition:

Fanny, in accepting the brainless Edmund Sparkler, does so as belonging with accomplished and single-minded assurance to that 'civilization', having, on the Dorrit re-emergence into society, achieved her unquestioned position with exemplary completeness. Her ability to do so was achieved in the Marshalsea: it is the product of her upbringing, and her father can see in her the reward and vindication of his resolute stand for 'self-respect'. The subtle perfection of the way Dickens does her is seen in the way in which, enjoying the comedy of her unflinching success in holding her own socially, we never forget that she is the pupil of the Marshalsea and the sister of Little Dorrit, so that her value, even in these scenes is felt as more than satiric. She provides, in fact, one more illustration of what, associating it with pregnancy and depth, I have called flexibility, meaning the ease with which his art moves between different tones and modes. We can't but regard her but with a marked lack of sympathy, our applause being only for her spirit and skill in the heartless comedy of manners in which she triumphs; but at the same time she belongs as essentially to the sombre theme of the Marshalsea, the long drama of human disaster, with its disturbing and monitory significance, as Little Dorrit and the rest of the family do. [258]

Undeniably, Fanny is often cynical and unfeeling toward others in her relentless efforts to climb to the top of the social ladder, but I would like to think that 'our applause' for her can and should run to greater depths than simply to the 'spirit and skill in the heartless comedy of manners in which she triumphs'. Taking into account Bakhtin's approach (which allows so-called minor voices to be heard) my feeling is that we simply cannot view with a 'marked lack of sympathy' this complex and conflicted character whose depth of feeling, self-revelation, insight, resolve, flashes of honesty with herself and with Amy, and ability to surprise both herself and her interlocutors, show her to be a character-in-the-making – a personality struggling to come to terms with her past and present. If we are to identify in any way with Amy, who undoubtedly lies at the heart of the novel's redemptive plot, perhaps we need to take cognisance of Amy's enduring love for her which does not emanate solely from Amy's forgiving nature, but also from Fanny's reciprocated affection. In her own way she, too, loves and trusts Amy – certainly enough to allow Amy insight into the depths of her being. Having said that, Amy does become increasingly alarmed regarding the lengths to which her sister is prepared to go in order to facilitate the 'Dorrit re-emergence into society'.

'Oh, my dear Fanny!' expostulated Little Dorrit, upon whom a kind of terror had been stealing as she perceived what her sister meant. 'If you loved any one, all this feeling would change. *If you loved anyone, you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him.* If you loved him, Fanny –' *Fanny had stopped the dabbling hand, and was looking at her fixedly.*

'*O, indeed!*' cried Fanny. '*Really? Bless me, how much some people know of some subjects! They say every one has a subject and I certainly seem to have hit upon yours, Amy.* There, *you little thing*, I was only in fun,' dabbing her sister's forehead; 'but don't be a *silly puss*, and *don't think flightily and eloquently about degenerate impossibilities.* *There! Now, I'll go back to myself.*'

'Dear Fanny, let me say first, that I would far rather we worked for a scanty living again than I would see you rich and married to Mr Sparkler.'

'*Let* you say, my dear?' retorted Fanny. 'Why, of course, *I will let you say anything.* There is no constraint upon you, I hope. *We are together to talk it over.* And as to marrying Mr Sparkler, I have not the slightest intention of doing so to-night, my dear, or tomorrow morning either.'

[Book II, Chap 14: 648 - 49]

Bakhtin makes the point that the word shapes its own stylistic profile and tone by “breaking through to its own meaning and to its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking dissonance with others” (DiN 277). Fanny’s pragmatic approach to achieving her goals is brought into sharp relief against Amy’s idealist attitude to life, particularly to love. Without pre-empting my discussion of Bakhtin’s notions of love, marriage, self and society in the *Middlemarch* Section, I do just want to mention here that Amy’s belief in the transforming power of love finds resonance in Bakhtin’s declaration that “you love a human not because he is good, but, rather, a human being is good because you love him” (TPA 62). Despite Amy’s notions about losing and forgetting oneself in love being met with the utmost derision, she nevertheless does succeed in stopping Fanny in her tracks and, for a brief moment, she commands her full attention. In fact, Amy manages to elicit a real and visceral response which puts a temporary halt to Fanny’s ‘role-playing’.

Although this new feeling Fanny experiences does not lead to engagement in a real dialogue about Amy, Fanny’s ‘fixed look’ does suggest that she realises that Amy is not simply talking in the abstract but describing her own experience. However, for her to engage in Amy’s personal problems would require considerably more openness and empathy than Fanny is capable of. Consequently she brushes off Amy’s remarks, treating them with disdain (‘They say every one has a subject and I certainly seem to have hit upon yours, Amy’.) To her credit, she does seem to realise that she has hurt her sister’s feelings and compensates for her lack of sensitivity by affectionately dabbing Amy’s forehead (once again!) and, assuring her that her words were in jest, she entreats Amy not to be a ‘silly puss’. Similarly, when Fanny says ‘Why, of course, I will *let* you say anything’, her actions constitute a clear disavowal of what she actually says.

Despite protesting that the primary objective of their conversation is to talk things over together before coming to any decision regarding Sparkler whom, she declares, she has no intention of marrying in the immediate future she, typically, disregards sister’s point of view. However, she does continue to use Amy as a sounding board, if only to enable her to ‘hear’ her plans spoken out loud. Prompted by Fanny’s grudging ‘invitation’ to talk things over with her, Amy bravely soldiers on.

‘But at some time?’

‘At no time, for anything I know at present,’ answered Fanny with indifference. Then suddenly changing her indifference into a burning restlessness, she added, ‘*You talk about the clever men, you*

*little thing! It's all very fine and easy to talk about the clever men; but where are they? I don't see them anywhere near me!*

'My dear Fanny, so short a time –'

'Short time or long time,' interrupted Fanny. 'I am impatient of our situation. I don't like our situation, and very little would induce me to change it. *Other girls, differently reared and differently circumstanced altogether, might wonder at what I say or may do. Let them. They are driven by their lives and characters; I am driven by mine.*'

'Fanny, my dear Fanny, you know that you have qualities to make you the wife of one very superior to Mr Sparkler.'

'*Amy, my dear Amy,*' retorted Fanny, *parodying her words, 'I know that I wish to have a more defined and distinct position, in which I can assert myself with greater effect against that insolent woman.'*

'Would you *therefore* – forgive my asking, Fanny – *therefore* marry her son?'

'Why, perhaps,' said Fanny, with a *triumphant* smile. 'There may be many less promising ways of arriving at an end than that, my dear. That piece of insolence may think, now, that it would be a great success to get her son off upon me, and shelve me. But, perhaps, she little thinks I would retort upon her if I married her son. I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her. *I would make it the business of my life.*'

[Book II, Chap 14: 649 - 50]

Read in conjunction with Fanny's prior consultation with herself in the mirror, it soon becomes apparent that she intends to pursue, with renewed vigour, the only course of action that will guarantee success in accomplishing her goals. But there is surely pathos in the 'triumphant smile' with which she delineates the rather paltry pleasures on which she is prepared to stake her entire future. Her keenly attuned antennae enable her to divine the very real but as yet unbeknown truth that she does not have the luxury of time to wait for more suitable offers to come her way.

Her remark brings me back to an earlier point I made about Fanny's ability to discern certain things that Amy is blind to. As she says, she does not see any of the so-called 'clever men' near her. Her intuitive recognition of her limited choices highlights just how pragmatic Fanny really is, especially when viewed against Amy's simple idealism. One is compelled to accept the undeniable logic of '[o]ther girls are driven by their lives and characters; I am driven by mine', a statement which is at once illuminating and depressing: illuminating because no-one can arrive at such a conclusion without having a reasonably sound knowledge of self, and depressing because Fanny both recognises and embraces her inscription within the narrow dictates of society.

Amy's repeated word, 'therefore', regarding Fanny's revenge against 'that insolent woman', constitutes another example of how any word used by a speaker is always "half-someone else's" (DiN 293). If one took 'therefore' to express simply the monologic meaning of the speaker's intention, the word's meaning would seem to be ironic, functioning to expose the shallow and ethically problematic nature of Fanny's values. 'Therefore' implies a logic of cause and effect and, within Amy's value system, being slighted by Mrs Merdle does not constitute a logical

reason for entering into a loveless marriage with her son in order to slight her in return. However, as Fanny is the addressee (the other party in this dialogue), the word is also half hers and if we avoid automatically privileging Amy's ethical logic over Fanny's pragmatic logic, the word approaches a social and psychological truth: marrying the ineffectual Edmund and launching a campaign of defiance against his mother may actually be the *only* way in which Fanny *can* assert her own sense of a self – one that does not meekly submit to condescension and the dismissal of her worth as a human being. That 'opposing her and competing with her' is forthwith to be the 'business of [her] life' is a clear reminder that she has never forgotten the depth of shame, anger and hurt inflicted on her by Mrs Merdle during the course of the Harley Street meeting.

Agitated by these searing memories (not to mention the subsequent ones in which she and Mrs Merdle play out the fiction of their not having met before), she embarks almost trance-like on outlining her plan for retribution.

Fanny set down the bottle when she came to this, and walked about the room; *always stopping and standing still while she spoke.*

'One thing I could certainly do, my child: *I could make her older. And I would!*'

This was followed by *another walk.*

'I would talk of her as an old woman. I would pretend to know – if I didn't, but I should from her son – all about her age. And *she should hear me say, Amy: affectionately, quite dutifully and affectionately: how well she looked, considering her time of life. I could make her seem older at once, by being myself so much younger.* I may not be as handsome as she is; I am not a fair judge of that question, I suppose; but I know *I am handsome enough to be a thorn in her side. And I would be!*'

'My dear sister, *would you condemn yourself to an unhappy life for this?*'

'It wouldn't be an unhappy life, Amy. *It would be the life I am fitted for. Whether by disposition, or whether by circumstances, it is no matter; I am better fitted for such a life than for almost any other.*'

*There was something of a desolate tone in those words;* but with a short, proud laugh she took another walk, and *after passing a great looking glass came to another stop.*

'Figure! Figure, Amy! Well the woman has a good figure. I will give her her due, and not deny it. But is it so far beyond all others that it is altogether unapproachable? Upon my word, I am not so sure of it. Give some much younger woman the latitude as to dress that she has, being married; and we would see about that, my dear!'

Something in the thought that *was agreeable and flattering brought her back to her seat in a gayer temper.* She took her sister's hands in hers, and clapped all four hands above her head as she looked in her sister's face laughing:

'*And the dancer,* Amy, that she has quite forgotten – the dancer who bore no sort of resemblance to me, and of whom I never remind her, oh dear no! – *should dance through her life, and dance in her way, to such a tune as would disturb her insolent placidity a little!*'

Meeting an earnest and imploring look in Amy's face, she brought the four hands down, and laid only one on Amy's lips.

'Now don't argue with me *child,*' she said in a *sterner* way, 'because it is of no use. *I understand these subjects much better than you do.* I have not nearly made up my mind, *but it may be. Now, we have talked this over comfortably, and you may go to bed. You best and dearest little mouse, Good night!*' *With those words Fanny weighed her Anchor and – having taken so much advice – left off being advised for that occasion.*

[Book 2, Chap 14: 650 – 51]

Caught up in the full swing of her reverie, Fanny seems here to be in the grasp of two parallel scenarios: the actual conversation with Amy (to whom, by turns, she justifies herself, seeks

understanding from, and finally dismisses), and an imaginary, deeply satisfying encounter with Mrs Merdle in which the previously scorned but now ‘quite forgotten’ dancer re-emerges to take her revenge.

Reiterating Bakhtin, Robert Stam agrees that there can be no neutral utterance because “language is everywhere shot through with intentions and accents, it is material, multiaccental, and historical, and is densely overlaid with the traces of its historical usages” (8). Fanny, the actress, Fanny, the former dancer and daughter of the erstwhile Father of the Marshalsea, and Fanny the heiress together embody the ‘multiaccental’ and historically overlaid aspect of language as she launches into a description of the kind of vengeance she means to exact upon the woman who had once, so shamelessly, tried to buy her off. Her ‘body language’ is carefully prepared to ensure that her delivery achieves maximum impact on her ‘audience’, of whom she is always aware. At the same time, she projects herself into the immensely enjoyable future of ‘seeing’ the effect of her words on her imaginary audience (Mrs Merdle), relishing the thought that the true and provocative meaning of her ‘affectionate’ and ‘dutiful’ solicitations will be clearly understood by her rival, who will be forced to take her words at face value and respond to them accordingly, at least in public.

A fundamental theme of the novel, according to Bakhtin, is that of the hero’s inadequacy to his fate or situation, the individual being “either greater than his fate, or less than his condition” (EaN 37). In other words, the individual cannot become “once and for all a clerk, a landowner, a merchant, a fiancé, a jealous lover, a father and so forth” (EaN 37). Being “always essentially what he is not but what he could perhaps become, the novelistic hero, conceived with all his ‘unrealized potential and unrealized demands’ (EaN 37) is a creature made in part of the future” (MB 425). What makes a person what he truly is, and what novels correctly understand a person to be, is what Bakhtin calls his “surplus of humanness” (MB 425). As he puts it:

There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word, like the tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to the brim and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. There always remains an unrealized surplus of humaneness. There always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found. All existing clothes are always too tight, and thus comical, on a man. [EaN 37]

When Amy expresses her horror at the thought of the bizarre and unhappy life outlined by Fanny, Fanny stops play-acting and responds candidly, and with a good deal of perception and self-knowledge, that she is probably better ‘fitted for such a life than for almost any other’. The brief moment of desolation experienced in uttering these words of self-revelation is abruptly curtailed



by her, once again, resuming her stage persona. Seeing her image in the mirror enables her to conjure up other amusing ways in which to make her older rival fade by comparison. Cheered by this thought she gives herself up to the much more natural and girlish inclination of sharing with Amy her delight in being able to parade the once rejected but now ‘forgotten’ dancer before Mrs Merdle and dance relentlessly to a ‘tune’ that would ‘disturb’ the latter’s ‘insolent placidity’. Amy’s silent demurrals are met with a firm and determined refusal to engage in any more discussion as Fanny reverts to her customary use of affectionate diminutives with which to dismiss her sister. The mood is kept light by the hybridised account of Fanny weighing ‘her Anchor’ on account of her having been given enough advice for one night.

The word ‘anchor’, having already been used by Fanny, is once again capitalised by the narrator (something Fanny does not do). The implication is that ‘the Anchor’ is simply an inanimate object in Fanny’s hands, to do with what she will – Amy has no real choice in the matter. The feeling is extended by the comedy of ‘having taken so much advice’ (which could belong to both Fanny and the narrator but with different intentions) while, ‘for that occasion’ has a decidedly narratorial ring to it. When, one might ask, has Fanny ever really taken advice, even if she is able, on occasion, to satisfy herself that she does?

It never becomes clear at exactly what point Fanny decides to marry Sparkler but one suspects that her mind is already made up before taking ‘advice’ from Amy. A few weeks later, Sparkler and Fanny together inform Amy of their impending marriage.

*When he was gone, [Amy] said, ‘O Fanny, Fanny!’ and turned to her sister in the bright window, and fell upon her bosom and cried there. Fanny laughed at first; but soon laid her face against her sister’s and cried too – a little. It was the last time Fanny ever showed that there was any hidden, suppressed or conquered feelings in her on the matter. From that hour the way she had chosen lay before her and she trod it with her own imperious self-willed step.* [Book II, Chap 14: 654]

This is the third and final time that the narrator actively mediates on Fanny’s behalf. I chose to highlight the entire section as it clearly defines how Fanny’s idea of ‘self’ is at once circumscribed by society and simultaneously dialogized both by Amy’s tears and by the narrator, who expressly states that there will be no further excursions into Fanny’s innermost feelings on the matter. It is simply not possible to read the narrator’s closing sentences without being aware that the words, ‘hidden’, ‘suppressed’ and ‘conquered’ carry an unusual narratorial poignancy insofar as Fanny is concerned. From this point on, the author steers us towards an understanding that Fanny’s limited journey of self-discovery has come to an end as a result of her own ‘imperious self-willed step’. Because there is no turning back for her, it is made abundantly clear that there can be no more speculation about her potential for future growth or self-revelation. In

fact, any further attempt to discover the self-doubting Fanny ‘in and through’ another would be pure conjecture; the narrator effectively shuts down this option with ‘it was the last time Fanny ever showed that there was any hidden, suppressed or conquered feelings in her on the matter.’ One could argue though, that the word ‘showed’ implies that Fanny may yet have ambivalent feelings but ones which she is henceforth, determined to conceal.

Notwithstanding the narrator’s ‘signing-off’ on Fanny, she is yet able thoroughly to hold one’s interest and never more so than when, after having ‘informed’ her father of her impending marriage (notice that she does not ask his permission for this) there is a superb account of her ‘facing off’ against Mrs General after her father insists that it is her duty to convey the news to her in person.

‘The preliminaries being so satisfactorily arranged, I think I will go now, my dear,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘announce – ha – formally, to Mrs General –’

‘Papa,’ returned Fanny, *taking him up short upon that name*, ‘I don’t see what Mrs General has got to do with it.’

‘My dear,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘it will be an act of courtesy to – hum – a lady, well bred and refined –’

‘Oh! *I am sick of Mrs General’s good breeding and refinement, papa*,’ said Fanny. ‘I am tired of Mrs General.’

‘Tired,’ repeated Mr Dorrit in reproachful astonishment, ‘of – ha – Mrs General.’

‘*Quite disgusted with her, papa*,’ said Fanny. ‘I really don’t see what she has to do with my marriage. Let her keep on her own matrimonial prospects – if she has any.’

‘Fanny,’ returned Mr Dorrit, with a grave and weighty slowness upon him, contrasting strongly with his daughter’s levity: ‘I beg the favour of your explaining – ha – what it is you mean.’

‘I mean, papa,’ said Fanny, ‘that if Mrs General should happen to have any matrimonial projects of her own, I dare say they are quite enough to occupy her spare time. And that if she has not, *so much the better*, but still I don’t wish to have the honour of making announcements to her.’

‘Permit me to ask you, Fanny,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘why not?’

‘Because she can find my engagement out for herself, papa,’ retorted Fanny. ‘She is *watchful* enough, I dare say. I think I have seen her so. Let her find it out for herself. If she should not find it out for herself, she will know it when I am married. And I hope you will not consider me wanting in affection for you papa, if I say it strikes *me that will be quite amazed for Mrs General*.’

‘Fanny,’ returned Mr Dorrit, ‘I am quite amazed, I am displeased by this – hum – *this capricious and unintelligible display of animosity* towards – ha – Mrs General.’

‘Do not, if you please, papa,’ urged Fanny, ‘call it animosity, because I can assure you I do not consider Mrs General worth my animosity.’

At this, Mr Dorrit rose from his chair with a fixed look of severe reproof, and remained standing in his dignity before his daughter. His daughter, turning the bracelet on her arm, and now looking at him, and now looking from him, said, ‘Very well, papa. I am truly sorry if you don’t like it; but I can’t help it. *I am not a child, and I am not Amy, and I must speak*.’

‘Fanny,’ gasped Mr Dorrit, after a majestic silence, ‘if I request you to remain here, while I formally announce to Mrs General, as an exemplary lady, who is – hum – a trusted member of this family, the – ha – the change that is contemplated among us; if I ha – not only request it, but – hum – insist upon it –’

‘Oh, *papa*,’ Fanny broke in with pointed significance, ‘if you make so much of it as that, I have in duty nothing to do but comply. I hope I may have my thoughts upon the subject, however, for I really cannot help it under the circumstances.’ So *Fanny sat down with a meekness which, in the junction of extremes, became defiance*; and her father, either not deigning to answer, or not knowing what to answer, summoned Mr Tinkler into his presence. [Book II, Chap15: 658 - 60]

Fanny’s soon-to-be-married status seems to provide for her the impetus she has so long desired – that of being given the means with which to finally extricate herself from under the eagle-eye of

the arch-varnisher. To her shocked father she articulates, in plain language, her enduring negativity towards Mrs General, declaring that she is ‘tired of Mrs General’, ‘sick’ of her, ‘quite disgusted with her’. She says that she is no longer a ‘child’ and, unlike Amy, she ‘must speak’ her mind on the subject. In Fanny’s earlier discussions with Amy I alluded to her propensity for self-knowledge and truth-telling, and here it reaches a climax when she takes a stand against her father’s sycophantic attitude towards Mrs General. In truth, Fanny has always recognised Mrs General for what she is: an impoverished social climber who clings to the pretence of ‘good breeding’ and so-called refinement’. Such ‘pretenders’, in Bakhtin’s philosophy, are people who avoid the project of selfhood and try to live without identities of their own. Instead, they live “as the theorists of ethical ‘norms’ say we all should live, by simply performing or failing to perform abstract demands” (MB 31). Susan Stewart conceives Bakhtin’s critique of abstraction as “a profound and relentless one,” in which he proclaims that “only in its living reality, shaped and articulated by social evaluation, does the word exist” (“Shouts on the Street: Bakhtin’s Anti-Linguistics”. Morson (43 – 4). By contrast, the pretender both uses the word and lives “representatively” and “ritualistically,” a life “washed from all sides by the waves of an endless, empty potentiality” (TPA 121). An ordered life such as Mrs General’s is in constant need of social justification but Bakhtin is adamant that “unfinalizability [and] real creativity, cannot be located in a system of laws” (MB 39). He prefers ‘messiness’ or ‘disorder’ as the healthier alternative (MB 30), one which provides fertile ground for ‘openness, potentiality, freedom and creativity’ (MB 37), to the abstract, ordered approaches in which life loses its ‘eventness’ and creativity and becomes ‘finalized’ (MB 39).

It can be argued that Fanny, too, sacrifices personal growth in her efforts to climb the social ladder and thus take her revenge on Mrs Merdle; the difference is that she recognises society for what it is. She scorns and makes a mockery of it and is determined to conquer – to vanquish it – and then to lead it by the nose. Perhaps it is not overly generous to suggest that Fanny’s lampooning of Mrs General is not just her typical way venting her feelings but also a very real, if oblique, attempt to warn her susceptible father off Mrs General. As she says: “if Mrs General should happen to have any matrimonial projects of her own, I dare say they are quite enough to occupy her spare time [. . .] and if she has not, so much the better”. When her flabbergasted father, who is either too slow-witted or too unwilling to comprehend her meaning, chastises her for what he calls a ‘capricious and unintelligible display of animosity’ towards Mrs General, Fanny’s retort to her speechless father could not state more clearly how insignificant Mrs General is to her. However, in deference to her father, she agrees to comply with his request. With a

‘show’ of meekness that borders on defiance, she insists that her feelings with respect to Mrs General are, and always will remain, unaltered.

Whilst conceding that the formulation of selfhood requires lifelong work, Bakhtin feels strongly that it is an ethical responsibility of the individual to continually strive for completion of the self (MB 31). Although Fanny does not fully realise her ‘ethical responsibility’, perhaps she deserves at least some small credit for attempting to express her (admittedly flawed) selfhood first to Little Dorrit and subsequently to her father. The form of ‘pretence’ she inhabits is not consummate – she cannot be accused of living, like Mrs General, ‘ritualistically’. The beginnings of an awareness of self allow her to admit her limitations, to others and to herself and she chooses her path knowing and accepting the consequences.

[. . .] Mrs General’s *skirts were very speedily heard* outside, coming along – one might almost have said *dancing* along – with *unusual expedition*. Albeit, they *settled* down at the door and *swept* into the room with their *customary coolness*. ‘Mrs General,’ said Mr Dorrit, ‘take a chair.’

Mrs General, with a *graceful curve* of acknowledgement, *descended* into the chair which Mr Dorrit offered.

‘Madam,’ pursued that gentleman, ‘as you have had the kindness to undertake the – *hum* – formation of my daughters, and as I am persuaded that nothing nearly affecting them can – *ha* – be indifferent to you–’

‘Wholly impossible,’ said Mrs General *in the calmest of ways*.

‘– I therefore wish to announce to you, madam, that my daughter, now present –’

Mrs General made a slight inclination of her head to Fanny, *who made a very low inclination of her head to Mrs General, and came loftily upright again*.

‘– That my daughter Fanny is a – *ha* – contracted to be married to Mr Sparkler, with whom you are acquainted. Hence, madam, you will be relieved of half your difficult charge – *ha* – *difficult charge*.’ Mr Dorrit repeated it *with his angry eye on Fanny*. ‘But not, I hope, to the – *hum* – diminution of any other portion, direct or indirect of the footing you have at present the kindness to occupy in my family.’

‘Mr Dorrit,’ returned Mrs General, with her *gloved hands* resting on one another in *exemplary repose*, ‘*is ever considerate, and ever but too appreciative of my friendly services*.’

(*Miss Fanny coughed, as much as to say, ‘You are right.’*)

‘Miss Dorrit has no doubt exercised the soundest discretion of which the circumstances admitted, and I trust will allow me to offer her my sincere congratulations. When free from the trammels of passion,’ Mrs General *closed her eyes at the word, as if she could not utter it, and see anybody*; ‘when occurring with the approbation of near relatives; and when cementing the proud structure of a family edifice; these are usually auspicious events. I trust Miss Dorrit will allow me to offer her my best congratulations.’

*Here Mrs General stopped, and added internally, for the setting of her face, ‘Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism.’*

‘Mr Dorrit,’ she *superadded aloud*, ‘*is ever most obliging*; and for the attention, and I will add distinction, of having this confidence imparted to me by himself and Miss Dorrit at this early time, I beg to offer *the tribute of* my thanks. My thanks, and my congratulations, are equally *the meed of* Mr Dorrit and of Miss Dorrit.’

‘*To me*,’ observed Miss Fanny, ‘*they are excessively gratifying – inexpressibly so. The relief of finding that you have no objection to make, Mrs General, quite takes a load off my mind, I am sure. I hardly know what I should have done*,’ said Fanny, ‘*if you had interposed any objection, Mrs General*.’

Mrs General changed her gloves, as to the right glove being uppermost and the left undermost, with a *Prunes and Prism smile*.

‘*To preserve your approbation, Mrs General*,’ said Fanny, *returning the smile with one in which there was no trace of those ingredients*, ‘*will of course be the highest object of my married life; to lose it would of course be perfect wretchedness. I am sure your great kindness will not object, and I hope papa will not object to my correcting a small mistake you have made, however. The best of us are so liable to mistakes, that even you, Mrs General, have fallen into a little error. The attention and distinction you have so impressively mentioned, Mrs General, as attaching to this confidence, are, I have no doubt, of the most complimentary and gratifying description; but they don’t at all proceed from*

*me. The merit of having consulted you on the subject would have been so great in me, that I feel I must not lay claim to it when it really is not mine. It is wholly papa's. I am deeply obliged to you for your encouragement and patronage but it was papa who asked for it. I have to thank you, Mrs General for relieving my breast of a great weight by so handsomely giving your consent to my engagement, but you have nothing to thank me for. I hope you will always approve my proceedings after I have left home and that my sister also may long remain the favoured object of your condescension, Mrs General.'*

With this address, which was delivered in her politest manner, Fanny left the room with an *elegant and cheerful* air to *tear upstairs* with a *flushed face as soon as she was out of hearing, pounce upon her sister, call her a little Dormouse, shake her for the better opening of her eyes, tell her what had passed below and ask her what she thought of Pa now?* [Book II, Chap 15: 660 – 62]

One is reminded of the care with which Mrs General cultivates her public 'face'. In a splendid illustration of parodic dialogism Dickens manages swiftly to dehumanize her by conflating her with her skirts, and later with her closed eyes and her gloves, whose 'exemplary repose' she later changes 'as to the right being uppermost and the left undermost'. She can only be known in and through her clothes, her cover, so to speak. Any lingering doubts as to her reluctance, or inability, to reveal her inner self are finally dispelled when she pauses in the middle of her speech to consciously set her face with 'Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism'. Even the order in which these words occur is not accidental for the entire expression is brought to an emphatic, tight-lipped ending, supplied by the last letter in the word 'prism'. Her very smile, full of 'Prunes and Prism', constitutes one of the most hilarious examples of parodical dialogism in the book by virtue of its being impossible to execute. Actually, one could say that Mrs General is all about endings rather than beginnings and closings rather than openings. Consequently, Mr Dorrit's abiding deference to her is a constant reminder of his inadequacies. Wholly unable to recognise what is real and true and what is not, he uses her as a marker through which he can define himself.

Fanny, on the other hand, fully 'gets' Mrs General and *plays* out the scene with a multiple awareness of herself, her father and Mrs General. This is immediately evident in the way in which she ostensibly defers to her father but in a way that *consciously* mimics and exaggerates Mrs General's own idiom and deportment. When Mrs General slightly inclines her head Fanny returns the acknowledgement with interest before 'coming loftily upright again'. For the duration of the encounter, she carefully *chooses* her words to satisfy her father, whose further displeasure she is anxious to avoid, as she does care about him and his opinion of her – one might go so far as to say that she defines a part of her 'selfhood' in and through him. Even more significantly her carefully chosen words serve the dual purpose of ventriloquizing, and thus taunting, Mrs General, who is effectively checkmated by Fanny's artfully concealed hostility. Note too, that she counters Mrs General's 'Prunes and Prism' smile with a, presumably, wide smile of her own, 'in which there was no trace of those ingredients'. In this, too, Fanny has a

dual motivation: one of venting her own feelings (but in the language of elite society), and one that effectively throws down the gauntlet to Mrs General who must either swallow Fanny's 'medicine' without comment or allow her own 'demeanour' to slip if she retaliates with anything resembling 'passion' or anger. The double irony, of course, is that such a response would inevitably make her more real, certainly to the reader and probably to all but a handful of characters in the book. Either way Fanny's victory is consummate.

Having achieved her goal she leaves the room with an 'elegant and cheerful air' (that could perhaps be interpreted as *another's speech*) which here happens to be the language of deportment manuals), employed to indicate Fanny's appropriation of social manners to serve her own ends. But the more vernacular usages, 'fear', 'pounce' (narrator's voice) and 'Little Dormouse' (Fanny's voice), function to indicate a division between the elaborately constructed outer Fanny and the spontaneous inner one. At the level of language, then, Fanny's conflicted interiority has not been sealed off from the reader as completely as had previously been suggested by the narrator and the passionate and gleeful 'child' in her rushes upstairs to relate the incident to Amy, presumably in the greatest of detail.

To locate the passage in Bakhtin's notion of 'self and other' one might argue that Mrs General can be understood only in terms of the combined societal 'other', but what lies beneath the surface (if anything) is unlikely to be found in or through 'another' actual being. Her varnish is, first and foremost, expertly applied to herself and, rather as Fanny aims to do, she has carved out a niche for herself in society, one in which it would not serve her to relinquish, even for a moment, her carefully manufactured façade. Is she to be blamed for this? Or is society to be blamed for her having to create this image in the first place in order to survive? These are questions that could be argued back and forth for decades to come. Mr Dorrit, on the other hand, feels Mrs General is perfectly 'fitted' for him. He seems to believe that she has revealed herself to him and, equally, he is able to find himself in her. Certainly, she is the only person to whom he defers. But both these characters exhibit a spectacular failure truly to find self in the other – their so-called self-revelation being nothing more than a mere parroting of the other's language and a reinforcement of the other's ideology. As pointed out by J. Hillis Miller in *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels*, when one chooses relation to society over direct, intimate relations to other individuals "the choice of the relation to society as a source of selfhood is shown to fail, and to lead rather to the loss of identity" (226). There is a slight but very important difference in the way in which Fanny is presented. Although, by consciously utilizing Mrs General's 'surface', she ultimately chooses relation to society over direct, intimate relations to

another individual, she is yet frequently able to express herself without artifice to Amy. One could argue, therefore, that Amy provides the means through which Fanny can express herself in direct relation to another. Fanny is thus often jointly mediated by Amy and the narratorial voice. The irony is that it is Amy, whom the immediate family and Mrs General all find 'wanting', who is the one person who always attempts to meet the other by means of open, direct expression of herself and sensitivity to the needs of those she encounters. Whilst it is true that, in the novel as a whole, the author does tend to privilege Amy's voice over that of other characters, equally important is that he allows other voices, such as Fanny's, to mediate our view of her.

It could be similarly argued that, in settling on passages which tend to show Fanny in a better light, I am guilty of privileging her voice. Of course this is true – it is certainly not difficult to find passages that highlight the many negative aspects of her character. Even within the passages I have chosen, I have hierarchized certain utterances over others and I fully expect that many persuasive arguments will continue to evolve which will either dispute my understanding or add to it meanings I have overlooked. My point is that utilisation of Bakhtin's 'prosaics' enables readings which complement and extend existing accounts of the novel and do justice to the sorts of meanings that emerge when the interplay of voices and the contested nature of even the simplest gestures or utterances are fully acknowledged.

## 3 *MIDDLEMARCH*

### 3.1. **Introductory Remarks**

One of the most alluring features of the novel is its ability to reveal everyday life from a variety of viewpoints and through the number of ‘languages’ used by each character. Whenever we read a novel we enter into a dialogical relationship not only with the characters but also the narrator and/or author or, as Michael Holquist puts it, “What marks the novel off as distinctive within the range of all possible genres [. . .] is its peculiar ability to open a window in discourse from which the extraordinary variety of social languages can be perceived” (DBW 72). For Bakhtin, this special ability of the novel to enable dialogical access to the ‘other’ has profound implications for the philosophical examination of life itself in that our own lives are richly enhanced by the fact that novels allow us to ‘experience’ the interiority of characters whose lives and ideologies are vastly different from our own. As he points out, “No Nirvana is possible for a *single* consciousness. A single consciousness is a contradiction in terms. Consciousness is in essence multiple” (PDP 288).

Bakhtin’s philosophical notion that selfhood can only truly be located in dialogic relation to ‘another’ is inextricably linked to his theory on the dialogic nature of language, and it could be argued that his philosophical ideas on selfhood and ethics flow naturally from his contention that language cannot ever have been monologic (a direct, unmediated discourse which focuses solely on the object of speech without ever taking into account anyone else’s discourse or any second context). Bakhtin contends that, as soon as there is more than one speaker, any utterance gets its meaning from its interaction with other utterances:

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, orientated toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already-spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. [DiN 279]

Holquist draws attention to the intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood, both of which, he says, exist to mean. Reiterating Bakhtin, he speaks of self as being “dominated by a ‘drive to meaning,’ where meaning is understood as something still in the process of creation, something still bending toward the future as opposed to that which is already completed” (DBW 23).



Whilst a detailed and full explication of Bakhtin's comprehensive philosophy is beyond the scope of this thesis, I do explore the notion of selfhood as revealed through the novel (which Bakhtin views as being an exemplar for ordinary life). As Morson and Emerson put it, "For Bakhtin, the novel was not just a complex form of thinking, but was also the supreme achievement of Western thought, greater than all other genres as well as all schools of philosophy" and it was Bakhtin's belief that "more accurate narrative prose often *preceded* more accurate philosophical discussions" (MB 307 – 08 and 48 – emphasis added) and that "the best novelists [were] far ahead of the philosophers" (MB 60). J. Hillis Miller goes a step further, declaring that novels are able to produce "the powerful illusion of an even more intimate access to the mind and heart of another person than the reader can ever have in real life" (*Ariadne's Thread* 31). Because the word lives "beyond itself", in a "living impulse toward the object", Bakhtin insists that "*To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experiences outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it was determined*" (DiN 292). In other words, a dialogical understanding of both self and word are mutually interdependent. In Bakhtin's view, the novel, is the most dialogic genre and "the best form for psychological investigation" (MB 218).

George Eliot expressed similarly strong views with regard to artistic creation. In one of her *Westminster Review* essays, "The Natural History of German Life" (July, 1856), she maintains that "Art [. . .] is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (pp 51 – 6). She goes on to observe that while Charles Dickens had a particular gift for portraying external traits, she truly believed that if he could have approached the psychological side of his characters – their "conceptions of life, and their emotions – with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies". Her specific reservation about Dickens's novels was that he was seldom able to move from exteriority to interiority without, "becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness".

Marcus Stone, Dickens's long-time illustrator, has a slightly different view, believing that Dickens had "an extraordinary grasp of the characters he created" and that "he could tell me everything about them as if they were living people" so much so that "he wept when he has had to kill people, and he was sad and moody for days over a tragedy (Collins, Philip: *Interviews and*

*Recollections* [Volume 2] 188). Likewise, in *Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, Collins expresses admiration for Dickens's "feeling of universal sympathy with human nature," a feeling, he says, that "breathes through his pages like the 'broad and general' atmosphere," so much so, that, although they "may appear extravagant to matter-of fact minds, [. . .] his characters have in them such a strong and self-existent vitality that they have already become part of our actual experience, and remain there like remembrances of our own life (362). I agree. Dickens may not have explored 'the psychological side of his characters' with the same degree of 'truth' that Eliot brings to her characters but, by paying close attention to utterances in one form or another (what Eliot calls 'idiom and manners'), I believe that my own account of *Little Dorrit* does reveal that degree of 'interiority' Eliot finds to be generally lacking in Dickens's characters.

In Eliot's view, the greatest benefit one owes to the artist is the "extension of our sympathies".

As she explains:

Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment. [Pinney. *Essays of George Eliot* 270]

At the time of writing she herself had not yet become a celebrated author and did not have the benefit of hindsight that allows subsequent readers to distinguish between her own and Dickens's very different aims and styles of writing and our recognition of Eliot as a consummate purveyor of realism (whose writing does succeed in exhibiting a fine transition from the external to the internal), and Dickens as a brilliant exponent of satire and parody (which inherently works against a realistic account).

In the *Middlemarch* chapters that follow I once again apply a Bakhtinian reading in the hope that readers' enjoyment of *both* these two vastly different styles of writing will be enhanced. As I have already mentioned, in *Little Dorrit* dialogism is invariably overt and easily identifiable simply because Dickens wrote in a transparently satirical way. With Eliot, however, dialogism is usually, though not always, more subtle and in keeping with her aspirations towards a more realistic approach.

In a letter to her friend, Charles Bray, Eliot expands on her aspirations as a novelist:

If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally ... opinions are a poor cement between human souls, and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures. [Haight (Ed.) *Letters* Vol. 3: 111]

Bakhtin's high regard for novels has much to do with precisely the kinds of insight alluded to by Eliot which, "take real 'becoming' into consideration [by allowing] ideas to grow, change, and struggle against a background that is active in shaping a life" (MB 9). This ever-evolving act of 'becoming' is, for Bakhtin, perhaps the most critical aspect of people, characters and historical or fictional events for, in his view, once 'becoming' no longer occurs, the person or event is finalized and thus closed to change. 'Becoming' therefore alludes to an intrinsic openness to change, development and growth and the novel allows the reader a unique insight into this ongoing process with the diversity of voices, characters and thus worldviews it expresses by means of heteroglossia, dialogy and hybridised discourse.

In "Discourse and the Novel," Bakhtin maintains that each character in a novel has his own sphere of influence on the authorial context surrounding him – one which extends beyond the boundaries of direct speech allotted to him, with the result that "the area occupied by an important character's voice" must be "broader than his direct or 'actual' words". This zone is always, to some extent, dialogised because inside it a special type of novelistic dialogue takes place between the author and his characters – one which differs from the "broken up into statement-and-response" of dramatic dialogues, appearing, instead to resemble a monologue. It is the potential for this special kind of dialogue that constitutes "one of the most fundamental privileges of prose" a privilege that Bakhtin believes is denied to either the drama or to poetry (DiN 320).

*Middlemarch* yields a vast array of characters and events, each having his or her own 'sphere of influence' on the surrounding authorial context, but for the purpose of this thesis I have necessarily had to limit my study and have chosen to focus my attention on the development of the characters of Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate and their relationship to each other and to selected other characters. Consequently I will be looking closely at the ways in which Rosamond's and Lydgate's lives are shaped by internal and external forces in the town of Middlemarch, how they relate to their circumstances and to each other, and the way in which the narrator 'interacts' with both her characters and the imagined reader. Especially pertinent is how these multiple dialogic relationships *include*, *affect* and *involve* the reader in ongoing debate about the multiplicity of meanings and experiences in the quest for selfhood.

The process of establishing 'selfhood' begins by concentrating on what Bakhtin calls 'character zones' which are, he says:

formed from the fragments of character speech, from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's word, from scattered words, sayings, and verbal tics belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations). Such a character zone is the field of action for a character's voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author's voice. [DiN 316]

Feeling that the disparate examples Bakhtin uses to illustrate hybridised discourse are perhaps too simple, Morson and Emerson submit that “The most complicated examples of hybridized discourse develop and accumulate over the course of a whole novel” (MB 330). This is why they felt that it might have been a helpful exercise to study a whole novel and why I intend to extend and expand on the approach I took for *Little Dorrit*: that of pursuing a specific theme or themes chosen from a fairly tightly-knit group of characters *as they develop* and so situate complex examples of hybrid discourse within each character's ‘field of action’. As Morson and Emerson put it, “unless the critic discusses the particular character zones *as they are being established*, their presence in later passages is likely to be invisible” (MB 330). Because Bakhtin provides no sustained reading of whole novels (MB 247 – 48), the characters he discusses are not located within a particular theme or framework. As opposed to exploring the *accumulated effect* of discourse as it develops over the course of the novel, he opted, instead to discuss isolated passages (in which, although the languages dialogized are *immediately comprehensible* to the reader, these unconnected conversations or remarks cannot be properly contextualized within the novel as a whole).

Situating characters within character zones is especially significant when approaching a realist novel such as *Middlemarch* in which the growth and development of a particular character is charted, affected and dialogized not only by the author but also by the many other characters and circumstances each encounters as their character zones intersect. It soon becomes evident that Eliot's dialogized heteroglossia is less obvious than Dickens's but, as Gerald Bullet remarks, in *George Eliot: Her Life and Her Books*, “The richness and variety of colour, the warm undertones of meaning, the mingling of comedy and tragedy and dramatic irony, the abundance of invention, the densely populated provincial background, the author's imaginative saturation in her theme” all combine to make *Middlemarch* an extraordinarily rich novel in which “the universals in life are apprehended in the particulars” (277).

In this section I look closely at the contextualised ways in which Eliot presents Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate as their lives mingle, intersect and are influenced by each other and by other members of the community, and most particularly by Dorothea Brooke. I settled on these two characters for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that they are two vastly different

personalities who struggle to come to terms both with themselves and each other in an ill-conceived marriage fraught with complications and setbacks. Added to their discrepant backgrounds (the supremely class-conscious Rosamond craves the social status Lydgate seems intent on discarding), they have utterly different needs, expectations and modes of expressing themselves and, consequently, experience enormous difficulties in conducting the sort of dialogue or interaction characteristic of people who share a similar outlook on life. I also felt that it would be interesting to explore a character like Rosamond who, in some respects, is quite similar to Fanny Dorrit. Both are self-seeking and opinionated, both suffer from being products of their respective environments and both are single-minded in their determination to improve their status through marriage. These traits have led to largely negative and, in my view, sometimes unwarranted criticisms of their respective characters.

### 3.2. Character Zones

To contextualize the characters of Rosamond and Lydgate and present them as fully as possible within their respective character zones I use a chronological approach, extracting excerpts that involve each or both of them either directly or indirectly. As in *Little Dorrit*, while striving to include as much original text as possible, I have had to exercise a certain degree of selectivity so as to avoid repetition. As in the previous section, I highlight (in bold italics) certain words and phrases that may relate to Bakhtinian theory. I have chosen to not expand exhaustively on each individual instance in which Bakhtinian thinking could be applied but, instead, merely to draw to the readers' attention some points of interest. This is for two reasons. Firstly, like Bakhtin, I do not believe that novels can be exhaustively analysed, since new meanings continue to emerge and develop over time. No *one* detail can have the identical meaning for everyone and one of my goals is to encourage the reader to explore not only the texts themselves but also question the validity of my own responses. Secondly, some of the sections I have highlighted are italicised simply in order to redirect readers' attention to points I have previously discussed and do not feel the need to repeat. My primary objective is to provide a tool for the reader which, though not definitive can nevertheless be utilised to enhance appreciation and enjoyment of *Middlemarch* and, by extension, other great novelistic texts.

In *Middlemarch* Eliot chooses to introduce both Rosamond and Lydgate through hearsay and the opinion of selected guests at a pre-wedding party for Dorothea, to which Lydgate, who has recently arrived in Middlemarch, has been invited and Rosamond, the daughter of a local

merchant, has not. The ensuing conversational titbits, in which a group of male guests reflect on what constitutes desirable wifely material, set up the prospect of a dialogical relationship between Lydgate, Rosamond and Dorothea (none of whom, as yet, have met) and between them and members of Middlemarch society.

‘A *fine* woman, Miss Brooke! an uncommonly fine woman, by God!’ said Mr Standish, the old lawyer, who had been so long concerned with the landed gentry *that he had become landed himself*, and *used that oath* in a deep-mouthed manner *as a sort of armorial bearings, stamping the speech of a man who held a good position*. Mr Bulstrode, the banker, seemed to be addressed, but *that gentleman disliked coarseness and profanity* and merely bowed.

The remark was taken up by Mr Chichely, a *middle-aged bachelor* and courting celebrity, who had a *complexion something like an Easter egg, a few hairs carefully arranged, and a carriage implying the consciousness of a distinguished appearance*.

‘Yes, but not my style of woman: *I like a woman who lays herself out a little more to please us. There should be a little filigree about a woman – something of the coquette*. A man likes a sort of challenge. The more of a dead set she makes at you the better.’

‘There’s some truth in that,’ said Mr Standish, disposed to be genial. ‘And by God, it’s usually the way with them. I suppose it answers some wise ends: Providence made them so, eh, Bulstrode?’

‘I should be disposed to refer coquetry to another source,’ said Mr Bulstrode. ‘I should refer it rather to the devil’

‘Ay, to be sure, there should be a little *devil* in a woman,’ said Mr Chichely, whose study of the fair sex seemed to have been detrimental to his theology. ‘And I like them *blond*, with a *certain gait*, and a *swan neck*. Between ourselves, *the mayor’s daughter is more to my taste than Miss Brooke* or Miss Celia either. *If I were a marrying man I should choose Miss Vincy before either of them.*’

‘Well, make up, make up,’ said Mr Standish, jocosely; ‘you see the middle-aged fellows carry the day.’ Mr Chichely shook his head with much meaning: he was not going to incur the certainty of being accepted by the woman he would choose.

*The Miss Vincy who had the honour of being Mr Chichely’s ideal was of course not present; for Mr Brooke, always objecting to go too far, would not have chosen that his nieces should meet the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer, unless it were on a public occasion.* [Chap 10: 87 – 8]

The above conversation immediately places Rosamond and Dorothea in overlapping character zones in which certain distinctions are drawn between them. We are thus immediately alerted to a possible future dialogical relationship between the two women. In *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, Gary Saul Morson makes the point that a great deal of comedy “depends on people identifying a context differently from their listeners – and their unseen judge – and betraying their values in the process” (4) and, in what approaches a Dickensian propensity for the comic, Eliot targets the idiosyncrasies of the speaking parties: Mr Standish, whose speech patterns and ‘armorial bearings’ imply a conscious effort to imitate the idiolect of his ‘landed’ clients (thus betraying his social aspirations), the confirmed bachelor Mr Chichely, whose comical figure is satirized by the narrator against the ‘distinguished’ image of himself he is at pains to project, and Mr Bulstrode, whose initial silence and subsequent remarks target him as being somewhat sanctimonious.

For Bakhtin the language of the novel is never “laid out on a single plane” (TDI 48). Instead, it constitutes a system of languages that “mutually and ideologically interanimate each other” (TDI

47). Whilst sharing a general linguistic pool for their means of expression, each character's use of language is highly individualized and formulated to express an ideology so that, to some degree, they emerge as ideologues (Danow 53). The highly individualized and satirized 'languages' of the three speakers in the above passage reveal that their respective opinions regarding Rosamond and Dorothea are likely to be as fatally flawed as the images they have of themselves and their conversation creates an immediate awareness that, during the course of events, the characters of Rosamond and Dorothea are likely to be variously, and often erroneously, assessed and compared. The passage also provides some insight into the Middlemarch social milieu against which the characters develop, and it shortly becomes apparent that, despite the fact that their paths ultimately intersect and overlap, Rosamond and Lydgate move in essentially different social circles. Mr Brooke's scrupulous omission of Rosamond from the guest list is a case in point, signaling the social inequality between her and Lydgate who, despite being only a family practitioner, is sufficiently well connected to qualify to meet and talk with Dorothea on an equal footing.

In Bakhtin's considered judgment all utterances are "social enthymemes" – arguments based on probability (Morson 4). When Lady Chettam says of Lydgate, 'I am told he is wonderfully clever: he certainly looks it – a fine brow indeed', the Rector's voluble wife, Mrs Cadwallader (the town's social barometer, so to speak), predictably pronounces him 'a gentleman' because he 'talks well' (90 – emphasis added). The implicit 'therefore' (he talks well, therefore he is a gentleman) constitutes a syllogism which "carries the force of logical inevitability" but which omits "the major premise for the reader to reconstruct" ("Tolstoy's Absolute Language". Morson 128). Regardless of all else, Lydgate is thus 'logically' adjudged to be 'a gentleman' by Mrs Cadwallader on the sole basis of the way he speaks. However, he does not meet with similar approval by everyone at the gathering.

'Lydgate has lots of ideas, quite new, about ventilation and diet, that sort of thing,' resumed Mr Brooke, after he had handed out Lady Chettam, and had returned to be civil to a group of Middlemarchers.

'Hang it, do you think that is quite sound? – *upsetting the old treatment, which has made Englishmen what they are?*' said Mr Standish.

'Medical knowledge is at a low ebb among us,' said Mr Bulstrode, who spoke in a subdued tone, and had rather a *sickly air*. 'I, for my part, hail the advent of Mr Lydgate. I hope to find good reason for confiding the new hospital to his management.'

'That is all very fine,' replied Mr Standish, *who was not fond of Mr Bulstrode; 'if you like him to try experiments on your hospital patients, and kill a few people for charity, I have no objection. But I am not going to hand money out of my purse to have experiments tried on me. I like treatment that has been tested a little.'* [. . .] [Chap 10: 91]

Bakhtin insists that, "novels are never in danger of becoming a mere aimless verbal play [but are] a dialogized representation of an ideologically freighted discourse" (DiN 333). Or, as Danow

puts it, every word articulated in the novel is by definition both social and ideological, collectively replicating an arena accommodating various contending points of view” (53). When Mr Standish (who, as we have already seen, aligns himself with the landed gentry) has reservations about Lydgate *before* meeting him, one might conclude that his discourse is ideologically ‘freighted’ (by personal bigotry). However, when viewed against the broader context of the First Reform Bill in 1832 (on the eve of which *Middlemarch* was set) and the medical reforms Lydgate intends to institute, Mr Standish’s summary denouncement of Lydgate’s new-fangled methods serve also as an early warning for what will eventually emerge as the collective voice of the community when later developments turn public opinion against him. Furthermore, the implicit narratorial reservations against Lydgate’s champion, Bulstrode, in the previous passage (‘that gentleman disliked coarseness and profanity’) here gather momentum (he ‘had rather a sickly air’). We hear, too, that Mr Standish ‘was not fond of Mr Bulstrode’. Contextual dialogism thus links general criticism of Bulstrode to Lydgate to the extent that Bulstrode’s eventual undoing spills over into how Lydgate is ultimately perceived by the community. What is clear is that these initial differences of opinion regarding Lydgate and his new medical ‘ideas’ are likely to become the source of lively and ongoing debate among the members of the community.

Mr Lydgate, of course, was out of hearing. He had quitted the party early, and would have thought it *altogether tedious but for the novelty of certain introductions, especially the introduction to Miss Brooke*, whose youthful bloom, with her approaching marriage to that faded scholar, and her interest in matters socially useful, gave her the piquancy of an unusual combination.

‘She is a good creature – that fine girl – *but a little too earnest*,’ he thought. ‘*It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste.*’

*Evidently Miss Brooke was not Mr Lydgate’s style of woman any more than Mr Chichely’s.* [. . .] But Lydgate was less ripe, and might possibly have experience before him *which would modify* his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman. [. . .]

Lydgate, in fact, was already conscious of being fascinated by a woman *strikingly different from Miss Brooke*: he *did not in the least suppose that he had lost his balance and fallen in love*, but he had said of that particular woman, ‘She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. *That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music*’. Plain women he regarded as he did other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science. But Rosamond Vincy seemed to have the true melodic charm, and when a man has seen the woman whom he would have chosen if he had intended to marry speedily, *his remaining a bachelor will usually depend on her resolution* rather than on his. Lydgate believed that he should not marry for several years: not marry until he had trodden out a good clear path for himself away from the broad road which was quite ready made. But Lydgate was young, poor, ambitious. [. . .] To a man under such circumstances, taking a wife is something more than a question of adornment, however highly he may rate this; and *Lydgate was disposed to give it the first place among wifely functions*. To his taste, *guided by a single conversation*, here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be found wanting, notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. *She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle*. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with *sweet laughs* for bird-notes, and *blue eyes for a heaven*. [Chaps 10 and 11: 91 – 4]



Having embarked on what Bakhtin calls “the field of action for a character’s voice” (DiN 316), through indirect and reported speech, the narrator only now offers her readers a brief glimpse of the inner man, one which not only suggests a tenuous link between Lydgate and Dorothea, but also continues the theme of what constitutes desirable marriage partnerships – this time from the point of view of Lydgate himself. Lydgate’s biases are, at first, subtly alluded to (Dorothea was not his ‘style of woman’ being ‘too earnest’ and ‘troublesome to talk to’), and then rather more strenuously undermined by the narrator who likens his conventional attitude to women to that of Mr Chichely. Another slightly negative aspect to his character is hinted at in his reason for quitting the party early (tedium), but we are given the clear impression that these opinions emanate from a man who has yet to mature.

Bakhtin maintains that what keeps the novel from congealing (as a genre) is that it constantly “comes into contact with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present” and that “the novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed” (EaN 27). Even at this early stage, it is clear that Eliot views Lydgate as ‘not yet completed’ but as a man in the making whose judgments are likely to undergo modification for reasons not yet specified but which probably have much to do with his conventional approach to marriage coupled with his unconventional approach to medicine and society.

Rosamond’s placement at the intersection of character zones between Lydgate and Dorothea is reinforced, as is Lydgate’s conventional attitude to women, as after just a single conversation with Dorothea, Lydgate perceives Rosamond, by contrast, to be ‘what a woman ought to be’ with ‘sweet laughs’ and ‘blue eyes for a heaven’ and, presumably in contradistinction to Dorothea, one who *is* able to look at things ‘from the proper feminine angle’. His perceptions thus reinforce the imminent dialogical relationship between the three characters. But the narratorial dialogism contained in his having been ‘guided by a single conversation’ and the prior suggestion that a possible modification of his views might be necessary, place a question mark over the reliability of Lydgate’s judgment. Furthermore, although the statement that a man’s ‘remaining a bachelor will usually depend on her resolution rather than on his’ is stated in general terms, it serves the additional purpose of slipping in more information about the nature of Rosamond and her determination to achieve her own goals. The prediction thus becomes more specific – Lydgate’s intention of not marrying ‘for several years’ is doomed to fail in the face of Rosamond’s resolve.

Certainly nothing could seem less important to Lydgate than the turn of Miss Brooke's mind, or to Miss Brooke than the qualities of the woman who had attracted this young surgeon. *But anyone watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another*, which tells like a calculated irony or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour. Destiny stands by sarcastic with our *dramatis personae* folded in her hand.

Old provincial society had its share of this *subtle* movement: had not only its striking downfalls, its brilliant young professional dandies who ended by living up an entry with a drab and six children for their establishment, but also those *less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse, and begetting new consciousness of inter-dependence*. Some slipped a little downward, some got higher footing: people denied aspirates, gained wealth, and fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves surprisingly grouped in consequence; while a few personages or families that stood with rock firmness amid all this fluctuation, were slowly presenting new aspects in spite of solidity, *and altering with the double change of self and beholder*. Municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection – gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings-bank, and the worship of the solar guinea became extinct; while squires and baronets, and even lords who had once lived blamelessly afar from the civic mind, gathered the faultiness of closer acquaintanceship. Settlers, too, came from the distant counties, some with an alarming novelty of skill, others with an offensive advantage in cunning. In fact, much the same sort of *movement and mixture* went on in old England as we find in older Herodotus, who also, in telling what had been, thought it well to take a woman's lot for his starting-point; though Io, as a maiden apparently *beguiled by attractive merchandise*, was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy, *who had excellent taste in costume*, with that nymph-like figure and *pure blondness* which give the largest range to choice in the flow and colour of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was admitted to be the *flower* of Mrs Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female – even to *extras*, such as the getting in and out of a carriage. Mrs Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an example: no pupil, she said, *exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech*, while her musical execution was quite exceptional. *We cannot help the way in which people speak of us*, and probably if Mrs Lemon had undertaken to describe Juliet or Imogen, these heroines would not have seemed poetical. *The first vision of Rosamond would have been enough with most judges to dispel any prejudice excited by Mrs Lemon's praise.*

[Chap 11: 94 – 5]

Although much of this passage constitutes a shift away from my primary focus in this section (that of establishing character zones), I have included it here as it does hark back to points made in the Introduction in that Bakhtin's ideas about 'selfhood' and 'becoming' chime with Eliot's. The passage signifies one of the narrator's many divergences from the specific to a more general discourse on one of Eliot's favourite themes: the interdependence of all who constitute society. Despite many individuals' propensity for isolation within narrow circles, the 'stealthy convergence of human lots' imperceptibly shifts 'the boundaries of social intercourse' and gives birth to 'a new consciousness of inter-dependence'. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth submits in her landmark essay, "Negotiating *Middlemarch*," the genius of Eliot lies precisely in her ability to make visible "the difficult, complex fact that each individual act specifies anew some traditional arrangement, some systemic order, modifying in some miniscule way a broadly interconnected balance of things. It is precisely thus that the most unheroic acts become powerful" by specifying and modifying "a grammar of belief and value" (Chase 119).

In Bakhtin's view, history is shaped by very ordinary things and not, as is thought by some, by great cataclysmic events. History should, therefore, be understood as being "neither random nor

completely ordered, neither of which would allow for genuine ‘becoming’” (MB 45). It is rather the subtle changes (alluded to by the narrator) that result in genuine ‘becoming’ by means of a new ‘inter-dependence’. Any genuine ‘becoming’ (in Bakhtin’s view) involves more than one consciousness and this both reinforces and is reinforced by Eliot’s reference to even the most obstinate believers in autonomy who begin ‘altering with the double change of self and beholder’. Over time, not only are they carried along by change but they are themselves compelled to change and are viewed differently by others; no matter how stubbornly they stand their ground, they cannot withstand the creeping tide of change.

At this point, the narrator leads the discussion away from the abstract flow of events towards a particular comparison between the unfortunate mythical Io (Rosamond) and the estimable Dorothea (who, by contrast, is compared to Saint Theresa in the *Middlemarch’s* Prelude – 7) so as to resume where she left off discussing Rosamond in relation to Dorothea. But this time she does so from her own point of view and not from Lydgate’s – and we are given a view of Rosamond who, quite unlike Dorothea, has a penchant for ‘attractive merchandise’, and is characterized by her ‘pure blondness’, ‘a nymph-like figure’ and ‘excellent taste in costume’ and was considered the ‘flower’ of Mrs Lemon’s school. This last point is beautifully hybridised by the narrator who progresses seamlessly from general opinion, to undercutting that opinion with an explanation of the ‘extras’ provided by Mrs Lemon’s estimable establishment, before going on to Mrs Lemon’s own reported speech (a dubious compliment on account of its ideological bias), and then finishing up with the narrator’s own ‘take’ on both Mrs Lemon and Rosamond. Bakhtin remarks that “every work faces outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent anticipates possible reactions to itself” (FTC 257), and this passage, bracketed by ‘But anyone watching keenly [. . .]’, and “We cannot help the way in which people speak of us’ [. . .] is just one of the many examples of Eliot’s awareness of her readers and her attempts to draw them into philosophical debate.

*Rosamond silently wished that her father would invite Mr Lydgate.* She was tired of the faces and figures she had always been used to – the various *irregular profiles and gaits* and *turns of phrase* distinguishing those Middlemarch young men whom she had known as boys. She had been at school with girls of *higher position*, whose brothers, *she felt sure, it would have been possible for her to be more interested in*, than in these inevitable Middlemarch companions. *But she would not have chosen to mention her wish to her father*; and he, for his part, was in no hurry on the subject. [Chap 11: 96]

Up until this point Rosamond has only been the subject of various *outside* opinions (including those of the narrator), but here we are finally afforded direct insight into her own thoughts which, at the outset, appear to be laid bare before the reader in quite a simple denotative (and therefore monologic) way. However, idiolectical dialogism quickly makes an appearance as we learn of

her distaste for local suitors whose inferior social position is exacerbated by the ‘higher position’ of her friends at school. Her apparently simple motive for wishing to meet Lydgate thus becomes quickly caught up in her ultimate desire for social prestige, revealed in her reflecting about men she has never met and yet feels about them that ‘it would have been possible for her to be more interested in’ than her less-connected Middlemarch companions. That these wishes are ‘silent’ and not revealed to her father can be interpreted in several ways, ranging from a natural reticence and decorum to a hidden agenda and extending to a personality that may, for various reasons, want to avoid being fully known. Bakhtin submits that “no less than people in drama or in epic” the actions taken by novelistic characters “are always associated with an ideological motif” and occupy “a definite ideological position” (DiN 333 – 34). Therefore the “action and individual act of a character in a novel are essential in order to expose – as well as to test – his ideological position, his discourse” (DiN 334).

Rosamond, who up until now has been only the subject of hearsay and speculation, begins to emerge as a character and this passage leads to a scene in her own home in which we hear, for the first time, her direct speech, but not before we are given yet another impression of her, this time coming from her mother who looks ‘admiringly at her daughter’ sitting in the breakfast room with her embroidery (96).

‘Mamma,’ said Rosamond, ‘when Fred comes down I wish you would not let him have red herrings. *I cannot bear the smell of them* all over the house at this hour of the morning.’

‘Oh, *my dear*, you are so hard on your brothers! *It is the only fault I have to find with you*. You are *the sweetest temper* in the world, but are so tetchy with your brothers.’

‘Not tetchy, mamma; *you never hear me speak in an unladylike way*.’

‘Well, but you want to deny them things.’

‘*Brothers are so unpleasant*.’

‘Oh, *my dear*, you must allow for young men. Be thankful if they have good hearts. A woman must learn to put up with little things. You will be *married* some day.’

‘Not to anyone who is like Fred.’ [. . .]

‘Well, *my dear*, you will not find any Middlemarch young man who has not something against him.’

‘But’ – here Rosamond’s face broke into a smile which suddenly revealed two dimples. *She herself thought unfavourably of these dimples and smiled little in general society*. ‘*But I shall not marry any Middlemarch young man*.’

‘So it seems, *my love*, for you have as good as *refused the pick of them*; and if there’s better to be had, I’m sure *there’s no girl better deserves it*.’

‘Excuse me, mamma – *I wish you would not say, the pick of them*.’

‘Why, what else are they?’

‘I mean mother, it is a rather *vulgar expression*.’

‘*Very likely, my dear*; I never was a good speaker. What should I say?’

‘The best of them.’

‘Why, that seems just as plain and common. If I had had time to think, I should have said, ‘the most superior young men.’ But with your education you must know.’

[Chap 11: 96 – 7]

Rosamond’s zone of contact now enters into the realm of those closest to her as her mother’s regard is added into the mix of opinions surrounding her. Mrs Vincy’s indulgence of all her

children is palpable and the majority of her responses to Rosamond are prefaced with an endearment ('my dear' and 'my love'). Nevertheless, she does mildly reproach Rosamond for criticising her brothers, Fred, in particular. All the same she continually makes concessions to Rosamond on account of the latter's superior education, beauty and 'sweet temper', all of which gesture towards her considerable marriageable qualities. These qualities inevitably become a topic of conversation in which Rosamond's direct speech reveals the image of herself she is at pains to portray. Clearly she aspires to greater heights than those into which she is born – a yearning that seems to be somewhat recklessly encouraged by her indulgent mother. What we begin to see in this passage is a discrepancy between her behaviour at home and the way in which she presents herself in society, to the extent that, in company, she even curbs her smile in an effort to hide her dimples that, for some reason, she appears to find objectionable and equally out of keeping with the 'ladylike' image she wishes to project, as conversing in the kind of slang she accuses her mother of using.

Bakhtin puts forward the view that the "topic of a speaking person" is particularly important in everyday life and that "speech about speakers" is constantly taking place. People, he says, "talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh and pass judgment on other people's words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by other's words, or agree with them, contest them, refer to them and so forth" (DiN 338). The progression of the Vincy's domestic conversation to include a discussion on the actual words themselves would, doubtlessly, have been of great interest to Bakhtin. Mrs Vincy's particular choice of words, 'tetchy' and 'the pick of them' is considered vulgar by Rosamond, whose chastisement of her mother is reminiscent of Mrs General's repeated correction of Fanny's colourful idiolect in *Little Dorrit*. Implicit in Rosamond's objection is an exquisitely understated example of paradoxical dialogism: 'the pick of them' has predatory connotations very close to the mark for Rosamond in particular but, for obvious reasons, she cannot bring herself even to think in such terms, let alone allow this kind of indelicate sentiment to be heard by others. Rather like Mrs General she is a purveyor of propriety, and nothing if not ladylike. Discussion on the suitability of certain expressions continues after they are joined by Fred, who interposes himself into their conversation.

'What must Rosy know, mother?' [. . .]

'Whether it's right to say 'superior young men,' said Mrs Vincy ringing the bell.

'Oh, there are so many superior teas and sugars now. Superior is getting to be shopkeepers' slang.'

'Are you beginning to dislike slang, then?' said Rosamond, with mild gravity.

'Only the wrong sort. *All choice of words is slang. It marks a class.*'

*There is correct English: that is not slang.*

'I beg your pardon: *correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.*'

[Chap 11: 98]

The passage extends Rosamond's character zone to include Fred's attitude toward her and we are treated to a taste of his personality and views, both very different from hers and against which she is dialogized. Their conversation centres on the nature of language itself and in which Fred could almost be seen as a spokesperson for Bakhtin himself who, as we remember, declares that language is "heteroglot from top to bottom" and that the many different 'languages' used by different people, in different generations and in various professional capacities and level of social rank intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying languages (DiN 291). Even at this early stage, it becomes apparent that Rosamond ('There is correct English') embodies centripetal (or unifying) forces which seek to centralise meaning by imposing order on an "essentially heterogeneous and messy world" (MB 30) while Fred ('All choice of words is slang. It marks a class') comes out strongly on the side of centrifugal (or disruptive) forces that "either purposefully or *for no particular reason* continually disrupt that order" (MB 30). Actually, Fred pours scorn on the type of person who feels it necessary to use 'correct English', the propensity for which he summarily writes off as the 'slang of prigs'. In Bakhtinian terms Rosamond's speech patterns, personality traits and values together exemplify the pull towards an ideological centre whilst Fred's natural instincts are to pull against forces of unification and centralisation.

After an extended session of sibling squabbling Rosamond is able to ascertain that Lydgate pays daily medical visits to their uncle, Mr Featherstone, and she swiftly engineers a visit to Stone Court with Fred, to coincide with Lydgate's morning consultation.

'I suppose you are not going out riding to-day?' said Rosamond, lingering a bit after her mamma was gone.

'No; why?'

'Papa says I may have the chestnut to ride now.'

'You can go with me tomorrow, if you like. Only I am going to Stone Court, remember.'

'I want to ride so much, *it is indifferent to me where we go.*' **Rosamond really wished to go to Stone Court, of all other places.**

'Oh, I say, Rosy,' said Fred, as she was passing out of the room, 'if you are going to the piano, let me come and play some airs with you.'

'Pray do not ask me this morning.'

'Why not this morning?'

'Really, Fred, I wish you would leave off playing the flute. A man looks very silly playing the flute. And you play so out of tune.'

'**When next any one makes love to you, Miss Rosamond, I will tell him how obliging you are.**'

'Why should you expect me to oblige you by hearing you play the flute, any more than I should expect you to oblige me by not playing it?'

'And why should you expect me to take you out riding?'

This question led to an *adjustment*, for **Rosamond had set her mind on that particular ride.**

So Fred was gratified with nearly an hour's practice of '*Ar hyd y nos*', '*Ye banks and braes*,' and other favourite airs from his "Instructor on the Flute"; a wheezy performance, into which he **threw much ambition and an irrepressible hopefulness.**

[Chap 11: 101]

Although Rosamond and Fred manipulate each other into providing what each requires, the difference between them is that, unlike Rosamond, Fred has no discernible secret agenda. Rosamond's stated reasons for the ride are clearly bogus and she takes great pains to conceal them – it should never be said of her that she is husband-hunting. That she submits to the hard bargain he drives indicates her awareness that Fred sees right through her ruse and is almost certainly teasing her about Lydgate when he playfully threatens to disclose her so-called 'obliging' qualities to her *next* prospective suitor, knowing full well that she has already rejected the Middlemarch bachelors.

A number of critics, including Kerry McSweeney, have objected to what they call Eliot's overly intrusive narratorial comments. McSweeney is of the opinion that Rosamond, in particular, "brings out the worst in the narrator" when it comes to "infelicitous asides" (68). Although she does not single out this passage, in principle I agree it might have been left to the reader to gauge Rosamond's real intentions without the added help of 'Rosamond really wished to go to Stone Court, of all other places'. Far more subtle is the information conveyed by the fact that one of Fred's favourite songs is, quite unsurprisingly, written in Welsh and another in Scottish dialect. Neither song conforms to the category of 'correct English' or in his terminology, 'the slang of prigs'. Rather, they exemplify his irrepressible individuality and reinforce the inalienable ideological differences between the two siblings who constantly correct and retranslate each others' discourse. Discussing Bakhtin's view on language diversity, David Danow submits that, "if each speaker [. . .] employs language distinctively and, perhaps, idiosyncratically, then each is certain to speak 'a different language' [and] this implies the need to translate. Communication thus always involves translation" and, in the novel, characters are bound to emerge as ideologues because of their "individualized lexicon[s] and particular manner of expression" (53).

At Stone Court, the following morning, Rosamond and her childhood friend, Mary Garth, who has been employed to take care of the ageing Mr Featherstone, reconnect with each other.

'Come into my room, Rosamond, you will not mind *the cold* for a little while,' said Mary. The two girls had not only known each other in childhood, but had been at the same provincial school together (Mary as an articulated pupil), so that they had many memories in common, and liked very well to talk in private. Indeed this *tête-à-tête* was *one of Rosamond's objects* in coming to Stone Court. [. . .]

Rosamond and Mary had been talking faster than their male friends. *They did not think of sitting down*, but stood at the toilette-table near the window while Rosamond took off her hat, *adjusted her veil, and applied little touches of her finger-tips to her hair* – hair of *infinite fairness*, neither flaxen nor yellow. Mary Garth seemed all the *plainer* standing at an *angle between the two nymphs – the one in the glass, and the one out of it, who looked at each other with eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings an ingenious beholder could put into them, and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite.* [. . .] In fact most men in Middlemarch, *except her brothers*, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called

her an *angel*. Mary Garth, on the contrary, had the aspect of an *ordinary sinner*: she was brown, her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low, and it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues. [. . .] Rembrandt would have painted her with pleasure, and would have made her broad features look out of the canvas with intelligent honesty. *For honesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue: she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof*, and when she was in a good mood she *had humour enough in her to laugh at herself*. When she and Rosamond happened both to be reflected in the glass, she said laughingly –

‘What a brown patch I am by the side of you, Rosy! You are the most *unbecoming* companion.’

‘Oh no! No one thinks of your appearance, you are so sensible and useful, Mary. Beauty is of very little consequence in reality,’ said Rosamond, turning her head towards Mary, *but with eyes swerving towards the new view of her neck in the glass*.

‘You mean *my* beauty,’ said Mary, rather sardonically.

Rosamond *thought*, ‘Poor Mary, she takes the kindest things ill.’ *Aloud she said*, ‘What have you been doing lately?’ [Chap 12: 110 – 11]

One must presume that some of the studied ‘extras’ gleaned from Mrs Lemon fall away from Rosamond in her old friend’s company. They do not bother to sit down but stand chatting at the dressing table while Rosamond makes minor adjustments to her appearance. The opening paragraph immediately sets about showing a divide in the status of the two girls, suggesting that the ‘cold’, quite normal for Mary, is obviously alien to the cosseted Rosamond. If we were to continue along the lines of division one might be forgiven for suspecting that the phrase ‘one of Rosamond’s objects’ is indicative of a kind of calculation in Rosamond perhaps not present in Mary.

The mirrored Rosamond: ‘an angel’ to ‘most men in Middlemarch, except her brothers’, is here keenly contrasted with the solid reality of Mary: ‘an ordinary sinner’ whose ‘plainness’ the narrator later describes as being of ‘the good, human sort’. As the self-absorbed Rosamond adjusts her veil and touches her ‘hair of infinite fairness’ in front of the mirror, a refracted view of Mary is given, standing outside the immediate field of vision, at an ‘angle’ between the ‘two nymphs’. Narratorial dialogic makes an appearance when a second, hybridised view of Rosamond (contained and isolated within a bubble of her own conscious creation of herself), is proffered in which the attributes ‘nymph’, ‘heavenly’ and ‘exquisite’ are poised between Rosamond’s narcissistic reflections and the narrator’s ironic sense of the words. The word ‘ingenious’ clearly belongs to the narrator and *not* to Rosamond who would hardly admit to the ingenuity involved in her ability to hide ‘less exquisite’ meanings.

Although Mary is strongly inclined towards ‘honesty’ and ‘truth-telling fairness’ – actually described as her ‘reigning virtue’ – she is not lacking in humour. Her reference to Rosamond as ‘the most unbecoming companion’ is a case in point in which she chooses the type of words her companion might use, but inflects them with an irony Rosamond does not appear to pick up on and whose rebuttal is explicit enough. However, Rosamond’s protestation regarding the



inconsequentiality of physical beauty is belied by her ‘eyes swerving toward the new view of her neck in the glass’ and her unvoiced reservations about ‘poor’ Mary. ‘Aloud’ she deftly changes the direction of the conversation.

Eliot’s multi-layered perception of Rosamond – ranging from Rosamond’s own point of view (from her perspective of herself in the mirror) to those refracted by the narrator and, through the narrator, by Mary – impact on the reader almost simultaneously. In describing outward appearance Bakhtin dwells at length on the unreliability of one’s image of oneself in the mirror and its propensity for accomplishing self-abdication by allowing what he calls ‘pretenders’ to overlook their peculiar falsity, by identifying, instead, with the mirror image. As Morson and Emerson explain:

When I look in the mirror, I never see what others see when they see me, because any authentic outer self requires the finalizing efforts of a *second* consciousness. The falsity therefore occurs in confusing an I-for-others with an I-for-myself; an I-for-others requires that second, outside other, who in fact supplies that image of self. Looking at myself I can only impersonate such an other; and even if such impersonation could be successful, I would still have a sense of myself-for-others, which is still a very different thing from the I-for-myself. My own body, my own voice cannot be the same for me as it is for someone else.

For myself, my body can at best be a sort of semi-detached “bas-relief” image; “what strikes us in our external image is its own peculiar emptiness, ghostliness, its vaguely oppressive loneliness” (AiG [AH], pp. 28 – 29)<sup>1</sup>. Responding to my own face in a mirror – by talking, smiling, pretending to be a second consciousness – I can only play the role of an “indeterminate potential other” (AiG [AH], p. 31). I cannot be a real other at all, but only a fraudulent “soul-slave without a place of its own, without a name and without a role” (AiG [AH], p. 30). This soul-slave, part self and part other, registers the expression of a potential other’s evaluation,” but since a real other is absent, the expression on my reflected face is always “somewhat false,” moving in various directions at once, a mix of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (AiG [AH], p. 31). Life offers many kinds of mirrors, Bakhtin intimates, and many invitations to soul-slavery. We become pretenders whenever we live in a world we irresponsibly aestheticize, which happens whenever we turn subjects into mere “pretender-doubles” (KFP [TPA] p. 95)<sup>2</sup>. [MB 181]

That the expression on Rosamond’s ‘reflected face’ is always ‘somewhat false’ can be extrapolated from the fact that her eyes are ‘deep enough’ to ‘hide the [less than exquisite] meanings of the owner’. Her habitual disingenuity thus signifies her as a potential ‘pretender’ (an idea I explore in greater depth in 3.3). I am more concerned here with the idea that truly knowing oneself requires what Bakhtin calls a non-coincidence with self, such as a mirror image cannot adequately provide. An integral self, or even a tentative definition of self, always requires the ‘surplus’ I cannot see when looking at myself but which can only be provided by an outside ‘finalizing other’, in this case by Mary, through the narrator and extending outwards towards the reader. However, placing characters within ‘zones’ is more concerned with introductions than with ‘finalization’ and because my primary aim in this section is to extend the reader’s understanding of Rosamond’s particular ‘field of action’ by including Mary and, of course, the

mirror, I have deferred discussion of the significance of the ‘finalizing other’ to section 3.4 in which Bakhtin’s notion of ‘real becoming’ is discussed.

Intent on pursuing her own purposes (to find out more about Lydgate), Rosamond circuitously puts forward Lydgate as a potential suitor for Mary who scornfully rejects Rosamond’s suggestion.

‘Oh, Mr Lydgate!’ said Mary, with an unmistakeable lapse into indifference. “You want to know something about him,” she added, not choosing to indulge Rosamond’s indirectness.

‘There is no question of liking at present. *My liking always wants some little kindness to kindle it. I am not magnanimous enough to like people who speak to me without seeming to see me.*’

‘Is he so haughty?’ said Rosamond, *with heightened satisfaction*. ‘*You know he is of a good family?*’

‘No; he did not give that as a reason.’

‘Mary! you are the oddest girl. But what sort of looking man is he? Describe him to me.’

‘How can one describe a man? I can give you an inventory: heavy eyebrows, dark eyes, a straight nose, thick dark hair, large solid white hands – and – let me see – oh, an exquisite cambric pocket-handkerchief. But you will see him. You *know* this is about the time of his visits.’

Rosamond blushed a little, but said, meditatively, ‘*I rather like a haughty manner*. I cannot endure a rattling young man.’ [Chap 12: 111 – 12]

The astute Mary shows insight into Rosamond’s modus operandi and refuses to indulge the latter’s artifice. Instead she comes straight to the point and states Rosamond’s real purpose for the visit. Her insight is later reinforced by ‘you *know* this is about the time of his visits’ (emphasis added). At this point Lydgate’s character zone is extended to include both Mary’s and Rosamond’s points of view. Mary’s negative comment (deriving from the ‘language’ of ethics, kindness and magnanimity) about his ‘speaking to [her] without seeming to see [her]’ is dialogized by Rosamond who, driven by the language of social class, reinterprets his arrogance in a thoroughly positive light. She expresses ‘heightened satisfaction’ at his ‘haughtiness’ thus confirming our suspicions that she is predisposed to like him for the very same reasons Mary objects to him.

Earlier I discussed the author’s propensity to “turn up on the field of representation” (DiN 27), and J. Hillis Miller suggests that of all the characters in *Middlemarch*, Mary, with her “somewhat detached, thoroughly demystified, ironic wisdom” comes closest to the character of Marian Evans whose novels “dramatise in one way or another the failure of the search for a legitimate masculine authority to which to submit” and whose decision to become George Eliot was an “imperious assertion of masculine authority and power” (“A Conclusion in Which Almost Nothing is Concluded”. Chase 150 and 151).

In due course, Mr Featherstone’s bell interrupts their *tête-à-tête* summoning the girls downstairs where, at his behest, Rosamond plays the piano and sings for him.

Mr Featherstone was still applauding the last performance [. . .] when Mr Lydgate's horse passed the window.

His *dull expectation* of the usual *disagreeable* routine with an aged patient – who can hardly believe that medicine would not “set him up” if the doctor were only clever enough – added to his *general disbelief in Middlemarch charms*, made a doubly effective background to this vision of Rosamond, whom old Featherstone made haste ostentatiously to introduce as his niece, though he had never thought it worth while to speak of Mary Garth in that light. *Nothing escaped Lydgate in Rosamond's graceful behaviour*: how *delicately* she waived the notice which the old man's want of taste had thrust upon her by a *quiet gravity, not showing her dimples on the wrong occasion, but showing them afterwards in speaking to Mary*, to whom she addressed herself with so much *good-natured interest*, that Lydgate, *after quickly examining Mary more fully than he had done before*, saw an *adorable kindness in Rosamond's eyes*. But Mary from some cause looked rather out of temper.

‘Miss Rosy has been singing me a song – you've nothing to say against that, eh, doctor?’ said Mr Featherstone. ‘I like it better than your physic.’

‘That has made me forget how the time was going,’ said Rosamond, rising to reach her hat, which she had laid aside before singing, so that her flower-like head on its white stem was seen in perfection above her riding habit. ‘Fred, we really must go.’ [. . .]

‘Miss Vincy is a musician?’ said Lydgate, following her with his eyes. (*Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at*. She was by nature an *actress of parts* that entered into her *physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own*.)

‘The best in Middlemarch, I'll be bound,’ said Mr Featherstone, ‘let the next be who she will. Eh, Fred? Speak up for your sister.’

‘I'm afraid I'm out of court, sir. My evidence would be good for nothing.’

‘*Middlemarch has not a very high standard, uncle*,’ said Rosamond, *with a pretty lightness*, going towards her whip, which lay at a distance.

Lydgate was quick in anticipating her. He reached the whip before she did, and turned to present it to her. She bowed and looked at him: he of course was looking at her, and their eyes met with that peculiar meeting which *is never arrived at by effort*, but seems like a sudden divine clearance of haze. I think Lydgate turned a little paler than usual, but Rosamond *blushed deeply, and felt a certain astonishment*. After that she was really anxious to go, and did not know what sort of *stupidity* her uncle was talking of when she went to shake hands with him.

Yet this result, which *she took to be a mutual impression, called falling in love*, was just what Rosamond had *contemplated beforehand*. Ever since that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had *woven a little future*, of which something like this scene was the necessary beginning. [. . .] And a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond's social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegroom who was *not a Middlemarcher*, and who had *no connections at all like her own*: of late, indeed, the construction seemed to demand that he should somehow be related to a baronet. Now that she and the stranger had met, reality *proved much more moving than anticipation*, and Rosamond could not doubt that this was the great epoch of her life. She judged of her own symptoms as those of awakening love, and *she held it still more natural that Mr Lydgate should have fallen in love at first sight of her*. These things often happened at balls, and why not by the morning light when the *complexion showed all the better* for it? Rosamond, though no older than Mary, was rather used to being fallen in love with; but she, for her part, had remained indifferent and fastidiously critical towards both fresh sprig and faded bachelor. And here was Mr Lydgate *suddenly corresponding to her ideal*, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which offered vistas of that *middle-class heaven*, rank; a man of talent, also, whom it would be especially *delightful to enslave*: in fact, a man who had touched her nature *quite newly*, and brought a vivid interest into her life which was better than any fancied ‘might-be’ *such as she was in the habit of opposing to the actual*. [Chap 12: 114 – 16]

Having being partially apprised of Lydgate's and Rosamond's characters from the point of view of others, together with their own already half-formed thoughts about each other, the reader keenly anticipates their actual meeting which is finally dialogised, first from Lydgate's perspective and then from Rosamond's. The heightened appreciation of her charms (‘nothing escaped Lydgate in Rosamond's graceful behaviour’) is positioned against his negative

attitude prior to arrival (his ‘dull expectation of the usual disagreeable routine’ and his ‘general disbelief in Middlemarch charms’). Such is Rosamond’s effect on him that he even casts a slightly more observant eye over Mary. But ideological dialogic is the driving force behind the narrator’s description of Lydgate’s response – he does not relate in any way to Mary for Mary’s sake, but only in relation to Rosamond’s perceived ‘good-natured interest’ in and ‘adorable kindness’ toward her. As for Rosamond, we are informed that her whole being ‘was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at’. Given her eagerness to make Lydgate’s acquaintance this, of course, is to be expected. But now the narrator adds a pejorative twist, undermining the relative neutrality of her prior observations – Rosamond is, she says, not only ‘by nature’ an actress but her role-playing is so firmly cemented into her very being that ‘she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own’.

Bakhtin has a good deal to say about ‘pretendship’ which I will continue to explore as the occasions arise. For now it will suffice to say that, for him, ‘true becoming’ in the novel mirrors real life situations and consequently his ethical concerns are in evidence as he examines characters in the novel. In brief, he believes that the real ‘event of being’ is the opposite of ‘pretendship’ whose “absolutism destroys the oughtness of an event by replacing it with rules” (MB 26). ‘Oughtness’, according to Bakhtin, involves a conscious choice to act according to one’s conscience, as opposed acting merely by ‘rote’. Seen in this light, Rosamond would appear to be a likely candidate for ‘pretendship’ but, however strongly one might feel inclined to agree with Bakhtin’s reservations about this type of being, one might wish to consider some of the reasons why Rosamond’s particular brand of ‘pretendship’ may have arisen. Already we know that much of her spontaneous behaviour has been ironed out by Mrs Lemon whose purpose it is, presumably, to mould young women into social types. In addition, we have been given a clear indication that her mother’s rather feeble attempts at guidance do little to dissuade Rosamond from her course of action. Only Fred seems aware of her artifice and is unimpressed by it.

In this passage Rosamond provides a fascinating contrast to Fanny Dorrit whose emergence into society is rather more abrupt. A major difference between them seems to be that Fanny never quite loses sight of the fact that much of her life is spent acting out various roles and she often reveals innermost thoughts quite candidly to Amy. We recall that her ‘way of receiving instruction from Mrs General’ is always immediately to refuse it but that ‘she

always stored it up in her mind and adopted it at another time (LD, Book II, Chap 5: 534). We also know that she is capable of self-reflexivity ('Other girls, differently reared and differently circumstanced altogether, might wonder at what I say and do' (Book II, Chap 14: 649). She has a clear understanding of what she is doing but, nevertheless, allows herself to be partially mediated by Amy, her 'Anchor' and her 'Angel'. Rosamond, on the other hand, appears to play her part quite unconsciously.

When, for example, she prettily brushes off her uncle's high praise, she does so instinctively, just as she knows *instinctively* when to leave. But when Lydgate hands her her whip we see, for the first time, a naturalness in Rosamond who even astonishes herself by 'blushing deeply' as their eyes meet. In fact she is so overtaken with feeling that she merely goes through the motions of mouthing her goodbyes. Again her response falls into sharp relief against Fanny's cynical procurement of the unsuspecting Sparkler. This time it is Rosamond who displays real feeling as a result of the romance she had *already* 'woven [as] a little future' – a feeling she simply assumes to be 'mutual' for Lydgate. At this point the particular ideologies and dreams that govern all her responses begin to take shape in her quest for a 'middle-class heaven'. The fact that she plans to 'enslave' Lydgate is delicately poised between her own pleasurable anticipation of the event and the narrator's view of her. The narrator also reminds us that, despite her nature being 'touched quite newly', speculation about the 'vivid interest' that Lydgate has brought into her life is abruptly curtailed when we are informed that daydreams and the "might-be" are something which Rosamond 'was in the habit of opposing to the actual'.

Rosamond, *whose basis for her structure had the usual airy slightness*, was of *remarkably detailed and realistic imagination* when the foundation had been once *presupposed*; and before they had ridden a mile she was far on in the costume and introductions of her wedded life, having determined on her house in Middlemarch, and foreseen the visits she would pay to her *husband's high-bred relatives at a distance*, *whose finished manners she could appropriate* as thoroughly as she had done her school accomplishments, preparing herself thus for *vaguer elevations* which might ultimately come. There was *nothing financial*, still *less sordid*, in her previsions: she cared about what were *considered refinements*, and *not about the money* that was to pay for them. [Chap 12: 116]

Rosamond's ideologically-driven persona comes under closer scrutiny as a window into her mind is opened and we are given a glimpse of her girlish fantasies. Clearly Rosamond's attitudes and behaviour do not find resonance with the author's ideals, but here Eliot does appear to question her sardonic comments about Rosamond's skills of appropriation and, consequently, attempts to temper the injustice by conceding that there is 'nothing financial' or 'sordid' in Rosamond's daydreams. For Eliot (and this would doubtless have found favour in Bakhtin) part of the act of

responsible artistic creation is to give a ‘human picture of life’ so as to ‘enlarge men’s sympathies’, and this ideal invariably surfaces in her account of even her most flawed characters. It is this kind of sensitivity that prompted the great historian, Lord Acton, to observe a key difference in the way historians and successful novelists, such as Eliot, portrayed humankind – while historians were capable of displaying the “origins and their defects” of people, they were unable to “think or to feel as men do who live in the grasp of the various systems” such as religion, philosophy and politics. In direct contrast he believed that George Eliot appeared to be capable of

not only reading the diverse hearts of men, but of creeping into their skin, watching the world through their eyes, feeling their latent background of conviction, discerning theory and habit, influences of thought and knowledge, of life and of descent, and having obtained this experience, recovering her independence, stripping off the borrowed shell, and exposing scientifically and indifferently the should of [her characters] without attraction, preference, or caricature. And each of them should say that she displayed him in his strength, that she laid bare features in his character he had never realised.

[Carroll. *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* 461 – 62]

Let us consider these comments in the light of the care Eliot takes in presenting Lydgate’s historical life to her readers, a summary of which follows:

Orphaned ‘fresh from public school’ (138), he became the ward of his two uncles. We hear that he was “one of the rarer lads who early get a decided bent and make up their minds that there is something particular in life which they would like to do for its own sake” (138), that Lydgate’s vocation became clear to him after chancing on the section of anatomy in an “old Cyclopaedia” (139), and from that hour he “felt the growth of an intellectual passion” (140). Eliot’s seeming digression, describing similarly motivated beings who ultimately fail in their quest for greatness, as a result of cooled “ardour,” humanity’s “infecting” breath, or even “the vibrations of a woman’s glance,” is not accidental but ominously portentous for Lydgate who, “believing the medical profession *as it might be* was the finest in the world” and “offering the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good” (141 – emphasis added), did not intend to be counted among those failures. That his chosen profession “wanted reform” (141) was an additional bonus and he meant to be that “unit who would make a certain amount of difference” (142) – one who would refuse to have “his vanities provoked by contact with the showy worldly success” (142) of London but, instead, choose to live among people who would “hold no rivalry with that pursuit of a great idea which was to be a twin object with the assiduous practice of his profession” (142). Eliot makes Lydgate a man of science whose modernity stretches to the latest social (and perhaps, proto-socialist) theories of the day, particularly those of the then recently deceased social and scientific reformer and author, Henri de Saint-Simon. Also

immensely fascinated by the quest of the late French researcher, Marie François Xavier Bichat, to identify primitive tissue at the turn of the century, Lydgate meant to further Bichat's "judgement in certain cases". Believing that these two purposes "would illuminate each other," he aimed to be a "good Middlemarch doctor, and by that very means keep himself in the tract of far-reaching investigation" (142). But, as Gillian Beer points out in her essay, "What's not in *Middlemarch*," Eliot "gains a temporal march" on the book's subject because the writing is "endowed with the additional knowledge" gained between the setting of the work (around 1830) and the time of its publication in 1870 (Chase 17). Because Eliot sets her novel back in time she is aware that, in the 1830s, a microscope powerful enough to afford a sufficiently detailed study for Lydgate's investigations was not yet in existence and she knows that, on technical grounds alone, Lydgate's proposed continuance of Bichat's work is doomed to failure before it has even begun.

He intended to begin in his own case some particular reforms which were quite certainly within his reach, and much less of a problem than the demonstrating of an anatomical conception. One of these reforms was to act stoutly on the strength of a recent legal decision and simply prescribe, without dispensing drugs or taking percentage from druggists. This was an innovation for one who had chosen to adopt the style of general practitioner in a country town, *and would be felt as offensive criticism by his professional brethren*. But Lydgate meant to innovate in his treatment also, and he was wise enough to see that the best security for his practising honestly according to his belief was to get rid of systematic temptations to the contrary.

[ . . . ] And he *counted on quiet intervals to be watchfully seized, for taking up the threads of investigation* – on many hints to be won from diligent application, not only of the scalpel, but of the microscope, which research had begun to use again with new enthusiasm of reliance. Such was Lydgate's plan of his future; to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world. [Chap 15: 143 – 44]

In her essay, "*Middlemarch* and the Passions," Barbara Hardy says of George Eliot that she "usually introduces her major characters, not always right at the moment of dramatic entry, but fairly near it, in words that are clearly analytic, taxonomic, and instructive" (Adam 4). Eliot's approach to Tertius Lydgate is no exception. Before introducing him fully, he is discussed only in terms of what others have to say about him when their character zones intersect with his, that is, he is the subject of conversation at Dorothea's engagement party in Chapter 10 and again between Rosamond and Fred in Chapter 11. He then makes an appearance at Stone Court in Chapter 12, at which time he meets Rosamond. Finally he is given Eliot's undivided attention in Chapter 15 which, in its entirety, provides an account of Lydgate's background and goals. Hardy begins her essay by saying that "one of the less obvious sources of the greatness of *Middlemarch* is its charting of the passions" (3) and, clearly, it is Eliot's intention that her readers are given a full account of her hero and his passion for research and medical reform.

Eliot uses narratorial dialogic to ensure that her readers are given not only a positive account of Lydgate's ambitions but also a slightly sardonic one, in which the narratorial voice also hints at

possible pitfalls inherent in his laudable ambitions to do ‘good small work for Middlemarch and great work for the world’. Going back to the fact that Eliot sets her novel back to the eve of the hotly disputed First Reform Bill of 1832, “which is presaged in the characters’ lives, while Eliot’s 1870s readers were responding to the second Reform Bill” (Beer 18), Lydgate’s assumption that the innovations he so blithely intends to set in motion, in conformance with ‘a recent legal decision’ – the case of *Allison v Haydon* in which it was ruled, in affirmation of the Apothecaries Act of 1815, that a physician may prescribe medicines, but may not charge for dispensing his own medicines (Hornback 100 [footnote]) – shows a certain naiveté on his part with regard to his ‘professional brethren’, who would inevitably be upset and angered by introducing changes to the treatment regimen from which they were still (unlawfully) profiting. As Francis Pinion observes, in *A George Eliot Companion*, “The state of medicine in Middlemarch is of critical consequence to the action,” and so Lydgate’s innovations could hardly be expected to “win ready favour in opposition to current practice and prejudice” (187). Commenting on advertisements surrounding the script of an early serialised magazine publication of *Middlemarch*, Gillian Beer wryly remarks that, “Lydgate [. . .] the modern doctor of the 1830s, would still have much to do against medical quackery in the 1870s, as we see when we read the advertisement for the astonishingly omni-present ‘Allcock’s Porous Strengthening Plaster’”:

A Curative Host in itself: superior to any electric of galvanic chain-band or belt, or Spanish fly blister, or any blister, or any rubefacients or stimulating liniment whatsoever. The best and most successful remedy in all cases of Weak Muscles, Nervous Affections, Bronchitis, Sciatica, Tic Doloureux, Rheumatism, Local Pains, Inflammation of the lungs, Severe Coughs, Asthma, Lumbago, Diarrhoea and Consumption.  
[Chase 19 – 20]

Furthermore, Lydgate’s belief that Middlemarch would provide him ample time for ‘quiet intervals’ in which to proceed with his microscopic research has already been undercut by our knowledge of Rosamond’s intentions regarding Lydgate. Thus, one senses an ever-so-slightly hybridised narratorial voice behind Lydgate’s projected plan for his life in which Eliot (to go back to Lord Acton’s observations regarding Eliot’s ability to portray characters) simultaneously displays Lydgate ‘in his strength’, and lays bare ‘features in his character he had never realised’.

The man was still *in the making*, as much as the Middlemarch doctor and the immortal discoverer, and there were *both virtues and faults* capable of *shrinking or expanding*. *The faults will not, I hope, be a reason for the withdrawal of your interest in him*. Among *our* valued friends is there not some one or other who is a little too self-confident and disdainful; whose distinguished mind is a little *spotted with commonness*; who is a little pinched here and protuberant there with native prejudices; or whose better energies are liable to lapse down the wrong channel under the influence of transient solicitations? All these things might be alleged against Lydgate, but then, they are not periphrases of a *polite preacher, who talks of Adam, and would not like to mention anything painful to the pew-renters*. The particular faults from which these delicate generalities are distilled have distinguishable physiognomies, diction, and grimaces; filling up parts in very various dramas. *Our* vanities differ as *our* noses do: all conceit is not



the same conceit, but varies in correspondence with the minutiae of mental make in which *one of us differs from another*. Lydgate's *conceit* was of the arrogant sort, never simpering, never impertinent, *but massive in its claims and benevolently contemptuous*. [. . .] Where then lay his spots of commonness? [. . .] Lydgate's spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of noble intentions and sympathy, *were half of them such as are found in the ordinary men of the world*: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, *did not penetrate his feeling and judgement about furniture, or women*, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons. [. . .]

As to women, he had once already been drawn headlong by *impetuous folly*, which he *meant to be final*, since marriage *at some distant period would* of course *not be impetuous*. For those who want to be acquainted with Lydgate it will be good to know what was that case of impetuous folly, for it may stand as an example of the *fitful swerving of passion to which he was prone*, together with the *chivalrous kindness* which helped to make him *morally lovable*. [Chap 15: 145 – 46]

Eliot continues to take great care in introducing Lydgate to her readers and accomplish what is to her an obviously important goal: to provide as full a picture of this significant and complex character as possible, and one which will serve to colour all future impressions of him – via Mary, Rosamond, the townsfolk and even the author/narrator.

As distinct from the characters in most dramas (as a genre), Bakhtin submits that “the speaking person in the novel need not necessarily be incarnated in a character” and that heteroglot languages may also enter the novel in various forms, including ‘impersonal, parodied stylizations’, ‘nonparodic stylizations’, or even as ‘unqualified authorial speech’ “insofar as it is polemical and forensic, [and] contrasts itself as a distinctive language different from other such languages in the heteroglot world by being to a certain extent focused on itself” (DiN 335). We have already observed direct authorial input from both Dickens when he laments what Mr Dorrit *should* have said in reply to Mrs General’s criticism of Amy. In similar vein, in *Middlemarch*, Eliot’s third person narrative becomes entangled with a form of first person narrative when she repeatedly tries to engage with her reader by using such pronouns as ‘us’, ‘we’ and ‘our’. As Morson and Emerson remark, this type of first person narrative is not traditional, in that the author does not “acquire a name, face, or visible presence” [or] interact with any of the characters” – instead her presence is anonymous, rather like a “fly-on-the-wall observer” (MB 92). Claiming to oppose the ‘polite preacher’ approach which, in heroising its subject, is likely to overlook problematic aspects of his personality, Eliot voices her determination to be equitable and to show Lydgate as realistically as possible to be a man ‘still in the making’. She will thus acknowledge not only his ‘virtues’ but also his ‘faults’ which she hopes (and here she exposes her partiality toward him) will not cause her readers to lose interest in him, reasoning that we all know and admire people despite their little flaws.

This balancing act continues into her account of Lydgate's particular brand of 'arrogance', his 'spots of commonness', 'the fitful swerving of passion to which he was prone' and his lack of judgement on woman and furniture – all of which are set against an ardent, kind, chivalrous and lovable man who is determined not to repeat his prior impetuosity with regard to women. We are cautioned however, that we would do well to remember that both his virtues and his vices are 'capable of shrinking and expanding'. This minutely detailed introduction and the ongoing commentary consolidate the view that Eliot's primary interest lay in the inner development of her characters and their propensity for either growth or stagnation. As Ermarth wryly remarks:

Being simultaneously dedicated to science and ready to throw everything at the feet of his latest romantic obsession, Lydgate is famously a man who has "two selves within him apparently": a sort of personal "on the other hand." His laissez-faire attitude toward this internal threshold proves to have dangerous implications, but initially it seems only troublesome, as in this quick retrospective loop in a central chapter. ["Negotiating *Middlemarch*". Chase 121]

To aid her cause Eliot encourages active reader participation, skilfully drawing her readers in with such maxims as 'our valued friends' and 'our vanities' (emphasis added), a technique she uses on more than ninety different occasions in *Middlemarch*. Bakhtin refers to this type of interruption of stylization in novelistic language as one that "directly embodies (without any refracting) semantic and axiological intentions of the author" (DiN 301). In *Middlemarch* this strategy serves several purposes. Firstly, by this means Eliot attempts to engage in an ongoing 'dialogue' with the reader in which she not only puts questions to the reader but also suggests possible responses. Secondly, use of the first person allows her to insert herself indirectly into the action of the novel, via the narrator. Furthermore, her repeated appeals to her readers to form opinions include them in her fictitious community. Finally, as readers, we become so involved with our assessments and judgements of various situations (including either agreeing or disagreeing with the narrator) that it seems natural to begin to conflate her fictional environment with real-life situations. In fact, one feels that she rather encourages us to do just that: to reinterpret novelistic events in terms of our own lives.

Not surprisingly, Bakhtin maintains that the novel, because of its prosaic, everyday nature and variety of voices, is often able to educate our responsiveness to real-life situations where traditional ethics might fall short. He notes, also, that philosophers' examples tend to be "too schematic," too abstract to be useful from a prosaic point of view (MB 27). Instead, Bakhtin prefers to "link the ethical with every ordinary moment of our lives" and insists that "crises tend to "dissolve personal responsibility in the same way norms and principles do" (MB 26). This is because catastrophes and unusual good luck, alike, have a tendency to "undo the network of

small, reasoned obligations” built around everyday events (MB 26). It is therefore much more helpful to focus on the “small prosaic decisions” taken after much inner debate than on the “large impersonal mandate” imposed on one by outer sources (MB 26 – 7). As I have already mentioned in my discussions on *Little Dorrit* (Book I, Chap 5: 535 – 36), even real-life situations fall short for the very reason that there is usually no way of knowing particulars such as the state of mind of each person when decisions are taken. Case studies would need to extend over “hundreds of pages” minutely describing all events within the social ambit of the persons concerned. And this is precisely where the “rich and thick accounts” found in great novels succeed – occupying a “special place in ethical education” and for “good or ill, they are powerful tools for enriching our moral sense of particular situations” (MB 26 - 27).

The active inclusion of Eliot’s readers in the “rich and thick accounts” in *Middlemarch* pays further dividends. By including both herself and the reader in the action of the novel she seems to imply that both exist in the same ‘world’ and time of the novel, or as Bakhtin puts it, in a “zone of familiar contact” (the chronotope) with the characters and with each other (MB 420). By placing the reader in a “zone of familiar contact” with her fictional characters, Eliot ensures that their character zones are extended to include reader opinion. At the same time, the alignment of author and reader is, paradoxically, the means by which the author is herself able to escape the boundaries of the fictional historical time in which the novel is set, thus gaining her a ‘presence’ whenever or wherever her books are read or, as J. Hillis Miller puts it, she “can move at will in time and space [. . .] making connections, comparisons, juxtapositions, and generalizations on the basis of a universal knowledge” (*The Form of Victorian Fiction* 113). *Middlemarch* thus becomes a vehicle for Eliot to transport herself, as it were, into dialogic relations with present and future readers and to ensure a never-ending ‘openendedness’ in the novel in that it can never be completely ‘finalized’. Instead, it always remains open to possible ‘potentials’ or various interpretive possibilities. Bakhtin calls this process ‘re-accentuation’. “Every age,” he says, “re-accentuates in its own way the works of its immediate past” and it is owing to the “intentional potential embedded in them” that classic works have “proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogising backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself” (DiN 421).

Because novelistic characters are continually re-accented, they too remain open to various interpretative possibilities and Lydgate's capacity for growth is put to the test when he is invited to dine at the Vincys.

The tinge of *unpretentious, inoffensive vulgarity* in Mrs Vincy gave more effect to *Rosamond's refinement*, which was *beyond* what Lydgate had expected.

Certainly, small feet and perfectly turned shoulders *aid the impression* of refined manners, and the right thing said seems quite *astonishingly right when it is accompanied with the exquisite curves of lip and eyelid*. And *Rosamond could say the right thing; for she was clever with that sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous*. *Happily* she never attempted to joke, and this perhaps was *the most decisive mark of her cleverness*. [Chap 16: 153 – 54]

It soon becomes obvious that Lydgate's 'spots of commonness' make him all the more susceptible to Rosamond whose 'charms', particularly in contrast to Mrs Vincy's 'vulgarity', have an even more marked effect on him that he had hitherto imagined possible. Nina Auerbach makes the point that Lydgate's 'spots of commonness' stem from habit. Because they are "inherent" rather than "acquired," they "translate into sexual snobbery [and] recapitulate themselves in excruciating detail as his life develops" ("Dorothea's Lost Dog". Chase 100). Bakhtin's view is that individuals and culture develop habits he calls 'sclerotic deposits' of earlier activity (MB 57). Not only are these habits or congealed forms responsible for regulating present behaviour, but they also establish "the ground for new kinds of future activity" (MB 57 – 58). Habits become sets of rules as a result of being codified by centripetal forces of culture – a codification that "serves in part to restrain change" (MB 58).

At this point the narrator indulges in a bit of fun at the expense of both Lydgate and Rosamond in a multilayered hybrid construction in which Lydgate's perceptions are aligned with common opinion – one that equates charm and good looks with inner beauty. Lydgate is especially susceptible to Rosamond's refined manner of speech and to her opinions, which become 'astonishingly right' simply because they are accompanied by 'exquisite curves of lip and eyelid'. But the brunt of the narrator's wit is reserved for Rosamond whose particular brand of cleverness is able to catch 'every tone but the humorous', the implication being, of course, that humour requires something more intelligent than mere imitative ability. Rather, it is a delight in the mirthful (like the spontaneous wit exhibited by Mary Garth in her conversations with Rosamond).

However, Rosamond's want of humour is not yet discernible to Lydgate who is utterly mesmerised by the vision of perfect loveliness created by Rosamond.

Lydgate was almost forgetting that he must carry on the conversation, in thinking how lovely this creature was, her garment seeming to be made out of the faintest *blue sky*, herself so immaculately blond, as if the petals of a gigantic flower had just opened and disclosed her and yet with this *infantine* blondness showing so much *ready, self-possessed grace*. [. . .] But he recalled himself,

‘You will let me hear some music to-night, I hope.’

‘I will let you hear *my attempts*, if you like,’ said Rosamond. ‘Papa is sure to insist on my singing. But *I shall tremble before you*, who have heard the best singers in Paris. *I have heard very little*: I have only once been to London. But our organist at St Peter’s is a good musician, and I go on studying with him.’

‘Tell me what you saw in London.’

‘Very little.’ (*A more naïve girl would have said, ‘Oh, everything!’ But Rosamond knew better.*) ‘A few ordinary sights, such as *raw country girls* are always taken to.’

‘Do you call yourself a raw country girl?’ said Lydgate, looking at her with an *involuntary emphasis of admiration*, which made Rosamond *blush* with pleasure. *But she remained simply serious, turned her long neck a little, and put up her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits* – an habitual gesture with her as pretty as any movements of a kitten’s paw. Not that Rosamond was in the least like a kitten: *she was a sylph caught young and educated at Mrs Lemon’s*.

‘*I assure you my mind is raw*,’ she said immediately; ‘I pass at Middlemarch. *I am not afraid of talking to our old neighbours. But I am really afraid of you.*’

‘*An accomplished woman always knows more than we men*, though her knowledge is of a different sort. *I am sure you could teach me a thousand things* – as an exquisite bird could teach a bear if there were any *common language* between them. Happily there is a common language between women and men, and so the bears can get taught.’

‘Ah, there is Fred beginning to strum! I must go and hinder him from jarring all your nerves,’ said Rosamond, moving to the other side of the room, where Fred having opened the piano, at his father’s desire, that Rosamond might give them some music, was parenthetically performing “Cherry Ripe” with one hand. Able men who have passed their examinations will do these things sometimes, not less than the plucked Fred.

‘Fred, pray defer your practising till tomorrow; you will make Mr Lydgate ill,’ said Rosamond. ‘He has an ear.’

Fred laughed, and went on with his tune to the end.

Rosamond turned to Lydgate, smiling gently, and said, ‘You perceive, *the bears will not always be taught.*’

Rosamond played admirably. Her master at Mrs. Lemon’s school [. . .] was one of those excellent musicians here and there to be found in our provinces [. . .] Rosamond, with the *executant’s instinct*, had *seized* his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble music *with the precision of an echo*. It was almost *startling*, heard for the first time. A *hidden* soul *seemed* to be flowing forth from Rosamond’s fingers; and so indeed it was, since *souls live on in perpetual echoes, and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an originating activity, if it be only that of an interpreter*. Lydgate was *taken possession of*, and began to *believe in her as something exceptional*.

[Chap 16: 154 – 56]

Bakhtin believed that genuine creativity is marked by the potential of an author’s characters to act in surprising ways and although both Lydgate and Rosamond appear to behave in ways we have already come to expect, it seems to me that, in this passage as well as in several other places in the novel, they do manage to surprise themselves and, by extension, the reader as well. Lydgate finds that, against his better judgment, he is utterly captivated by the perfect grace and poise packaged in the faintest blue, evoking his earlier fascination with ‘blue eyes for a heaven’ (94). Some might argue that, from what we already know about Lydgate, his reaction to Rosamond is hardly surprising. But he almost forgets to engage in polite conversation as a result of his being rendered almost speechless by flights of fancy regarding Rosamond. Meanwhile she (about whom the narrator has already stated that humour was not her strong point) does actually tender something quite humorous: ‘the bears will not always be taught’. Furthermore, working

against the obvious artifice of ‘my attempts’, ‘raw country girls’, ‘I am afraid of you’ (her words), and ‘her ready self-possessed grace’ (Lydgate’s thoughts), we must assume that this ‘sylph caught young and educated at Mrs Lemon’s’, for all her practiced manners, cannot invoke blushing at will (or even prevent it). That this phenomenon occurs quite naturally in her early contact with Lydgate suggests that, at least for the moment, he is able to bring out something in her that touches on her true nature or innermost being.

However, Rosamond’s ‘executant’s instinct’, which seized on her music master’s rendition of music with the ‘precision of an echo’, insinuates a kind of ‘pretendship’, already alluded to. Morson and Emerson observe, “in Bakhtin’s idiosyncratic usage a pretender is not someone who usurps another’s place but someone who tries to live in no particular place at all, or from a purely generalized abstract place” (MB 180). In other words, pretenders live as if there were an ‘alibi for being’. As Bakhtin contends, “the three domains of human culture – science, art and life – gain unity in the individual person who integrates them into his own unity” (*Art* 1), but this action frequently becomes ‘mechanical’ and ‘external’ with the result that “when a human being is in art, he is not in life” (*Art* 1).

It is just possible, however, that the narrator does admit of the presence of a hidden soul emanating from Rosamond’s fingers. As she remarks, ‘souls live on in perpetual echoes and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an originating activity, if it be only that of an interpreter’. Taking into account Bakhtin’s contention that utterances can take many forms including the *extralinguistic* (MB 125), if we extend his notion of the extralinguistic utterance to a meaningful act or gesture, Rosamond’s act of playing the piano may be interpreted as an ‘utterance’ of sorts, in the same way that a sigh or gesture may signify an utterance. As David Danow observes, “By including into [the word] all the gamut of secondary association, contextual meanings and behavioural accompaniments, Bakhtin broadened its function and sphere and made the word transcend its purely linguistic borders” (18). Rosamond’s ‘admirable’ playing certainly communicates a message of sorts to Lydgate, who, oblivious to the fact that he is rushing headlong into something his rational nature eschews, is ‘taken possession of’ by what he believes to be ‘something exceptional’ in her. Already there are signs that his inward resistance to marriage stands little chance against the seemingly wifely ideal presented by Rosamond.

Having said that, in contrast to Rosamond’s musings after leaving Stone Court, and despite having flirted openly with Rosamond – telling her that he has found ‘charms’ in Middlemarch

‘much greater’ than he had expected and that he would attend its dances on the condition that she would dance with him (157) – when he takes his leave, Lydgate feels ‘no agitation’ and ‘no sense that any new current had set into his life’ and certainly does not consider himself to be in love (Chap 16: 158). However his thoughts do turn back to Rosamond.

Certainly, *if* falling in love had been at all in question, it would have been *quite safe* with a creature like this Miss Vincy, who had just the kind of *intelligence* one would desire in a woman – *polished, refined, docile*, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and *enshrined* in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that *excluded the need for other evidence*. Lydgate felt sure that if ever he married, his wife would have that *feminine radiance*, that *distinctive womanhood* which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was *virtuous*, being moulded *only* for pure and delicate joys.

But since he did not mean to marry for the next five years – his more pressing business was to look into Louis’ new book on Fever, which he was specially interested in. [. . .] He went home and read far into the smallest hour, *bringing a much more testing vision of details and relations into this pathological study than he had ever thought it necessary to apply to the complexities of love and marriage*, these subjects on which he felt himself amply informed by literature, and that traditional wisdom which is handed down in the genial conversation of men. [Chap 16: 158 – 59]

Stylization (by which means the author retains the original content of another’s word but uses it in a way that weakens its authority) is at play in the above passage. As well-intentioned as Lydgate’s reported reflections sound, we gather from the way in which his character is being established that his reasoning is skewed, not only because of his conventional attitudes but also because of his warm-blooded attraction to the opposite sex. When so ‘polished’ and ‘refined’ a being is ‘enshrined’ in an exquisite body, exuding ‘feminine radiance’ Lydgate requires no further evidence of virtue. Additionally, words such as, ‘quite safe’, ‘intelligence’ and ‘docile’ take on dual meanings – one from his (and his society’s) conservative point of view and one from the narrator’s vantage point in which those views are implicitly questioned. David Danow observes that in stylization the writer “‘grafts’ his intent upon the original, but does not change its initial semantic thrust or direction” (29). By bracketing the possibility of Lydgate’s falling in love with the proviso, ‘if’ and the implied, ‘then’, the narrator communicates a new emphasis, making the other’s word conditional – in the sense that “it loses its absolute (single-voiced) authority and independence” (29). Lydgate’s words are thus given to us in objectified form – although they are attributed to a character, his utterances are “subordinated to the author’s own strict intent” (29).

The hybrid construction is driven home when the narrator slyly slips in the fact that Lydgate brings to his current reading (a new book on typhoid fever, written by the French physician, Pierre Charles Louis) a far more critical eye for detail than he does to the ‘complexities of love and marriage’ about which, the narrator informs us, he considers himself sufficiently well-

informed by general reading and the ‘traditional wisdom’ found in ‘genial conversation’. A little further down the page we are told how seriously Lydgate takes his medical research.

*He for his part had tossed away all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself able and at ease: he was enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness.* [Chap 16: 159]

The above information appears to be straightforward and denotative in its orientation. Lydgate’s approach to his work is exacting and his intentions are unquestionably noble. But, as we recall, for Bakhtin even the simplest utterances are laden with meanings and all discourse is orientated towards a listener and a future event or answer-word (DiN 280). In actual fact this passage is steeped in hybridisation in which the *narrator’s* wry, cautionary voice is heard behind *Lydgate’s* laudable intentions. In an initial reading of *Middlemarch* one might easily overlook the irony and the pathos in this passage but a retrospective reading should clarify that the implicit suggestion is that, were Lydgate to have approached personal matters by disregarding ‘all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself able and at ease’ (like his infatuation with Rosamond, perhaps?) with the thoroughness he applies to scientific research, he may have been more easily able to identify in his own life the little things that determine ‘human misery and joy’ thereby avoiding ‘the first lurking-places of anguish, mania and crime’.

The ‘*minute* processes which prepare human misery and joy’ (emphasis added) also bring to mind Bakhtin’s contention that history should not be tracked by momentous decisions and cataclysmic events but by the minutiae of day-to-day living which actually bring about changes, through changes in consciousness. Or, as Morson and Emerson put it, history cannot be exclusively synchronic or diachronic and is in fact “neither random nor completely ordered”. In short, history is not history “unless particular experience is meaningful, actions are responsible, results are partially expected, and the lives of people, both individually and in groups, are surprising” (MB 44).

A review and evaluation of Lydgate’s personal history continues.

He was an *ardent* fellow, but at present his ardour was absorbed in love of his work and in the *ambition of making his life recognised as a factor in the better life of all mankind* – like other heroes of science who had nothing but an obscure country practice to begin with. [Chap 16: 160]

Lydgate’s character zone is extended here by what again appears to be straightforward narratorial commentary. But if we take ‘scattered words’ into account when establishing character zones



this passage provides an interesting perspective when one considers that the word ‘ardent’ occupies a special place in the heart of the narrator who usually reserves it for only Dorothea (several times) and Will, both of whom are undoubtedly her clear favourites, and who, in their own ways, become active in using their lives for ‘the better life of all mankind’. So although the narrator rarely alludes to a direct comparison between them and Lydgate, in so bracketing him together with Dorothea and Will, her use of the word ‘ardent’ takes on an additional contextual meaning and intimates a similar high regard for Lydgate.

We may recollect that the effect Eliot ‘ardently’ wanted to produce in her own writings, is that her readers “should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures” (Haight (Ed.) *Letters* Vol. 3: 111). Commenting on Eliot’s driving motivation, McSweeney submits that her “ardent feeling and a sense of human fellowship are the humanistic equivalents of, and replacement for, the Christian conception of grace” (16). Irrespective of her religious orientation, it is clear that Eliot’s desire to transmit real feeling continues as the chapter draws to an end.

*Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing.* It had not occurred to Lydgate that he had been the subject of eager meditation to Rosamond, who had neither any reason for throwing her marriage into distant perspective, nor any pathological studies to divert her mind from that ruminating habit, that inward repetition of looks, words, and phrases, which makes a large part of the lives of most girls. *He had not meant to look at her or speak to her with more than the inevitable amount of admiration and compliment which a man must give to a beautiful girl;* indeed, it seemed to him that his enjoyment of her music had remained almost silent, for he feared falling into the rudeness of telling her his great surprise at her possession of such accomplishment. *But Rosamond had registered every look and word, and estimated them as the opening incidents of a preconceived romance* – incidents which gather value from the foreseen development and climax. In Rosamond’s romance *it was not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious business in the world:* of course, he had a profession and was clever, as well as sufficiently handsome; but the piquant fact about Lydgate was his *good birth*, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers, and presented marriage as a prospect of *rising in rank and getting a little nearer to the celestial condition on earth* in which she would have *nothing to do with vulgar people*, and perhaps at last associate with relatives *quite equal to the county people who looked down on Middlemarchers*. It was *part of Rosamond’s cleverness to discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank*, and once when she had seen the Miss Brookes accompanying their uncle at the country assizes, and seated among the aristocracy, she had *envied* them, notwithstanding their plain dress.

*If you think* it incredible that to imagine Lydgate as a man of family could cause thrills of satisfaction which had anything to do with the sense that she was in love with him, *I will ask you to use your power of comparison a little more effectively*, and consider whether red cloth and epaulets have never had an influence of that sort. *Our passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but, dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together, feeding out of the common store according to their appetite.*

*Rosamond, in fact, was entirely occupied not exactly with Tertius Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her;* and it was excusable in a girl who was accustomed to hear that all young men might, could, would be, or actually were in love with her, *to believe at once that Lydgate could be no exception.* His looks and words meant more to her than other men’s, because she cared more for them: she thought of them *diligently*, and *diligently attended to the perfection of appearance, behaviour, sentiments, and all other elegancies, which would find in Lydgate a more adequate admirer than she had yet been conscious of.*

For Rosamond, though *she would never do anything that was disagreeable to her*, was *industrious*; and now more than ever she was active in sketching her landscapes and market-carts and portraits of friends, in practising her music, and in being from morning till night her own standard of a perfect lady, *having always an audience in her own consciousness*, with sometimes the not unwelcome addition of a more variable external audience in the numerous visitors of the house. [ . . . ]

*'The best girl in the world! He will be a happy fellow who gets her!'* was the sentiment of the elderly gentlemen who visited the Vincys; and the rejected young men thought of trying again, as is the fashion in country towns where the horizon is not thick in coming rivals. *But Mrs Plymdale thought Rosamond had been educated to a ridiculous pitch*, for what was the use of accomplishments which would be all laid aside as soon as she was married? While her aunt Bulstrode, who had a sisterly faithfulness towards her brother's family, had two sincere wishes for Rosamond – that she might show *a more serious turn of mind*, and that she might *meet with a husband whose wealth corresponded to her habits*.

[Chap 16: 160 – 62]

Ruminating on characterisation in novels, Bakhtin points out that, in order for a work to be considered “aesthetic,” one needs to be able to “‘feel’ another consciousness inside it, as one feels the presence of a human being” (MB 78). In this passage the narrator's feeling for Lydgate spills over into a similar feeling for Rosamond as she considers the obstacles presented by each living in a world ‘of which the other knew nothing’. Their first real encounter at the Vincys' dinner party is illustrative of the fact that the meaning of any utterance is shaped as much by the listener as by the speaker who “breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory” against the “apperceptive” or self-conscious agency of the listener (DiN 282). Quite clearly, because of their different desires, goals, and backgrounds, Rosamond and Lydgate each take away with them very different ideas about their meeting. Misunderstanding the other's intentions becomes the source of future confusion and pain for Rosamond and, while Lydgate had not meant to show admiration beyond the boundaries of acceptable social discourse, Rosamond embellishes his ‘every look and word’ with overtones of a romance she has already decided upon. It should be observed that the narrator is not unreservedly sympathetic toward Rosamond, whose shallowness is intimated by her lack of interest in ‘the inward life of [her] hero, or of his serious business in the world’. For Rosamond, Lydgate's good looks and intellect run a sorry second to his ‘good birth’ – his crowning glory and most marriageable quality, and her ticket for heaven on earth as she imagines herself rising in rank and finally freeing herself from the ‘vulgar people’ of Middlemarch.

Rosamond's unerring ‘cleverness’ in discerning the ‘faintest aroma of rank’ extends to her perception of Dorothea and Celia Brooke, and is playfully dialogized by the narrator who adds that she had envied them ‘notwithstanding their plain dress’. The allusion to the ‘Miss Brookes’ here is not accidental. It confirms a projected intersection of Rosamond and Dorothea's character zones, it encourages the reader to draw comparisons between them, and it recalls the very different nature of Lydgate's initial meeting with Dorothea in which both seem genuinely

interested in the inner life of the other – something Rosamond finds quite unnecessary for forming a romantic attachment. Consequently, she is not occupied with ‘Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her’. Eliot’s observation would doubtless find resonance in Bakhtin’s insistence that for people the most important activity is dialogue and that “for any individual or social entity, we cannot properly separate existence from the ongoing process of communication” (MB 50). When Bakhtin contends that ‘To *be* means *to communicate*’ (PDP 287) he is not only talking about social pleasantries but about the real communication that takes place when people reveal their hopes, dreams, aspirations and their ‘passions’ to another. While Rosamond and Lydgate do engage in fairly long conversations at the Vincy’s dinner, quite clearly their communication is superficial. Not only do they fail to engage in what is really important to the other but their conversation is also misleading (whether by design as is Rosamond’s or by accident like Lydgate’s) and, consequently, misinterpreted by both.

Once again turning her attention to her readers the narrator challenges them to consider whether Rosamond’s attitude is as untenable as it seems. After all, she reminds us, we are all disposed to conflate our ideological notions with our passions for one or other reason. In what can only be perceived as a rare show of solidarity with Rosamond, she ‘excuses’ Rosamond for imagining that Lydgate is in love with her because ‘she was accustomed to hear that all young men might, could, would be, or actually were in love with her’.

The narrator’s delicate ‘balancing act’ between being equitable and judgmental, funny or fair, yet again gives way to acerbic humour as we are informed that Rosamond’s chief occupation now becomes the diligent perfection of all aspects of her demeanour and appearance so as to ‘find in Lydgate a more suitable admirer than she had yet been conscious of’. In preparation for the day in which she will no longer be required to have anything to do with ‘vulgar people’ Rosamond tirelessly practices ‘her own standard of a perfect lady’ from ‘morning to night’, for the benefit of their numerous visitors. ‘Vulgar people’ constitutes an elaborate hybridisation – it comes from Rosamond (straight) *and* from the narrator (ironic) but is also the voice of Mrs Lemon who herself is “borrowing” the language of the social class she wants her pupils to aspire to. When there are no visitors Rosamond doubles up as both actress and adoring audience, ‘having always’, we are told, ‘an audience in her own consciousness’. Bakhtin warns that this type of self-perceiving consciousness ultimately results in a somewhat limited view of oneself. As he says, because a character “has an interior, a subjectivity, in tension with his exterior,” he cannot be seen from the outside in the same way that he sees himself (MB 425). To affirm her parodical

hybridisation of Rosamond, the narrator utilises the not-so-idealised views of Mrs Plymdale, who ‘thought Rosamond had been educated to a ridiculous pitch’ and Rosamond’s aunt Harriet, whose dual hope for Rosamond was that she would ‘show a more serious turn of mind’ and that she would meet a husband wealthy enough to accommodate her expensive habits.

One cannot help but compare Rosamond once again with Fanny Dorrit, whose mission is not dissimilar from Rosamond’s but whose inner reflexivity and frank talks with Amy show her to be capable of a realistic, and quite frequently, matter-of-fact contemplation of herself – something entirely lacking in Rosamond whose own inflexibility and uncritical audiences constantly work together to vindicate her belief in her own flawlessness. But, as Bakhtin tirelessly reiterates, one cannot come to know oneself fully without the finalising influence of an outside other whose dialogic or surplus knowledge of us is pivotal for our growth of character (MB 91). In Rosamond’s case, she becomes exactly what she was schooled for by Mrs Lemon – a social *product* rather than an integrated being and, when she returns to the uncritical Middlemarch society, she alone provides the measure for her behaviour which (on account of having been Mrs Lemon’s star pupil) she assumes to be above correction and beyond improvement. In this way she becomes almost entirely self-contained and finalised and, although her orientation is towards a future, it is an entirely idealised one which denies her any real potential for inner growth and change.

### 3.3. Testing the Boundaries of the Self

‘Providence’ arranges for Lydgate to be in constant attendance on the afflicted Fred at the Vincys’ home and, as a result, Rosamond and Lydgate’s relationship begins to develop. We learn that her “presence of mind and adroitness in carrying out his hints were admirable, and it is not wonderful that the idea of seeing Rosamond began to mingle itself with his interest in the case” (Chap 27: 255).

Lydgate, whenever he could, took his seat by Rosamond’s side, and lingered to hear her music, *calling himself her captive – meaning, all the while, not to be her captive*. The preposterousness of the notion that he could at once set up a satisfactory establishment as a married man *was a sufficient guarantee against danger*. This *play* at being a little in love was agreeable, and did not interfere with his graver pursuits. *Flirtation, after all, was not necessarily a singeing process*. Rosamond, for her part, had never enjoyed the days so much in her life before: she was sure of being admired by some one worth *captivating* and she did not distinguish flirtation from love, either in herself or in another. *She seemed to be sailing with a fair wind* just whither she would go, and her thoughts were much occupied with a handsome house in Lowick Gate which she hoped would by-and-by be vacant. She was *quite determined*, when she was

married, to *rid herself of all the visitors who were not agreeable to her at her father's*; and she imagined the drawing-room in her favourite house with various styles of furniture. [Chap 27: 257 – 58]

Once again, Rosamond and Lydgate's very different goals fall under the narrator's scrutinizing spotlight. Flirtation gets well under way for Lydgate as he *plays* at being in love, calls himself her 'captive' and convinces himself that his flirtation is harmless. However, he mistakenly believes that they are on the same 'idiolectical page', so to speak, but she, 'sailing with a fair wind' of her own volition misconstrues his intentions, assumes that they coincide with her own. In Chapter One I explored the notion of dialogized heteroglossia, defined as "*another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions in a refracted way*" (DiN 324). Inasmuch as such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse it is always "internally dialogized" as there are always (at least) two voices and two meanings (DiN 324). A word, therefore, bears multiple connotations by virtue of its association with one or other ideological group or single individual. Moreover, each word is a "*two-sided act* [. . .] determined both by *whose* word it is and for *whom* it is meant. As a word it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressor and addressee* [in which] every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'" (MPL 86). Any utterance, therefore is a "link in a very complex chain of other utterances [which], filled with *dialogic overtones*, [. . .] is never isolated but always responsive" (SG. SG& 92).

When Lydgate declares himself Rosamond's 'captive' even though he doesn't really mean to be, as speaker he both frames and finalizes the utterance, choosing the speech genre and intonation most suited to convey his 'intended message' (flirtatious admiration) to Rosamond, whose response he anticipates. She, in turn, invests Lydgate's words with a meaning determined by her own ideology – one which is quite unintended by Lydgate who mistakenly presumes that she understands his syntax and is engaging with it in a similar register. This kind of complication often results because "An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed at someone, its *addressivity*" (SG& 95) who also contributes to its formulation. As Danow puts it, "the word is engaged in a constant struggle to express an ideology (belonging to its user) that is being continuously formulated, subsequently opposed by the word of the other, and consequently reformulated" (Danow 29).

If Lydgate is guilty of unwittingly conveying the wrong impressions, Rosamond's skill in concealing her own feelings and intentions is anything but accidental and, despite the fact that

she experiences a “delicious sense that she was the object of enviable homage” (Chap 27: 258), she takes care not to reveal her true feelings to anyone, and especially not to Lydgate.

But Rosamond was *not one of those helpless girls* who *betray themselves unawares*, and whose behaviour is *awkwardly driven by their impulses*, instead of being *steered by wary grace and propriety*. *Do you imagine* that her *rapid forecast* and rumination concerning house-furniture and society were *ever discernible* in her conversation, *even with her mamma?* On the contrary, she would have expressed the *prettiest surprise* and *disapprobation* if she had heard that another young lady had been detected in that *immodest prematureness* – indeed, would probably have *disbelieved in its possibility*. For Rosamond *never showed any unbecoming knowledge* and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date. *Think no unfair evil of her*, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide. *She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods*, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light – they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please. Nature had inspired many arts in finishing Mrs Lemon’s favourite pupil, who, by general consent (*Fred’s excepted*) was a rare compound of beauty, cleverness, and amiability. [Chap 27: 258 – 59]

Rosamond’s ability to squelch impulsive behaviour in favour of ‘a wary grace and propriety’ is hardly surprising on account of her having been the ‘flower’ of Mrs Lemon’s finishing school. What is unusual, though, is that the kind of received response that allows for no ‘unbecoming knowledge’ of any sort extends even to her relationship with her own mother. Bakhtin, who maintains that “the ideological becoming of a human being [. . .] is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (DiN 341), may not have found this surprising but rather recognised it as the result of Rosamond’s responding to *authoritative discourse* which corresponds to reciting by heart, or by rote, as opposed to *internally persuasive discourse* (retelling in one’s own words) which, without completely diluting “the quality that makes another’s words unique” (DiN 341), presupposes at least a degree of internal dialogism. So, whereas dialogized language becomes “*relativized*” or “*de-privileged*” by its awareness of “competing definitions for the same things,” undialogized language is always “authoritative and absolute” (DiN 427). In his essay on speech genres, Bakhtin observes that authoritative discourse can be found in all social groups including “each small world of the family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives” (SG. SG& 88). Rosamond’s complete identification with the specific ideologically-driven authoritative teaching received at Mrs Lemon’s school would then explain her inability to ever be, say, or do anything outside of the art acquired at Mrs Lemon’s by her ‘favourite pupil’. One cannot help but wonder what, if anything, Mrs General in *Little Dorrit*, might have been able to add to this construction of ‘perfect loveliness’ or, in Lydgate’s terminology, her ‘ready, self-possessed grace’, ‘quiet gravity’, ‘feminine radiance’ and ‘distinctive womanhood’ (114 and 158).

However, as previously mentioned, the narrator seems anxious to be *seen* as being equitable to all parties and in another characteristic aside to her readers, she makes a great show of pulling back from the faintly discernible ‘disapprobation’ in her own assessment of Rosamond, and begs us to ‘think no unfair evil of her’. Actually, the narrator is herself quite subversive in her subtle disparagement of Rosamond and uses Fred as an unlikely ally, asserting that he too has reservations about Rosamond’s inimitable blend of beauty, cleverness, and amiability – something to which Lydgate appears to be particularly susceptible.

Lydgate found it more and more agreeable to be with her, and there was no constraint now, *there was a delightful interchange of influence in their eyes*, and *what they said had that superfluity of meaning for them*, which is observable with some *sense of flatness by a third person*; still they had no interviews or asides from which a third person need have been excluded. In fact, they *flirted*; and *Lydgate was secure in the belief that they did nothing else. If a man could not love and be wise, surely he could flirt and be wise at the same time?* [ . . . ] [Chap 27: 259]

[ . . . ] To Rosamond it seemed as if she and Lydgate were *as good as engaged*. That they were some time to be engaged had long been an idea in her mind; and *ideas, we know, tend to a more solid kind of existence*, the necessary materials being at hand. It is true, Lydgate had the *counter-idea of remaining unengaged*; but this was a *mere negative*, a *shadow* cast by other resolves which themselves were *capable of shrinking*. Circumstance was almost sure to be on the side of Rosamond’s idea, which had a shaping activity and looked through *watchful* blue eyes, whereas Lydgate’s lay blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which gets melted without knowing it. [Chap 27: 262]

I decided to combine my discussion of the above two passages because, even though the narrative is interrupted by a divergence into issues that do not directly involve Rosamond and Lydgate’s relationship, they are thematically consecutive: the opinions posited in the second passage flowing almost seamlessly from the events described in the first.

For the benefit of outside observers, the niceties of polite conversation are maintained by the two protagonists as they slip into what appears to be an easy, unconstrained relationship. But we are informed that Rosamond and Lydgate’s conversation acquires a ‘superfluity of meaning’ beyond the actual spoken word. In fact, what is implied by ‘the delightful interchange of influence in their eyes’ far exceeds their actual words, the apparent blandness of which is guaranteed to forestall the attention of any outside observer. As Bakhtin contends, there is more than meets the eye in discourses of any nature; all discourses are, to some or other extent, double-voiced because “no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object” (DiN 276). This is certainly true of Rosamond and Lydgate; each is guilty of translating the other’s words (and looks!) in terms of their own worldviews. While Lydgate is captivated by Rosamond’s apparent naivety and it suits him to assume that she is sophisticated enough to enjoy what he justifies as being harmless flirtation (even convincing himself that there is a certain wisdom attached to flirtation as opposed to falling in love)

Rosamond, misreading his intentions, *affects* an artless poise and malleability and so plays to the standards generally held to be necessary to become the perfect wife. It is this sort of exchange that prompts Bakhtin to comment that the word is “entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments, and accents” and that, directed toward its object, it enters a “dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments, and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from another, intersects with yet a third group” (DiN 276).

Lydgate, it seems, becomes trapped within a net of his own making as Rosamond’s ideas (being of a somewhat more substantial nature than his own, ‘unconcerned’ notions) begin to erode, without his knowing it, his determination to remain single. In *Extracts from “Notes”* (1970 – 1971), Bakhtin muses on the relationship between understanding, and the evaluation of a literary work. I have adapted his account to apply to the conversation between Rosamond and Lydgate. Bakhtin’s argument runs along the lines that understanding is not possible without evaluation; they are, in fact, “simultaneous and constitute a unified integral act”. The one who “understands” (Lydgate) approaches the work (conversation) “with his own already formed world view, from his own position” which, despite determining, to a certain degree, his evaluation, does not “always stay the same”. The reason for this is because his position is “influenced by the work” (Rosamond’s ‘artless’ response) which produces something new. If “the person who understands” (Lydgate) is able to change or abandon “his already prepared viewpoints and positions” a kind of struggle occurs in which “mutual change and enrichment” takes place (Morson 181). By extension, therefore, when there is no act of understanding, or if understanding is faulty (as is the case between Rosamond and Lydgate) no real mutual enrichment can occur.

The narrator puts her money on Rosamond’s likely success in that the simple negation of an idea has not sufficient power to counter the force of a ‘shaping activity’, being merely ‘a shadow cast by other resolves which themselves were capable of shrinking’. What is begun here prefigures the inevitable ‘shrinking’ of Lydgate’s insubstantial resolve, ‘blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which gets melted without knowing it’, under the ‘watchful’ eye of Rosamond – a process that is continually pitted against his potential for personal growth as the novel progresses.

Becoming what he wants to be is further complicated by the fact that Lydgate has already made some enemies, both medical and personal, mostly as a result of his professional and social



arrogance but also because of his success with Rosamond which elicits jealousy from other possible suitors, Ned Plymdeale, in particular (Chap 27: 260). Nevertheless his medical practice slowly begins to grow and he is summoned to Lowick Manor to attend to Casaubon who had collapsed in the library. On one of his follow-up visits he speaks frankly to Dorothea about Casaubon's health, advising the avoidance of mental strain and recommending a break from his work.

*'He would be miserable, if he had to give up his work,'* said Dorothea, with a quick prevision of that wretchedness. [. . .]

'Help me pray,' she said, at last, in the same low voice as before. *'Tell me what I can do.'* [. . .] Lydgate rose, and Dorothea mechanically rose at the same time, unclasping her cloak and throwing it off her as if it stifled her. He was bowing and quitting her, when an *impulse* which if she had been alone would have turned into a prayer, made her say with a sob in her voice –

'Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been labouring all his life and not looking forward. *He minds about nothing else. And I mind about nothing else –*

*For years after Lydgate remembered* the impression produced in him by this *involuntary appeal – this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures* in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully-illuminated life. But what could he say now except that he should see Mr Casaubon again to-morrow? [Chap 30: 280]

In direct contrast to the controlled decorum of Rosamond's 'language' of society and class, Dorothea's urgent pleas bespeak an inherent naturalness: 'a cry from soul to soul', emanating from the very core of her being and moving out towards Lydgate. The seeds of contextual dialogism are planted as Dorothea's impassioned concern for Casaubon's having to 'give up his work' is implicitly set against Rosamond's current disregard for her own husband's profession, as well as her future lack of support for Lydgate's predicament when he is forced to abandon his practice and research. Dorothea's 'involuntary appeal' thus produces in Lydgate an impression which he carries with him 'for years after'.

Because the word lives on it becomes "a vehicle for *others'* construction of me, or my creation of myself out of others" (MB 71) and, even though Lydgate's and Dorothea's character zones seldom intersect, the rare occasions in which their paths do actually cross produce discourses that are deeply meaningful, not only to Lydgate but also to Dorothea, who discerns in him a 'kindred' nature and is the first person to vindicate him when he encounters his own problems, declaring to Mr Farebrother, "I feel convinced that his conduct has not been guilty: I believe that people are almost always better than their neighbours think they are". She cannot, she insists, "be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in *my* trouble" (Chap 72: 696 – 97).

Long before Lydgate is in need of any character reference, he tries to put into words Dorothea's intensity of feeling.

Lydgate that evening spoke to Miss Vincy of Mrs Casaubon, and laid some emphasis on the strong feeling she appeared to have for that formal studious man thirty years older than herself.

‘Of course she is devoted to her husband,’ said Rosamond, *implying a notion of necessary sequence* which the scientific man regarded as the *prettiest possible* for a woman; *but she was thinking at the same time that it was not so very melancholy to be mistress of Lowick Manor with a husband likely to die soon. ‘Do you think her very handsome?’*

‘She certainly is handsome, *but I have not thought about it,*’ said Lydgate.

‘I suppose it would be unprofessional,’ said Rosamond, *dimpling*. ‘*But how your practice is spreading!* You were called in before to the Chettams, I think; and now, the Casaubons.’

[Chap 31: 284]

Rosamond’s ‘answer-word’, which is thought by Lydgate to be ‘prettiest possible’ response, is actually embedded with double-speech and narratorial annotations which render it somewhat less tolerable to the reader who immediately discerns that her direct answer (‘Of course she is devoted to her husband’), is socially informed and consciously designed to appeal to Lydgate, her subsequent thinking (‘it was not so very melancholy to be mistress of Lowick Manor with a husband likely to die soon’), is diminishing of Dorothea, and the question she puts to Lydgate (‘Do you think her very handsome?’), is an attempt to manoeuvre the conversation away from Dorothea’s attributes to an affirmation of her own beauty. That she is sufficiently rewarded by Lydgate’s nonchalant reply is shown by the ‘dimpling’ of her cheeks and her conversation quickly moves on to more propitious affairs: the fact that his practice is beginning to attract well-to-do clients such as the Chettams and the Casaubons.

Bakhtin cautions that “neither individuals nor any other social entities are locked within their boundaries” but are instead “extraterritorial, partially ‘located outside’ themselves” (MB 50). Referring thus, to the “nonself-sufficiency” of the self is his celebrated statement: “To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself” (PDP 287). Despite Lydgate’s efforts, their conversation never really goes beyond the superficial and, even at this early stage in their relationship, we are able to sense, as they cannot, that they do not properly *engage* with each other in conversation. Lydgate is too caught up in his *idea* of Rosamond to be able to see her as she *is*: someone who actively resists the idea of personal growth (she is already perfect) and who is, therefore, unlikely to be of any assistance to him, either professionally (her idea of professional success being very different from his own) or personally, in the development of an integrated self which requires “a genuine *other* consciousness” to “complete” him and “fill” him in (MB 75).

We turn with interest to the following passage in which Harriet Bulstrode seeks an audience with Rosamond, believing that it is her duty to have a serious talk to her when rumours of an impending engagement between her niece and Lydgate reach her. One wonders to what extent, if

any, Mrs Bulstrode may be able to supply a ‘genuine other consciousness’ for Rosamond to begin to ‘fill herself in’.

After this Mrs Bulstrode drove to her niece with a mind newly weighted. She was herself handsomely dressed, but she noticed with *a little more regret than usual* that Rosamond, who was just come in and met her in walking-dress, was *almost as expensively equipped*. Mrs Bulstrode was a feminine, smaller edition of her brother and had none of her husband’s low-toned pallor. *She had a good honest glance and used no circumlocution*.

‘You are alone, I see, *my dear*,’ she said, as they entered the drawing-room together, looking round gravely. Rosamond felt sure that her aunt had something particular to say, and they sat down near each other. *Nevertheless, the quilling inside Rosamond’s bonnet was so charming that it was impossible not to desire the same kind of thing for Kate, and Mrs Bulstrode’s eyes, which were rather fine, rolled round that ample quilled circuit, while she spoke.*

‘I have just heard something about you that has surprised me very much, Rosamond.’

‘What is that, aunt?’ *Rosamond’s eyes also were roaming over her aunt’s large embroidered collar.*

‘I can hardly believe it – that you should be engaged without my knowing it – without your father’s telling me.’ Here Mrs Bulstrode’s *eyes finally rested on Rosamond’s, who blushed deeply*, and said –

‘I am not engaged, aunt.’

‘How is it that everyone says so then – that it is the town’s talk?’

‘*The town’s talk is of little consequence*, I think,’ said Rosamond, *inwardly gratified*.

‘Oh, *my dear*, be more thoughtful; don’t despise your neighbours so. Remember you are turned twenty-two now, and you will have no fortune; your father, I am sure, will not be able to spare you anything. Mr Lydgate is very intellectual and clever; I know there is an attraction in that. I like talking to such men myself; and your uncle finds him very useful. But the profession is a poor one here. To be sure, this life is not everything; but it is seldom a medical man has true religious views – there is too much pride of intellect. *And you are not fit to marry a poor man.*’

‘My Lydgate is not a poor man, aunt. He has very high connections.’

‘He told me himself he was poor.’

‘That is because he is used to people who have a high style of living.’

‘*My dear* Rosamond, *you* must not think of living in high style.’

Rosamond looked down and played with her reticule. *She was not a fiery young lady and had no sharp answers, but she meant to live as she pleased.*

‘Then it is really true?’ said Mrs Bulstrode, *looking very earnestly* at her niece. ‘You are thinking of Mr Lydgate: there is some understanding between you, though your father doesn’t know. *Be open, my dear Rosamond*: Mr Lydgate has really made you an offer?’

*Poor* Rosamond’s *feelings were very unpleasant*. She had been quite easy as to Lydgate’s feeling and intention, but now when her aunt put this question, she did not like being unable to say Yes. *Her pride was hurt, but her habitual control of manner helped her.*

‘Pray, excuse me, aunt. I would rather not speak on the subject.’

‘You would not give your heart to a man without a decided prospect, I trust, *my dear*. And think of the two excellent offers I know of that you have refused! – and one still within your reach, if you will not throw it away. I knew a great beauty who married badly at last, by doing so. Mr Ned Plymdale is a nice young man – some might think good-looking; and an only son; and a large business of that kind is better than a profession. Not that marrying is everything. I would have you seek first the kingdom of God. But a girl should keep her heart within her own power.’

‘I should never give it to Mr Ned Plymdale, if it were. I have already refused him. If I loved, I should love at once and without change,’ said Rosamond, *with a great sense of being a romantic heroine, and playing the part very prettily.*

‘I see how it is, my dear,’ said Mrs Bulstrode, *in a melancholy voice*, rising to go. ‘You have allowed your affections to be engaged without return.’

‘No, indeed, aunt,’ said Rosamond, with emphasis.

‘Then you are quite confident that Mr Lydgate has a serious attachment to you?’

*Rosamond’s cheeks by this time were persistently burning*, and she *felt much mortification*. She *chose to be silent*, and her aunt went away *all the more convinced*. [Chap 31: 286 – 88]

As distinct from Rosamond, Mrs Bulstrode ‘uses no circumlocution’ and comes straight to the point of her visit but even the straight-talking, honest Mrs Bulstrode is partially dialogized as she simultaneously internalises ‘with regret’ the sophistication and expensiveness of Rosamond attire

whilst, at the same time, desiring a similar quilled bonnet for her own daughter. In like fashion, Rosamond's eyes roam over her aunt's 'large embroidered collar' while she is talking to her aunt.

Picking up on the discussion I began earlier (Chap 27: 259 and 262), regarding Bakhtin's take on the word ("no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way"), it should be noted that he distinguishes between what he refers to as the 'direct word', as understood by traditional stylistics, and what he calls the 'living word' (DiN 276). Whereas the direct word, he says, "encounters in its orientation toward the object only the resistance of the object itself," because no one "hinders" it or "argues with it," the living word encounters also "the fundamental and richly varied opposition of another's word" and during the course of "living interaction" with a "specific environment" the word becomes "individualized and given stylistic shape" (DiN 276). This is because, in dialogue, the utterance encounters an object which is already "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist" (DiN 276). One might say that, while Mrs Bulstrode's and Rosamond's thoughts are thus partly on what they are planning to say, they are simultaneously engaged in observing the way in which each is dressed, and anticipating what the other will say (together with their own anticipated responses), all of which are determined by various factors, including their present and past relationship to each other.

Rosamond correctly gathers that this is no mere social call and feels certain that her aunt 'had something particular to say'. The recent rumours regarding Rosamond are, in fact Mrs Bulstrode's major concern, and these, together with the fact that Rosamond is, in her view, rather too expensively dressed, are contributing factors to the way her conversation is likely to be shaped. Only when Mrs Bulstrode's eyes finally engage with Rosamond's, does she explicitly state the nature of her business.

Rosamond's response is complex. Her airy dismissal of the 'town's talk' hides her actual feelings of inward gratification, but not before a deep blush is invoked by her aunt's assumption that she is secretly engaged. For the first time in the novel we see Rosamond deeply discomfited as she is forced to confront her construction of herself as the heroine of her own fantasies and dreams, a construct that becomes increasingly eroded under the weight of her aunt's relentless interrogation and concern that Rosamond has not only given her heart to a poor man but also that she has given it to someone who has not yet made her an offer of marriage. Despite her mounting mortification when she is forced to acknowledge (to herself at least, if not to her aunt)

that her aunt's concerns may have some justification, her inherent self-possession and determination to 'live as she pleased' prompt her to deflect her aunt's allegations. On the one hand Rosamond is evasive but on the other she is not in the habit of telling lies and cannot deny that Lydgate has not yet asked her to marry him.

There is no doubt that this particular passage is pivotal in the author's construction of Rosamond's character and, for a short while, there is some question as to the direction in which Rosamond will develop. Sadly the opportunity is passed up; despite having chipped away doggedly at the outer boundaries of Rosamond's persona and entreating her to 'be open' with her, Mrs Bulstrode is unable to gain full dialogic 'entry' into Rosamond's profoundly guarded inner being.

Having said that, Rosamond cannot quite maintain the pretence of airy disregard for what her aunt is saying and even if, in her assumption of the role of 'romantic heroine', her actual words deny her aunt an answer, her burning cheeks speak their own kind of language. Notwithstanding Bakhtin's insistence that "a human being experiencing life in the category of his own *I* is incapable of gathering himself on his own into an even relatively finished outward whole" (AH 35), Rosamond's obvious discomfort indicates that some inroads have been made into her particular brand of pretendership when she encounters the straight-talking and responsible dialogical other of her aunt, for whom she obviously has some regard.

When Rosamond's aunt, in whom we sense a real affection towards her niece, cannot gain sufficient access to Rosamond's inner self to protect her from herself she feels that, at the very least, it is her duty to try to protect her from others. Consequently, she goes directly to Lydgate with more straight-talking, effectively telling him not to interfere with Rosamond's prospects. Although Lydgate inwardly fumes at her presumption (believing that Rosamond takes these things just as lightly as he does), he takes a pragmatic decision to curtail his social visits to the Vincy's.

***Rosamond became very unhappy.*** The uneasiness first stirred by her aunt's questions grew and grew till at the end of ten days that she had not seen Lydgate, it grew into terror at the blank that might possibly come – into foreboding of that ready, fatal sponge which so cheaply wipes out the hopes of mortals. The world would have a new dreariness for her, as a wilderness that a magician's spells had turned for a little while into a garden. ***She felt that she was beginning to know the pang of disappointed love, and that no other man could be the occasion of such delightful aerial building*** as she had been enjoying for the last six months. ***Poor*** Rosamond lost her appetite and felt as forlorn as Ariadne – as a ***charming stage Ariadne left behind with all her boxes full of costumes and no hope of a coach.***

There are many wonderful mixtures in the world which are all alike called love, and claim the privileges of a sublime rage which is an apology for everything (in literature and the drama). Happily

Rosamond did not think of committing any desperate act: she plaited her fair hair as beautifully as usual, and kept herself proudly calm. Her most cheerful supposition was that her aunt Bulstrode had interfered in some way to hinder Lydgate's visits: everything was better than a spontaneous indifference in him. *Anyone who imagines ten days too short a time* – not for falling into leanness, lightness, or other measurable effects of passion, but – *for the whole spiritual circuit of alarmed conjecture and disappointment, is ignorant of what can go on in the elegant leisure of a young lady's mind.*

[Chap 31: 290 – 91]

Despite Rosamond's taking great care to appear to be in complete control of her life, the inner turmoil she experiences, as she speculates on the possible reasons for Lydgate's sudden protracted absence after six months of daily visits, is undoubtedly one of the most acutely painful things she has ever had to endure. The resultant 'terror' she feels is prompted by the conviction that no-one but Lydgate would be able to fill the empty days that lie ahead. Yet, alongside her misery there exists an acute self-consciousness, implied by 'she felt she was beginning to know the pangs of disappointed love' – a phrase taken straight from the language of popular romance. Rosamond feels genuine unhappiness but, at the same time, she also consciously *feels* herself feeling it – playing the role of the abandoned maiden, 'a charming stage Ariadne left behind with all her boxes full of costumes and no hope of a coach'. It is this wry adjunct that Kerry McSweeney objects to as overkill and 'animus' on the part of the narrator (68). Whilst seeing her point, the issue is debatable on the grounds that, in Bakhtin's view, one of the marks of a polyphonic work (as opposed to a monologic one) is the characters' ability to surprise their author, by acting in unexpected ways, thereby rendering possible outcomes as continually outdated (MB 247).

In the light of the above it is just possible that, sensing that she is no longer in complete control of either Rosamond or her reader's feelings about Rosamond, Eliot tries to reassert her dominance by reminding her reader that Rosamond is always on stage even when she is alone. In so doing she uses what Bakhtin might have called, 'active double-voiced words' in which can be detected two accents competing for hegemony. As Bakhtin observes, "In such discourse, the author's thought no longer oppressively dominates the other's thought, discourse loses its composure, becomes agitated, internally undecided and two-faced" (PDP 198). It is this sense of real competition that is carried over into the next few paragraphs in which the narrator appears to attempt to tone down her 'digs' at Rosamond in what Bakhtin might have called, "self-deprecating, overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes and the like" (PDP 196); a 'loophole' being a device that allows one the possibility of altering the final meaning of one's words. So, whereas it should be the ultimate word, "it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final period" (PDP 223). Morson and Emerson describe this type of double-voiced discourse, or

‘hidden polemic’ as one in which “the author’s discourse is partially directed at its referential object [...] but, at the same time, it seems to cringe in the presence of a listener’s word, to take a ‘sideward glance’ as a possible hostile answer [...] and so we sense that the word has a double orientation” (MB 155). Said another way, it responds to an anticipated answer by striking “a polemical blow [...] at the other’s discourse on the same theme” (PDP 195). It does seem rather odd to imagine Eliot ‘cringing’ at anything but, as Bakhtin reminds us, “even an aesthete, working on a novel, becomes in this genre an ideologue who must defend and try out his ideological positions, who must become both a polemicist and an apologist” (DiN 333). In this passage Eliot appears to do just that – whilst polemicizing Rosamond’s consciousness of ‘feeling like Ariadne’ and her apparent calm in plaiting her ‘fair hair as beautifully as usual’ and whilst reminding us of the ‘elegant leisure of a young lady’s mind’ she, nevertheless, invokes sympathy for the ‘alarmed conjecture and disappointment’ Rosamond undoubtedly suffers at the hands of love.

After a period of eleven long days, Lydgate accidentally encounters Rosamond when he is asked to deliver a message from Mrs Vincy, who is visiting Stone Court, to her husband.

Miss Vincy was alone, and *blushed so deeply* when Lydgate came in that *he felt a corresponding embarrassment*, and instead of any playfulness, he began at once to speak of his reason for calling, and to beg her, almost formally, to deliver the message to her father. Rosamond, who at the first moment felt as if her happiness were returning, was keenly hurt by Lydgate’s manner; *her blush had departed*, and she assented *coldly, without adding an unnecessary word*, some trivial chain-work which she had in her hands enabling her to avoid looking at Lydgate higher than his chin. *In all failures, the beginning is certainly the half of the whole.* After sitting two long moments while he moved his whip and could say nothing, Lydgate rose to go, and *Rosamond, made nervous by her struggle between mortification and the wish not to betray it*, dropped her chain as if startled, and rose too, *mechanically*. Lydgate instantaneously stooped to pick up the chain. When he rose he was very near to a lovely little face set on a fair long neck which he had been used to see turning about under the most perfect management of self-contented grace. But as he raised his eyes now *he saw a certain helpless quivering which touched him quite newly*, and made him look at Rosamond with a questioning flash. *At this moment she was as natural as she had ever been when she was five years old: she felt that her tears had risen*, and it was no use to try to do anything else than let them stay like water on a blue flower or let them fall over her cheeks as they would.

*That moment of naturalness was the crystallising feather-touch: it shook flirtation into love.* [...]

‘What is the matter? you are distressed. Tell me – pray.’

*Rosamond had never been spoken to in such tones before. I am not sure* that she knew what the words were; but she looked at Lydgate and the tears fell over her cheeks. *There could have been no more complete answer than that silence*, and Lydgate, forgetting everything else, *completely mastered by the outrush of tenderness* at the sudden belief that this sweet young creature depended on him for her joy, actually put his arms round her, holding her gently and protectingly – *he was used to being gentle with the weak and suffering* – and kissed each of the two large tears. This was a strange way of arriving at an understanding, but it was a short way. Rosamond was not angry, but she moved backward a little in timid happiness, and Lydgate could now sit near her and speak less incompletely. Rosamond had to make her little confession, and he poured out words of gratitude and tenderness with impulsive lavishness. In half an hour he left the house an engaged man, *whose soul was not his own, but the woman’s to whom he had bound himself.*

[Chap 31: 291 – 92]

Despite being caught up in a romance of (mostly) her own making, what Rosamond feels here is very real to her. The naturalness of her blush renders Lydgate effectively tongue-tied and, instead of delivering his rehearsed light-hearted speech, he finds himself forced into unintentional formality. His formal tone provides the catalyst by which Rosamond is able to regain some measure of customary control. But, despite the narrator's prior negative allusions to a 'stage Ariadne', it seems reasonable to suggest that the reader is here encouraged to take account of the misery out of which Rosamond's cold response is wrought as she takes refuge behind her chain-work. However, this sentiment is swiftly undercut by the narrator who signposts the inevitable failure of a union between Lydgate and Rosamond with 'In all failures, the beginning is certainly half of the whole'.

Rosamond's internal struggle between humiliation and her efforts not to show it result in her dropping her chain. When Lydgate stoops to retrieve it his image of her is revised in an instant and he is 'touched quite newly' as he perceives that the usual 'self-contented grace' of her 'lovely little face' has been replaced by 'a certain helpless quivering'. His 'questioning glance' elicits unchecked tears which fall over her cheeks and, without a word being said, Lydgate's resolve is completely overturned – whereas he had only flirted with the 'artificial' Rosamond, he now falls irrevocably in love with the 'natural' Rosamond who, for the first time, is so moved that words fail her. As Morson and Emerson submit, silence is itself "a possible mode of communication" (MB 134). Tone, too, plays an enormous part in how the utterance is received by the interlocutor, to the extent that "often tone is *all* an utterance conveys" (MB 134) and Rosamond's positive response is not so much to the actual words spoken by Lydgate, as it is to the *tone* in which they are uttered. Her *unvoiced* response of 'tearful silence', extracts from Eliot the remark that 'there could have been no more complete answer' – an observation that would doubtlessly have found favour with Bakhtin.

Lydgate, who is "completely mastered by the "outrush of tenderness" he suddenly feels toward Rosamond, holds her protectively and gently kisses the two large tears that have fallen onto her cheeks. However, the poignancy of the scene is undercut by narratorial dialogic, bordering on scepticism, when the impulsive Lydgate, who 'was used to being gentle with the weak and suffering', leaves the house an engaged man whose soul now belongs to Rosamond 'to whom he had bound himself'. Even though this encounter constitutes one of the few times that Rosamond is truly devoid of artifice in her relationship with Lydgate – one of the rare occasions in which she approaches, in Bakhtinian terms, 'real becoming' – we suspect that this kind of 'opening up' is unlikely to become a pattern with her and that she will inevitably regress into her customary,



acquired responses. Kerry McSweeney takes this view a step further by remarking that, “never again in his presence will Rosamond fail to act out the artificial character that she does not realise is precisely her own” (95).

Nevertheless, the two lovers enter into an idyllic period as together they spin a ‘gossamer web’ of ‘young lovemaking’, each convinced that the other is the living embodiment of all their dreams (Chap 36: 333). Lydgate prepares for marriage, we hear in an ‘episodic way’, taking Mrs Breton’s house as soon as it falls vacant and ordering his ‘perfect dress’ and house furnishings and plate ‘without any notion of being extravagant’ (335). Lydgate, however, secretly desires to shorten the period of courtship. Having to descend to mingling with the Vincys begins to irritate him and he is certain that Rosamond has similar feelings and would benefit from being transported away by him (336). One evening he finds her alone and mentions that her eyelids look a little red.

‘Are they?’ said Rosamond. ‘I wonder why.’ *It was not in her nature to pour forth wishes or grievances. They only came forth gracefully on solicitation.*

‘As if you could hide it from me!’ said Lydgate, laying his hand *tenderly* on both of hers. ‘Don’t I see a tiny drop on one of the lashes? *Things trouble you, and you don’t tell me. That is unloving.*’

[Chap 36: 337]

Lydgate’s natural protectiveness towards Rosamond grows in direct proportion to what he perceives in her to be a natural restraint in cataloguing her wishes or grievances, and he immediately picks up on the barely perceptible outward sign that something is genuinely troubling her. Quite certain that she can never hide anything from him he admonishes her that it is ‘unloving’ to try to attempt to do so. This sentiment makes perfect sense in terms of Bakhtin’s stated belief that the very being of man is irrevocably bound to “communion” through dialogue. Failure to communicate is tantamount to “absolute death,” or “non-being,” a state of being “unheard, unrecognized, unremembered” (PDP 287). Unfortunately for Rosamond and Lydgate it is the negative aspect (non-being) which begins to assert itself more and more as their relationship progresses, since Rosamond’s much adored ‘constancy of purpose’ does not ultimately turn out to be in the quite the right place for Lydgate (337). However, convinced of the benefits for both, Lydgate urges an early wedding and she eagerly agrees.

After their marriage they befriend Will Ladislaw who becomes a frequent visitor to their home, playing music and singing with Rosamond in the daytime and spending time with both in the evenings. One afternoon Dorothea calls to see Lydgate in order to inquire after her husband. For the first time she and Rosamond come into direct contact, albeit briefly, and in the presence of

Will whom Dorothea is surprised and disconcerted to find passing time with Mrs Lydgate in her husband's absence. The narrator immediately embarks on a comparison of sorts between the two women, drawing Ladislav into the field of action as both observed and observer.

The gentleman was *too much occupied with the presence of the one woman to reflect on the contrast between the two* – a *contrast* that would certainly have been striking to a calm observer. They were both tall, and their eyes were on a level; but *imagine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hair-plaits*, with her *pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know the price of*, her *small hands duly set off with rings*, and that *controlled self-consciousness* of manner which is the *expensive substitute for simplicity*. [Chap 43: 413 – 14]

In a complex hybrid construction a finely dialogized comparison between Rosamond and Dorothea is presented to the reader. Whereas Rosamond's beauty is described in minute detail the narrator refers only to Dorothea by way of contrast. However, the description is prefaced by Ladislav's inability to perceive the contrast (he has eyes only for Dorothea) and finalized by the sardonic voice of the narrator. Interestingly, this excerpt is part of Book IV, "The Widow and the Wife", and we are afforded an indirect view of the widow, Dorothea, through a multilayered hybrid description of the wife, Rosamond.

Our own assessment as unimpassioned observers is coloured by both Will's ardent admiration for Dorothea and the narrator's dialogical description of Rosamond in which we can sense Lydgate's voice (admiration), Rosamond's voice (self-satisfaction), and the narrator's parodical voice which begins by playfully undermining Rosamond's 'infantile blondness', exquisite dress and bejewelled hands and ends with undisguised disparagement of her carefully and expensively prepared exterior. By extrapolation, therefore, the similarities between Rosamond and Dorothea begin and end with their common height and, although it must be imagined that 'to a calm observer' Dorothea's own plain clothing and appearance pale into insignificance beside the gorgeously attired Rosamond, it is Dorothea who emerges as the finer of the two, needing no 'expensive substitute for simplicity'.

After a few weeks of settling into married life, Rosamond, intent on impressing Lydgate's exalted relatives with her hospitality, invites the baronet's third son, Captain Lydgate, to visit.

Lydgate inwardly cursed his own folly that he had drawn down this visit by consenting to go to his uncle's on the wedding-tour, and *he made himself rather disagreeable* to Rosamond by saying so in private. For to Rosamond this visit was a source of *unprecedented but gracefully-concealed exaltation*. She was so intensely conscious of having a cousin who was a baronet's son staying in the house, that she imagined the knowledge of what was implied by his presence to be *diffused through all other minds*; and when she introduced Captain Lydgate to her guests, she had a *placid sense that his rank penetrated them as if it had been an odour*. The satisfaction was enough for the time to melt away some disappointment

in the conditions of marriage with a medical man even of good birth: it seemed now that *her marriage was visibly as well as ideally floating her above the Middlemarch level*, and the future looked bright with letters and visits to and from Quallingham, and *vague advancement* in consequence for Tertius. [. . .] *Hence* it was *clearly* worth while for Rosamond to take pains with her music and the careful selection of her lace.

As to Captain Lydgate himself, his low brow, his aquiline nose bent on one side, *and his rather heavy utterance*, might have been disadvantageous in any young gentleman who had not *a military bearing and moustache to give him what is doated on by some flower-like blond heads as "style"*. He had, moreover, that sort of high-breeding which consists in being free from the petty solitudes of middle-class gentility. Rosamond *delighted* in his admiration now even more than she had done at Quallingham, and he found it easy to spend several hours of the day *flirting* with her. The visit altogether was one of the *pleasanteest larks* he had ever had, *not the less so perhaps because he suspected that his queer cousin Tertius wished him away*: though Lydgate, who would rather (hyperbolically speaking) have died than have failed in polite hospitality, suppressed his dislike, and only pretended generally not to hear what the gallant officer said, consigning the task of answering him to Rosamond. For he was not at all a jealous husband, and preferred leaving a *feather-headed* young gentleman alone with his wife to bearing him company.

*'I wish you would talk more to the Captain at dinner, Tertius,'* said Rosamond, one evening when the important guest was gone to Loamford to see some brother officers stationed there.

*'My dear Rosy, you don't expect me to talk much to such a conceited ass as that, I hope,'* said Lydgate, brusquely. 'If he got his head broken, I might look at it with some interest, not before.'

'I cannot conceive why you should speak of your cousin so contemptuously,' said Rosamond, her fingers moving at her work while she spoke with a *mild gravity* which had a *touch of disdain in it*.

[Chap 58: 553 – 54]

The passage constitutes an intricately hybridised, multi-layered view of the captain, in which Rosamond's and Lydgate's very different feelings about him are recorded. In turn, they are both offset by the captain's 'own' feelings about them. At the same time all three 'voices' are dialogized by the satirical tones of the narrator. While the 'flower-like' blond head of Rosamond is sufficiently turned to believe that the presence of rank 'diffused' in equal measure to 'all other minds' and 'penetrated' her guests 'as if it had been an odour', Lydgate, with a characteristic indelicacy that Rosamond begins to find distasteful, sees only the 'conceited ass' his cousin really is. That the captain himself is no innocent pawn in this mild marital dispute is all too evident – his so-called freedom from 'the petty solitudes of middle-class gentility' places him in a position of power which he does not hesitate to take full advantage of by titillating Rosamond, on the one hand, and purposely infuriating his 'queer cousin', Tertius, on the other.

Bakhtin makes the point that the plot of the novel "is subordinated to the task of coordinating and exposing languages to each other" (DiN 365). As previously mentioned, the novelistic plot "orchestrates its themes" – the objects and ideas it depicts and expresses – by means of "a diversity of social speech types" and the different individual voices that thrive under a variety of conditions (DiN 263). Even though none of the characters is given direct speech in the first two paragraphs, the mediated language of the narrator allows us to discern the way in which various 'languages' overlap and intersect each other as each of the three characters function within a chosen language system, similar but not identical to that of the other two. For Bakhtin, language "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent,

when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (DiN 293). One might say that Lydgate expresses himself in terms he *knows* will make himself disagreeable to the captain, even though this carries the risk of his simultaneously becoming disagreeable to Rosamond, and the captain, partly consciously and partly because of his upbringing and social rank, speaks in a ‘heavy’ manner with all its attendant inflexions and intonations and which the narrator mischievously dialogises as being clearly ‘disadvantageous’ to anyone not having his rank and title or, at least, an impressive ‘moustache’.

David Danow alludes to Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘social ubiquity’ of the word – its ability to span both the “immediate social situation and the broader social milieu” – as being a “requisite to every instance of understanding and effort at interpretation” (36). Within Rosamond’s expressed wish, at the end of the excerpt, that Lydgate would talk more to the Captain, and Lydgate’s contemptuous reply, both the *particular* aspect of the word and its *social* implications are clearly visible. Added to her personal annoyance at Lydgate’s bad manners, Rosamond clearly wishes to establish herself within a society that Lydgate seems equally to want to shun and, consequently, the language style each elects to communicate in is bonded to and reflects different segments of society.

As well as exposing social languages, another of the novel’s accomplishments is to reveal characters as social ideologues. Rosamond, for example, is governed by the ‘correct’ language and practised norms she has learnt at Mrs Lemon’s school. Bakhtin would not have found this at all unusual given that he insists that, in the novel, “formal markers of languages, manners and styles are symbols for sets of social beliefs” to the extent that external linguistic features are often used as a “peripheral means to mark socio-linguistic differences, sometimes even in the form of direct authorial comments on the characters’ language (DiN 357). Although the narrator chooses mostly indirect commentary over direct comments, it is clear that her description of Rosamond marks her as a social ideologue or, to put it crudely, a social wannabe, who puts into practice at every given opportunity, the language and behaviour she believes to be appropriate to her cause.

What is a merely ‘one of the pleasantest larks’ (a turn of phrase belittling to both Rosamond and, oddly to the captain himself, who is not shown to be exactly articulate) to the noble gentleman is the catalyst for showing up the tiny cracks that are beginning to appear in Lydgate’s and Rosamond’s relationship, and when Rosamond persists in coaching Lydgate into behaving more appropriately towards the Captain her apparent disregard for her husband’s feelings is apparent.

*'The fact is that you would wish me to be a little more like him, Rosy,' said Lydgate, in a sort of resigned murmur, with a smile which was not exactly tender, and certainly not merry. Rosamond was silent and did not smile again;* but the lovely curves of her face looked good-tempered enough without smiling.

Those words of Lydgate's were like *a sad milestone* marking how far he had travelled from his old *dreamland*, in which Rosamond Vincy appeared to be that perfect piece of womanhood who would *reverence* her husband's mind after the fashion of an *accomplished mermaid*, using her comb and looking-glass and singing her song for the relaxation of his adored wisdom alone. He had *begun* to distinguish between that *imagined adoration* and the *attraction towards a man's talent because it gives him prestige*, and is like an order in his button-hole or an Honourable before his name.

It might have been supposed that Rosamond had travelled too, since she had found the pointless conversation of Mr Ned Plymdale perfectly wearisome; *but to most mortals there is a stupidity which is altogether acceptable* – else, indeed, what would become of social bonds? *Captain Lydgate's stupidity was delicately scented*, carried itself with "style," talked with a *good accent*, and was *closely related to Sir Godwin*. Rosamond found it quite agreeable and *caught many of its phrases*. [Chap 58: 555]

Lydgate's sudden clarity of vision enables him to begin to distinguish between 'pie-in-the-sky' dreams and the hard facts of their life together, and this constitutes a crucial turning-point for him in their relationship, especially since Rosamond does not grace his accusation with denial and reassurance of her love for him. The words 'reverence' and 'accomplished' signal the ideological and idiolectical disparity between them. While 'reverence' of sorts might have a place in both their vocabularies, 'reverencing her husband's *mind*' is unthinkable for Rosamond, whose capacity for reverence extends only to wealth, position and title. Likewise, 'accomplished' belongs to them both but its adjunct, 'mermaid' can only belong to Lydgate whose ideas of docile 'accomplishment' run counter to Rosamond's actual accomplishments.

Similarly, the narrator's use of the word 'stupidity' ignites a three-way battle over the word. Whilst, for Rosamond, the captain's 'stupidity' is 'delicately scented' and 'agreeable', Lydgate finds his social clap-trap unutterably intolerable. Despite taking pains to be seen as an impartial judge ('to most mortals there is a stupidity which is altogether acceptable'), rather like a clever comedian who, in introducing a topic, *pretends* to side with a particular segment of the audience but ends up polemicizing it, the narrator strikes a 'polemical blow' not only at all three characters but also at society in general. Whilst Rosamond's infatuation with the crass captain links her to his brand of stupidity (she becomes similarly stupid by association), Lydgate's poor social skills are highlighted in his inability or unwillingness to engage in social small talk. In offering an excuse for being 'stupid', the narrator sets herself up in an adjudicatory role, but her use of the specific word 'stupid', handpicked from a possible host of less pejorative words gives her away – it denies neutrality and positions her squarely in Lydgate's corner, rather than in Rosamond's.

Even though Rosamond's initial silence seems 'good-tempered', contained within her innate inscrutability are manifold meanings which signal to Lydgate the sad farewell to his dreams. He

begins to see them for what they really are: mere delusions in which he realises that Rosamond's real attraction is to the prestige she mistakenly believes he will give her, rather than to who he is in himself. Rosamond meanwhile, intent on achieving her own ideological aspirations, mimics the captain's phraseology, 'style; and 'good accent', so much so that her husband's 'sad milestone' seems not to have yet entered into her reckoning.

Something else that does not seem to have entered her mind are the dangers of overexertion in pregnancy and, without prior consultation with her doctor husband, she goes riding with the captain. She tells her husband afterwards and, invigorated by its success, she fully believes that he will approve her going out again but is, instead, met with 'thunderous exclamations' as a result of his being hurt that she has both risked herself and neglected to consult him. However his natural solicitude for her and her condition act as a silencer and, after a few moments of reflection he opts for a more pragmatic approach, hoping to appeal to her reason.

'However, you have come back safely,' he said at last, in a decisive tone. 'You will not go out again, Rosy; that is understood. If it were the quietest, most familiar horse in the world, there would always be the chance of an accident. And you know very well that I wished you to give up riding the roan on that account.'

'But there is the chance of accident indoors, Tertius.'

'*My darling, don't talk nonsense,*' said Lydgate, in an *imploring tone*; '*surely I am the person to judge for you. I think it is enough that I say you are not to go again.*'

Rosamond was arranging her *hair* before dinner, and the reflection of her head in the glass *showed no change* in its *loveliness* except a little turning aside of the *long neck*. Lydgate had been moving about with his hands in his pockets, and now paused near her, as if he awaited some assurance.

'I wish you would fasten up my *plaits*, dear,' said Rosamond, letting her arms fall with a little sigh, so as to make a husband *ashamed of standing there like a brute*. Lydgate had often fastened the plaits before, being among the deftest of men with his large finely-formed fingers. He swept up the soft festoons of plaits and fastened in the tall comb (*to such uses do men come!*); and what could he do then but *kiss the exquisite nape* which was shown in all its delicate curves? But *when we do* what we have done before, it is often with a *difference*. Lydgate was still angry, and had not forgotten his point.

'I shall tell the Captain that he ought to have known better than offer you his horse,' he said, as he moved away.

'I beg you will not do anything of the kind, Tertius,' said Rosamond, looking at him with something more *marked than usual in her speech*. 'It will be treating me as if I were a child. Promise that you will leave the subject to me.'

There did seem to be some truth in her objection. Lydgate said, 'Very well,' with surly obedience, *and thus the discussion ended with his promising Rosamond, and not with her promising him.*

*In fact, she had been determined not to promise.* Rosamond had that *victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance*. *What she liked to do was to her the right thing and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it.* She *meant to go out riding again* on the grey, and she did go on the next opportunity of her husband's absence, not intending that he should know until it was late enough not to signify to her. The temptation was certainly great: she was very fond of the exercise, and the gratification of riding on a fine horse, with Captain Lydgate, *Sir Godwin's son*, on another fine horse by her side, and of *being met in this position by any one but her husband, was something as good as her dreams before marriage*: moreover, *she was riveting the connection with the family at Quellingham, which must be a wise thing to do.* [Chap 58: 556–57]

Rosamond's 'victorious obstinacy' begins to assert itself in the face of Lydgate's attempts to lay down the law to her (or maybe because of them) and she is determined to do as she likes because

‘what she liked to do was to her the right thing’. The problem seems to be that each is equally convinced that their own course of action is the correct one but, as Bakhtin observes, “truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (PDP 110). The Bakhtinian view is that differences of opinion need not present insurmountable difficulties provided that people work together to search for truth.

Unfortunately, the stumbling block in Lydgate and Rosamond’s relationship is that they do not ‘collectively’ search for agreement, opting instead to impose their opinions on each other without reference to the feelings or views of the other. Consequently, Lydgate resorts to bullying – a tactic he is soon made to regret. He orders Rosamond not to go out again, insisting that he should be the person to decide and that it should be enough for her to simply accept his say-so. Rosamond counters with impeccable reasoning that she could just as easily meet with an accident indoors and, resorting to the kind of subterfuge that ‘never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance’, she plays on Lydgate’s defencelessness against her beauty as her image in the mirror shows ‘no change in its loveliness’ except to allow him a view of her ‘long neck’ as she turns slightly to request his assistance in tying up her plaits.

Eliot seems to use Rosamond’s plaits semiotically; they form part of an almost silently double-voiced ‘dialogue’ between her and Lydgate, with the plaits signifying her apparent beauty and purity, while also serving as rope to bind Lydgate to her. While on one hand, they portray something childlike about her, they link into the “mermaid/siren” metaphor in the previous excerpt. Given the Victorian restrictions on writing openly about sexual relations, the plaits seem to express both her narcissism and desire to attract him and his willingness to be bound to her. Playing the helpless female, she lets her arms ‘fall with a little sigh’ in a scene entirely calculated to ‘make her husband ashamed of standing there like a brute’. Once physical contact is made she knows that he will succumb to her beauty and, de facto, to her will. As the narrator sardonically remarks, ‘to such uses do men come’, but cautions, ‘when we do what we have done before, it is often with a difference’. The discussion ends with Lydgate’s making promises to Rosamond instead of, as he had hoped, eliciting a promise from her, one which, we are informed, “she had been determined” not to make.

However, capitulation does not constitute agreement and, in any case, as Morson and Emerson point out, “agreement, no less than disagreement, is a dialogic relation” on account of there

being, on the one hand, “a radical and qualitative difference” between “one speaker being consistent with himself, and on the other, two speakers who happen to agree, each from his own perspective” (MB 151). As I have previously mentioned, even agreement comes in a huge variety of “gradations and shadings” (MB 132), having to do with “overtones, pauses, implied attitude, what is left unsaid or is to be inferred” and “confidence in another’s word” or ‘grudging acknowledgement’ of it (Stam 14). The thwarted Lydgate suddenly finds himself outdone by Rosamond and tricked into ‘surlly obedience’. He is thus left with a feeling of sour, residual anger and frustration, and perhaps a flicker of understanding that he cannot win against the implacable Rosamond whose ‘cleverness’ is concentrated on achieving her own ends. It seems likely that that agreement or ‘truth-seeking’ between them will continue to be a slippery fish throughout their marriage.

Even at this early point in their marriage it is obvious that Rosamond has no notion of, the ‘sad milestone’ already reached by Lydgate. Whilst being aware that their aims are quite different, she is utterly certain that what she wants is best for both of them and we sense, in her calm rejoinder to Lydgate’s outburst, a tenacity that will not be relinquished until her goals are achieved. Her complacent faith in her own unassailable judgement and consequent objection to being told what to do, result in a stubborn disregard for Lydgate’s wishes and, and the very next time he is absent from home she seizes her chance to ride alongside the captain, by means of which agency she means to ‘rivet the connection with the family at Quallingham’.

In this instance, however, Lydgate’s reservations prove to be correct as, during the ride, her horse is startled by the sound of a tree being felled and Rosamond is given a fright that causes her to lose her baby. However, even in the face of her miscarriage, Rosamond is able to protest with mild certainty that the ride was not the deciding factor and that, had she stayed in, the same thing would probably have happened.

Lydgate could only say, ‘Poor, poor darling!’ but he secretly wondered over the terrible tenacity of this mild creature. There was a gathering within him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond. His superior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he had imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on every practical question. He had regarded Rosamond’s cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. *He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was* – what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent. *No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests:* she had seen clearly Lydgate’s pre-eminence in Middlemarch society, and could go on imaginatively tracing still more agreeable social effects when his talent should have advanced him; but for her, his professional and scientific ambition had no other relation to these desirable effects than if they had been the fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil. And that oil apart, with which she had nothing to do, of course *she believed in her own opinion more than she did in his*. Lydgate was astounded to find in numberless trifling matters, as well as in this last serious case of the riding, that *affection did not make her compliant*. He had no doubt that the affection was there, and had no presentiment that he had done



anything to repel it. For his own part *he said to himself that he loved her as tenderly as ever, and could make up his mind to her negations*; but well! Lydgate was much worried, and conscious of new elements in his life as noxious to him as an inlet of mud to a creature that has been used to breathe and bathe and dart after its illuminated prey in the clearest of waters.

Rosamond was soon looking lovelier than ever at her work-table and, enjoying rides in her father's phaeton and thinking it likely that she might be invited to Quallingham. [. . .]

Lydgate, relieved from anxiety about her, relapsed into what she inwardly called his *moodiness*, – a name which to her covered his thoughtful preoccupation with other subjects than herself, as well as that uneasy look of the brow and distaste for all ordinary things as if they were mixed with bitter herbs, which really made a sort of weatherglass to his vexation and foreboding. These latter states of mind had one cause amongst others, which he had *generously but mistakenly* avoided mentioning to Rosamond, lest it should affect her health and spirits. *Between him and her indeed there was that total missing of each other's mental track, which is too evidently possible even between persons who are continually thinking of each other.* To Lydgate it seemed that he had been spending month after month in *sacrificing* more than half of *his best intent* and *best power* to his tenderness for Rosamond; bearing her little claims and interruptions without impatience, and above all, bearing without betrayal of bitterness to look through less and less of interfering illusion at the *blank unreflecting surface her mind* presented to his ardour for the more impersonal ends of his profession and his scientific study, an ardour which he had fancied that the ideal wife must somehow worship as sublime, though not in the least knowing why. But his endurance was mingled with a *self-discontent* which, if *we* know how to be candid, *we* shall confess to make more than half *our* bitterness under grievances, wife or husband included. It always remains true that *if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us.* Lydgate was aware that his concessions to Rosamond were often little more than the lapse of slackening resolution, the *creeping paralysis* is apt to seize an enthusiasm which is out of adjustment to a constant portion of our lives. And on Lydgate's enthusiasm there was constantly pressing not a simple weight of sorrow, but the biting presence of a petty degrading care, such as casts the blight of irony over all higher effort.

[Chap 58: 557 – 59]

As Lydgate begins to experience a sense of 'powerlessness over Rosamond' he realises that he has underestimated her 'terrible tenacity' and misjudged her particular brand of cleverness which turns out to be quite the opposite of the 'receptive' and docile kind he had previously credited her with. Even his frequent shows of affection towards her fail to gain her compliance. Morson and Emerson make the point that, for Bakhtin, "the author's most responsible act is to grant integral wholeness to another consciousness" by affording that character "not only given traits but also unexpected potential". This enables a character to be "released to develop freely within the logic of his *own* reality" (MB 88). There is little sign of this 'potential' in Rosamond but we do begin to sense in Lydgate the possibility for change as he starts questioning his earlier logic and convictions about life, marriage and Rosamond. The fact that he has to remind himself that he still 'loved her as tenderly as ever' indicates a change in his feelings. Whereas his love initially sprang unbidden from his emotions, he now becomes aware of 'new elements in his life as noxious as an inlet of mud'. Keen to overlook her negations, he makes a conscious decision to love her despite her growing resistance to him.

The seemingly unbridgeable gap developing between Lydgate and Rosamond can, in part, be measured in terms of the inequality of their feelings for each other. For Rosamond, Lydgate becomes quite simply a means to an end (notwithstanding his inauspicious profession) while he still cherishes some hope of a warm and loving relationship. However much our natural

sympathies may lie with Lydgate, the point is not that we like them both equally but that we are given sufficient insight into their disparate characters to enable us to appreciate that what Rosamond wants and needs is as real to her ‘within the logic of [her] *own* reality’ as Lydgate’s aspirations are to him. In *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot’s Heroines*, Dorothea Barrett draws attention to the remark made about Eliot by Charles Bray: ‘She saw all sides, and there were always many, clearly and without prejudice’. Barrett takes slight issue with this and submits that seeing all sides “‘clearly and without prejudice’ suggests dispassionate, even-handed neutrality, whereas George Eliot saw each side with the passion of a partisan”. She adds that it is “this ability to enter into both sides of a conflict not only intellectually but also emotionally [that] lies behind a series of fascinating reflexive characterizations in George Eliot’s fiction” (14). One has to agree that Eliot is unquestionably prejudiced but despite this, or maybe even because of it, her readers are able to gain both intellectual *and* emotional access to her characters.

Unfortunately the genuine concern for Rosamond’s wellbeing that prompts Lydgate to keep his pressing financial burdens to himself is misinterpreted by Rosamond as ‘moodiness’. The narrator interprets this state of affairs as a total missing of ‘each other’s mental track’, a state of affairs that does not bode well for the development of selfhood, which, in Bakhtin’s opinion, requires a *shared* consciousness (PDP 287). One cannot manage without the other because “justification cannot be *self*-justification, recognition cannot be self-recognition” and therefore, “even love towards one own self is impossible” (PDP 278).

Put another way, the *interacting* presence of the other is a prerequisite for the formation of the self and this becomes evident in the ‘creeping paralysis’ that afflicts Lydgate as he reflects upon the ‘blank unreflecting surface of her mind’ to his own work and passion (to his mind an ideal wife would ‘worship’ his aspirations ‘without in the least knowing why’). Despite his sacrificing, month after month ‘his best intent and best power to his tenderness for Rosamond’, and despite his ‘bearing her little claims and interruptions without impatience’, he is unable to elicit from her any favourable or reciprocal response. Having said that, in an effort to pull back from a partisan view of the beleaguered Lydgate, Eliot once again directly engages with her readers in a characteristic ‘aside’ in which she reminds us that, ‘husband or wife included’, we are ourselves always partly to blame for our grievances and self-discontent. Fortune favours the brave and ‘if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us’, she concludes. As Elizabeth Ermarth remarks, “No sooner do you say something definite about [Eliot’s] novels than you confront a counter-balancing consideration, a qualifying remark, that inevitable ‘on the other hand’” (“Negotiating Middlemarch”. Chase 112), a process she describes

as “turn[ing] toward, and then away from, every formulation” (Chase 114). She goes on to describe what she calls Eliot’s “on the other hand” as suggesting “coexistence, not cancellation” and adds that that the only cancellation in Eliot’s work “is the cancellation of absolute truth claims, claims that do not allow for alternative claims” (Chase 114). Translated into Bakhtinian terms, one might say that Eliot seeks to “objectivize the struggle with all types of internally persuasive alien discourse that had at one time held sway over the author” (DiN 348). In what coincides with a key sentiment in Bakhtin’s ethics, Ermarth concludes that claims of being “‘right’ as opposed to everyone else’s ‘wrong’ are something that George Eliot considers key to the extinction of morality” (“Negotiating *Middlemarch*”. Chase 114).

As Rosamond regains her health Lydgate mentally prepares himself to discuss their financial situation with her.

He was *nerving himself to this rigour* as he rode from Brassing, and meditated on the representations he must make to Rosamond.

It was evening when he got home. He was *intensely miserable*, this strong man of nine-and-twenty and of many gifts. *He was not saying angrily within himself that he had made a profound mistake; but the mistake was at work in him like a recognised chronic disease*, mingling its uneasy importunities with every prospect, and enfeebling every thought. As he went along the passage to the drawing-room, he heard the piano and singing. Of course Ladislav was there. It was some weeks since *Will* had parted from Dorothea, yet he was still at the old post in Middlemarch. *Lydgate* had no objection in general to Ladislav’s coming, but just now he was annoyed that he could not find his hearth free. When he opened the door the two singers went on towards the keynote, raising their eyes and looking at him indeed, but not regarding his entrance as an interruption. To a man *galled with his harness* as poor Lydgate was, it is not soothing to see two people *warbling* at him, as he comes in with the sense that the painful day has still pains in store. His face, already paler than usual, took on a *scowl* as he walked across the room and *flung* himself into a chair.

The singers, feeling themselves excused by the fact that they had had only three bars to sing, now turned round.

‘How are you, *Lydgate*?’ said *Will*, coming forward to shake hands.

Lydgate took his hand, but did not think it necessary to speak.

‘Have you dined, Tertius? I expected you much earlier,’ said Rosamond, who had already seen that her husband was in a “*horrible humour*.” She seated herself in her usual place as he spoke.

‘I have dined. I should like some tea, please,’ said Lydgate, *curtly, still scowling* and looking markedly at his legs stretched before him.

*Will was too quick to need more*. ‘I shall be off,’ he said reaching for his hat.

‘Tea is coming,’ said Rosamond; ‘pray don’t go.’

‘Yes, Lydgate is bored,’ said *Will, who had more comprehension of Lydgate than Rosamond had, and was not offended by his manner, easily imagining outdoor causes of annoyance*.

‘There is the more need for you to stay,’ said Rosamond, *playfully*, and in her lightest accent; ‘he will not speak to me all the evening.’

‘Yes, Rosamond, I shall,’ said Lydgate, in his strong baritone, ‘I have some serious business to speak to you about.’

No introduction of the business could have been less like that which Lydgate had intended; *but her indifferent manner had been too provoking*.

‘There! You see,’ said *Will*. ‘I’m going to the meeting about the Mechanics’ Institute. Goodbye;’ and he went quickly out of the room.

[Chap 58: 562 – 63]

The narrator offers the disquieting *opinion* that *Will* has a better understanding of Lydgate than does Rosamond, and there is ample reason to suggest that this is true on some levels. That he

does not take Lydgate's surliness personally, but attributes it to some outside source, indicates a kind of understanding that appears to be lacking in Rosamond. Although Eliot never really expands on the relationship between the two male friends beyond the informal sharing of opinions, one senses that Will's direct and intuitive nature provides an unhindered, open flow between one consciousness and the other – something Lydgate finds increasingly difficult to enjoy with Rosamond. Consequently he spends much time consumed with anxiety, 'nerving himself' to the 'rigour' of discussing with her their financial difficulties. However, the argument is a clearly flawed syllogism, an argument of probability only, and more than a little unfair. Just because Rosamond chooses delaying tactics it does not automatically follow that she does not understand her husband – perhaps she understands him only too well but has no desire to engage in whatever it is that has caused his bad temper. While it is true that Will is quick to perceive that Lydgate wishes to be alone with his wife and that whatever is on Lydgate's mind has nothing to do with him, he is not emotionally invested in Lydgate and his decision to leave is an easy one. It can be argued that Rosamond is equally astute but, sensing that Lydgate's mood has much to do with her, does her best to take refuge behind a third person and avoid an evening alone with Lydgate in a 'horrible humour'.

The obviously biased conclusion calls into question the reliability of the narrator. For Bakhtin, however, a certain amount of narratorial bias does not necessarily constitute a negative. His feeling is that, in novels (as opposed to in the "absolutely inaccessible and closed world of the epic) the author is permitted "in all his various masks and faces, to move freely onto the field of his represented world" (EaN 27). Because the novelist's orientation is toward the incomplete future he may, as I mentioned in the section on *Little Dorrit* (Book II, Cap 5: 526) "turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose, he may depict real moments in his own life or make allusions to them, he may interfere in the conversations of his heroes, he may openly polemicize with his literary enemies and so forth" with the result that the "'depicting' authorial language now lies on the same plane as the 'depicted' language of the hero, and, as such, it cannot help but enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it" (EaN 27). In contradistinction to the epic, therefore, the novel allows, even encourages, readers to examine *all* the views that are offered, *including* those of the author or narrator, who may, for one or another reason, be predisposed toward certain characters and antipathetic toward others.

Picking up on a point I made earlier about Dorothea and Will being clear favourites of Eliot, my feeling is that this passage provides insight into the author's bias in more ways than one. The

constant reference to Will by his first name is an interesting contrast to the almost exclusive use of Lydgate's surname (except when he is addressed directly by Rosamond). One could argue that, despite her being sympathetic to Lydgate, the device allows her to be seen as keeping her distance from him. Certainly Lydgate cannot compete with Ladislav for her affection and, by extension, for ours (because she colours our views), especially since abysmal financial management, poor personal judgment and lack of courage are the major contributors to his misery. This view is consolidated in later passages when he is shown to allow himself to be compromised in ways that suggest he lacks the backbone and moral fibre of either Dorothea or Ladislav.

Having said that, although one may suspect that Lydgate is unlikely fully to recover from the cracks that begin to appear in his life and marriage, despite his failings, despite having got off to a bad start and despite having been provoked by Rosamond's apparent indifference to his wellbeing, he refuses to articulate his mistake in marrying Rosamond. Even though it is 'at work in him like a recognised chronic disease' he simply accepts his lot and is determined to try to set things to rights. While waiting for Rosamond to serve his tea, he lapses into a dream-like state in which he relives various stages of his life, culminating in his visit to Lowick Manor in which he recalls the ardent tone of Dorothea's voice in seeking advice from him.

*'Advise me – think what I can do – he has been all his life labouring and looking forward. He minds about nothing else – and I mind about nothing else.'*

*That voice of deep-souled womanhood had remained within him as the enkindling conceptions of dead and sceptred genius had remained within him (is there not a genius for feeling nobly which also reigns over human spirits and their conclusions?): the tones were a music from which he was falling away – he had really fallen into a momentary doze, when Rosamond said in **her silvery neutral way**, 'Here is your tea, Tertius,' setting it on the small table by his side, and then moved back to her place **without looking at him**. **Lydgate was too hasty in attributing insensibility to her; after her own fashion, she was sensitive enough, and took lasting impressions**. Her impression now was one of **offence and repulsion**. But then, **Rosamond had no scowls and had never raised her voice: she was quite sure that no one could justly find fault with her**.*

[Chap 58: 564]

In addition to the obvious contextual dialogism evident in Lydgate's pensive recollection of Dorothea's words, it also constitutes an example of the "phenomenon of hidden dialogicality," in which the second speaker (Dorothea) is "present invisibly," [her] words are not there but "deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker" (PDP 197). When Lydgate's reverie is abruptly halted by Rosamond's 'silvery neutral' tones the narrator hands Rosamond a backhanded 'compliment'— a decidedly double-voiced defence of her – observing that Lydgate has been too 'hasty in attributing insensibility to her' because, in her own way 'she was sensitive enough, and took lasting impressions'. 'Sensitive', therefore becomes another word whose meaning is delicately poised between

Lydgate and Rosamond – for Lydgate it denotes sensitivity to other people’s feelings and needs whereas, for Rosamond, it approaches something closer to being self-involved and easily hurt. That their very natures are so far removed from each other’s consolidates the narrator’s earlier opinion that ‘there was that total missing of each other’s mental track’ (558) and that any real communication between them is unlikely. While Lydgate’s silent moodiness cannot be fathomed by Rosamond (or understood by her in terms other than its effect on herself) her socially perfected but inscrutable exterior masks an even more noxious attitude than Lydgate believes possible.

In Rosamond’s book of rules, her behaviour is exemplary in every way but, as we recall, Bakhtin insists that rules are apt to destroy the ‘oughtness’ of an event in which true ethical decisions can be made (MB 26). Instead, he inclines towards the view that we are all participants in “the event of being” for which “a set or sets of timeless rules” (MB 177) are not adequate markers for our choices. A genuine understanding of self as one who acts on ethical choices entails an understanding of self “at particular moments and in unrepeatable circumstances” (MB 177). When one lives by rote it is not possible adequately to respond to the uniqueness of each moment. Consequently, ethical decisions are impoverished. One might say that Rosamond’s reliance on rules and regulations (‘absolutism’), rather than on a ‘felt’ response to a particular situation (‘oughtness’), makes it difficult for her to ‘hear’ the voice of her conscience and her character is again tested when Lydgate finally summons the courage to approach her about their financial situation.

‘*Dear Rosy*, lay down your work and come and sit by me,’ he said, *gently*, pushing away the table, and stretching out his arm to draw a chair near his own.

Rosamond *obeyed*. As she came towards him in her drapery of *transparent faintly-tinted muslin*, her slim yet round figure never looked more graceful; as she sat down by him *and laid one hand on the elbow of his chair, at last looking at him and meeting his eyes, her delicate neck and cheek and purely-cut lips never had more of that untarnished beauty* which touches us in spring-time and infancy and all sweet freshness. It touched Lydgate now, and mingled the early moments of his love for her with all the other memories which were stirred in this crisis of deep trouble. He laid his *ample* hand softly on hers, saying –

‘*Dear!*’ with the lingering utterance which *affection* gives to the word. *Rosamond too was still under the power of that same past*, and her husband was still *in part the Lydgate whose approval had stirred delight*. She put his hair lightly away from his forehead, *then laid her other hand on his, and was conscious of forgiving him*.

‘I am obliged to tell you what will hurt you, Rosy. But there are things *which husband and wife must think of together*. I daresay it has occurred to you already, that I am short of money.’

Lydgate paused; but Rosamond *turned her neck* and looked at a vase on the mantelpiece.

‘I was not able to pay for all the things we had to get before we were married, and there have been expenses since which I have been obliged to meet. The consequence is, there is a large debt at Brassing – three hundred and eighty pounds – which has been pressing on me a good while, and in fact we are getting deeper every day, for people don’t pay me the faster because others want the money. I took pains to keep it from you while you were not well; but now we must think together about it, and you must help me.’

‘*What can I do, Tertius?*’ said Rosamond, turning her eyes on him again. *That little speech of four words, like so many others in all languages, is capable by varied local inflexions of expressing all states*

*of mind from helpless dimness to exhaustive argumentative perception, from the completest self-devoting fellowship to the most neutral aloofness. Rosamond's thin utterance threw into the words 'What can I do!' as much neutrality as they could hold. They fell like a mortal chill on Lydgate's roused tenderness. He did not storm in indignation – he felt too sad a sinking of the heart. And when he spoke again it was more in the tone of a man who forces himself to fulfil a task.*

'It is necessary for you to know, because I have to give security for a time, and a man must come to make an inventory of the furniture.'

Rosamond *coloured deeply*. 'Have you not asked *papa* for money?' she said, as soon as she could speak.

'No.'

'Then I must ask him!' she said, releasing her hands from Lydgate's and rising to stand at two yard's distance from him.

'No, Rosy,' said Lydgate, decisively. 'It is too late to do that. The inventory will be begun tomorrow. Remember it is a mere security: it will make no difference: it is a temporary affair. I insist upon it that your father shall not know unless I choose to tell him,' added Lydgate, *with a more peremptory emphasis*.

This certainly was unkind, but *Rosamond had thrown him back on evil expectation as to what she would do in the way of quiet steady disobedience. The unkindness seemed unpardonable to her: she was not given to weeping and disliked it, but now her chin and lips began to tremble and the tears welled up. Perhaps it was not possible for Lydgate, under the double stress of outward material difficulty and of his own proud resistance to humiliating consequences, to imagine fully what this sudden trial was to a young creature who had known nothing but indulgence, and whose dreams had all been of new indulgence, more exactly to her taste. But he did wish to spare her as much as he could, and her tears cut him to the heart.* He could not speak again immediately; but Rosamond did not go on sobbing: she tried to conquer her agitation and wiped away her tears, continuing to look before her at the mantelpiece.

'Try not to grieve, *darling*,' said Lydgate, *turning his eyes up towards her*. That *she had chosen to move away from him* in this moment of her trouble made everything harder to say, but he must absolutely go on. 'We must brace ourselves to do what is necessary. *It is I who have been at fault*: I ought to have seen that I could not afford to live in this way. But many things have told against me in my practice, and it really just now has ebbed to a low point. I may recover it, but in the meantime we must pull up – we must change our way of living. We shall weather it. When I have given this security I shall have time to look about me; and *you are so clever that if you turn your mind to managing you will school me into carefulness*. I have been a thoughtless rascal about squaring prices – *but come, dear, sit down and forgive me.*'

[Chap 58: 565 – 67]

Writer and social reformer Edith Silcox had this to say about *Middlemarch*:

[It] marks an epoch in the history of fiction in so far as its incidents are taken from the inner life, as the action is developed by the direct influence of mind on mind and character on character, as the material circumstances of the outer world are made subordinate and accessory to the artistic presentation of a definite passage of mental experience, but chiefly giving a background of perfect realistic truth to a profoundly imaginative psychological study. [Carroll, Ed. *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* 323]

Bakhtin expressed similar views in his appreciation of Dostoevsky's approach to plot, the goal of which, he says, is to "place a person in various situations that expose and provoke him, to bring people together and make them collide in conflict – in such a way, however, that they do not remain within an area of plot-related contact but exceed its bounds" (MB 247). In other words, plot exists in order for it to be transcended by various 'extra plot connections' achieved by characters in the novel. As characters are changed in unexpected ways by their discourse with other characters – a phenomenon Bakhtin calls 'eventness' – they continually outdate all possible outcomes (PDP 105). In this way 'plot' becomes secondary to 'eventness' inasmuch as it is "no longer the sequence characters are *ordained to follow*, but the *result* of what they happen to say and do" (MB 247 – emphasis added. There is a moment in the above exchange in which the very

real possibility exists for Rosamond to ‘surprise’ us and change the course of their lives regardless of the financial predicament in which she and Lydgate find themselves (the plot).

We also observe in Lydgate a very real attempt to amend his approach to Rosamond, and, despite her studied civility, we perceive in her a residue of feeling toward him as she responds to his affectionate tones with what approaches real feeling, finally ‘meeting his eyes’, putting ‘his hair lightly away from his forehead’ and laying ‘her other hand on his’. But the internal dialogic of ‘[she] was conscious of forgiving him’ (reminiscent of Fanny’s consciousness of herself in various roles), erodes the likelihood that Lydgate will ever manage completely to break through the barriers and forge a real connection with her. In order for real progress to be made, quite clearly both characters would have to lower their initial expectations and abandon the kind of stubborn oppositional ideas and ideals that leave little room for communication and resolution. Although each has a valid point, neither Rosamond nor Lydgate (despite his desire to please, protect and be open with her) is equipped with the emotional resources required for reaching out to the other in a meaningful way. Despite the failure of this, and each successive attempt to connect with each other, what is genuinely moving is that, however small and however fleeting they are, opportunities *do* exist for them to bridge the gap between them.

Bakhtin applauded Dostoevsky’s handling of the plot which, to his mind, “avoids using a character’s predetermined destiny as a way of ‘ambushing’ and ‘finalizing’ him [but instead] becomes a way of setting optimally favourable conditions for intense dialogues and unforeseen circumstances” (MB 247). In much the same way, when, for example, Lydgate lovingly addresses Rosamond she is, as it were, transported back to her initial feelings of delight in him and her response is similarly affectionate and we are reminded of Bakhtin’s belief that each particular moment, each particular response, has the power to alter the course of a relationship and that, even if the plot may initially dictate various situations in which characters find themselves, their individual responses to these situations and their interaction with each other become the determining forces in the ongoing course of the plot. Under the sub-heading, “Plot Structure Versus Polyphony and Eventness,” Morson and Emerson submit that in the creative process, despite having sketched out various possibilities often found in notebooks, because the polyphonic author “does not know the outcomes of dialogue [. . .] he cannot decide in advance what will happen to the characters” (MB 247). Rather than serving to direct action then, the real purpose of these ‘sketched out possibilities’ or ‘potential outcomes’ is to “create a better sense of characters at a given time and to arrive at a conceptualized ‘whole’ of their personalities” (MB



247). The crucial point is that dialogues in the novel are not shaped or planned beforehand but take place “right now, that is, in the *real present* of the creative process,” so much so that one senses the author addressing characters like people (MB 247) who are “actually present and capable of answering him” (PDP 91).

Unfortunately Rosamond conceives of herself as utterly blameless in every respect and cannot entertain the notion that anyone could ‘justly find fault with her’ (564). As a result, it is incomprehensible to her that she has, in any way, contributed to their financial woes. Consequently, her response to Lydgate’s plea (“What can I do?”) – a near replication of Dorothea’s recently remembered words in everything but tone and feeling – has a negative effect on Lydgate. Tone is pivotal to the way in which a message is received and, here, Lydgate’s natural warmth is chilled by the ‘thin aloofness’ of Rosamond’s hollow-sounding rendition of Dorothea’s exact words. In keeping with Bakhtin’s views on tone, David Danow submits that in many instances the commonly accepted meaning of an utterance “is subordinated to a particular desired intonation, designed as the predominant strategy in making a point” (16). Such is the case in Rosamond’s question to Lydgate, as ‘What can I do?’ is actually intended as ‘What do you expect me to do?’

For Bakhtin, the spoken word (voice) immediately suggests tone simply because any articulated word must necessarily be intonated. As he says, “intonation follows from the very fact of its being pronounced” (TPA 32). In fact, for him, each particular situation is experienced as both “something given and as something-yet-to-be-determined, is intonated, has an emotional-volitional tone” (TPA 33). Drawing on *Middlemarch* he illustrates this emotional-volitional tone: “Yes,” said Mr Casaubon, with that peculiar pitch of voice which makes the word half a negative” – Chap 20: 194). Michael Holquist agrees that the simultaneity of the “said and the unsaid” becomes apparent in intonation in which “the repeatable, merely linguistic stuff of the utterance is stitched to the unrepeatable social situation in which it is spoken [and so becomes] the immediate interface between the said and the unsaid” (61). Expanding on Bakhtin’s view, Morson and Emerson observe that even a “meaningless word or a mere interjection may be uttered to simply carry tone” (MB 134). Furthermore, they maintain that gestures, too, often carry a silent intonation by virtue of the fact that tone is, itself “a sort of gesture, and the two are typically fused” with the result that even apparently “‘meaningless’ words and gestures” often constitute “complete and highly expressive, utterances” (MB 135). Sadly, both Rosamond’s tone

and her gestures (such as turning her neck, walking away from Lydgate and avoiding his eyes), signify withdrawal and abnegation of responsibility.

It is this kind of failure to share or take responsibility that is a constitutive force behind what Bakhtin refers to as the creation of an ‘alibi for being’ which ultimately results in loss of self. There can be no *real* ‘alibi for being’, Bakhtin insists. Integrity is not formulaic and there is no escaping one’s ethical obligations at any given time. Avoiding responsibility by turning away from ‘ethical obligations’, is to become ‘a pretender’ (MB 31) because “a rich understanding of selves must begin with a sense of people as free and morally responsible agents who are truly unfinalizable” (MB 175). For Bakhtin, there is a great difference between an abstract view of morality (moral norms) and responsibility, in which one is rescued from the world of pure cognition and so freed for genuine responsibility. It is vital that I ‘sign’ a given act, which is not the same as accepting all blame but is, rather, an enabling gesture that allows “morality to coalesce around a human being” (MB 69). Therefore, “the most important thing about any act is: did I do it and do I accept responsibility for it, or do I behave as if someone else, or nobody in particular, did it?” (MB 69 – 70). While Lydgate does appear to make headway in this direction, clearly both he and Rosamond have a long way to go towards the ideal of responsibility – an ideal Bakhtin sees as being constitutive of selfhood for *both* the ‘self’ *and* the ‘other’.

When Rosamond’s ‘solution’ to appeal to her father is met by Lydgate’s peremptory negative reaction we again catch a fleeting glimpse of the real, live person beneath her carefully manicured façade as she struggles to control her tears and regain her composure. But it is the very naturalness of her tears that moves Lydgate to tenderness rather than her subsequent control and, although he immediately seeks forgiveness for his abruptness, reaching out to her becomes somewhat forced, complicated by her having physically and emotionally distanced herself from him. Once again, the chance for real emotional connection is lost as neither character is able to see things from the other’s perspective, to empathise with the other. While Lydgate’s unkindness seems ‘unpardonable to her’ he, hurt by her distance, is unable to put himself in her shoes, unable to ‘imagine fully’ the trials ‘of a young creature who had known nothing but indulgence, and whose dreams had all been of new indulgence’.

Unhappily, Lydgate’s self-effacing ownership of blame fails to result in Rosamond’s compliance (as he had hoped it would) but, instead, fortifies Rosamond’s resolve to attempt to impose on him choices that would better suit her: to leave Middlemarch and start afresh or to apply to his friend

for help. His good intentions crumble and he reacts in anger, insisting that she learn to bow to his judgement in matters she cannot possibly understand (567).

Rosamond sat *perfectly still*. The thought in her mind was that *if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him*.

'We have no time to waste now on unnecessary words, dear,' said Lydgate, trying to be gentle again. 'There are some details that I want to consider with you. *Dover says he will take a good deal of the plate back again, and any of the jewellery we like*. He really behaves very well.'

'Are we to go without spoons and forks then?' said Rosamond, *whose very lips seemed to get thinner with the thinness of her utterance. She was determined to make no further resistance or suggestions*.

'Oh no, dear!' said Lydgate. 'But look here,' he continued, drawing a paper from his pocket and opening it; 'here is Dover's account. See I have marked a number of articles, which if we returned them would reduce the amount by thirty pounds or more. I have not marked any of the jewellery.' Lydgate had really felt this point of the jewellery very bitter to himself; but he had overcome the feeling by severe argument. He could not propose to Rosamond that she return any particular present of his, but he had told himself that he was bound to put Dover's offer before her, *and her inward prompting might make the affair easy*.

'It's useless for me to look, Tertius,' said Rosamond, *calmly*; 'you will return what you please.' *She would not turn her eyes on the paper*, and Lydgate, flushing up to the roots of his hair, drew it back and let it fall on his knee. Meanwhile Rosamond quietly went out of the room, leaving Lydgate *helpless and wondering*. Was she not coming back? *It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests*. [ . . . ]

But the door opened and Rosamond re-entered. She carried the leather box containing the amethysts, and a tiny ornamental basket which contained other boxes, and laying them on the chair where she had been sitting she said, with *perfect propriety* in her air –

'This is all the jewellery you ever gave me. You can return what you like of it and of the plate also. *You will not, of course, expect me to stay at home to-morrow. I shall go to papa's*.'

*To many women* the look Lydgate cast at her would have been *more terrible than one of anger*: it had in it a *despairing acceptance of the distance she was placing between them*.

'And when shall you come back again?' he said, with a *bitter* edge on his accent.

'Oh, in the evening. *Of course I shall not mention the subject to mamma*.' *Rosamond was convinced that no woman could behave more irreproachably* than she was behaving; and she went to sit down at her work-table. Lydgate sat meditating a minute or two, and the result was that he said, with *some of the old emotion in his tone* –

'*Now we have been united, Rosy, you should not leave me to myself in the first trouble that has come*.'

'Certainly not,' said Rosamond; '*I shall do everything it becomes me to do*.' [ . . . ]

'I shall not touch the jewels Rosy. Take them away again. But I will write out a list of plate that we may return, and that can be packed up and sent at once.

'The servants will know *that*,' said Rosamond, with the *slightest touch of sarcasm*. [Chap 58: 567 – 69]

Any hope of breaking through the outer shell of the other and salvaging some remnant of mutual understanding is effectively quashed by Rosamond's private admission that, had she known how he was to behave, 'she would never have married him'. When Lydgate breaks the news that he has already discussed returning much of the plate and jewellery and pleads for her cooperation, begging that they discuss the matter but have no 'unnecessary words' between them, her thin-lipped, caustic response, "Are we to do without spoons and forks then?" casts his words in the worst possible light. His plea for unity falls on deaf ears as she refuses to look at the list of items, insisting that he return whatever he pleases.

Determined to maintain her own irreproachability, she offers ‘no further resistance’. Instead she reverts to ideological typecasting and ‘perfect propriety’ and decides to do ‘everything it becomes’ her to do. Retrieving her box of jewellery and placing it in his hands, she announces that she can hardly be expected to be present for the reclamation of their possessions – she will go to her paternal home in the morning and return only after the repossession has been accomplished. Convinced of the propriety of her actions, she assures him that she will not involve her mother in the subject. The subject is thus finalised; there is no more to be said between them and she removes herself to her work table. Again we perceive in her a kind of ‘absolutism’ brought about by either her unwillingness or her inability to adapt her responses to each unique moment. But as Morson and Emerson point out:

If, in Bakhtin’s example, I live as a mere part of a social order or movement, a nation, or even all of humanity and if I passively join myself to these larger entities, then I submit too unreservedly to rhythm and speak merely as a part of a “chorus” of others. In this way I lose (or rather live as if I had lost) my uniquely responsible voice. [MB 194]

The word, ‘rhythm’, here signifies closure in the present moment. As such it works directly against the search for meaning (which should “always include the possibilities of new meaning”). Failure to search for real meaning leads to loss of selfhood and this is precisely why I can and must transcend others’ “rhythmicizing” of me (MB 194). There can be no doubt that Rosamond is ‘rhythmicized’ by, and lives as part of a ‘chorus’ of others’. Initially encouraged by Mrs Lemon (to meet the requirements set by elite society), this ‘chorus’ of others’ has since become the benchmark for all Rosamond’s decisions and the yardstick for each word she utters.

Small wonder, then, that the astonished and helpless Lydgate begins to think that she is less able to identify with him than if ‘they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests’ and his inarticulate gesture, a look of ‘despairing acceptance’ is a poignant and eloquent allusion to his disappointment at ‘the distance she was placing between them’. Still, he is able to summon his old tenderness and desire for unity and, placing himself at her mercy, he pleads with her not to abandon him at the first sign of trouble. However, her response is that she will continue to act as she sees fit. The implication is that he has not acted with propriety – he has not properly thought through the embarrassment and loss of dignity she will have to suffer doing it his way which necessitates everyone, the servants included, being privy to their financial predicament.

To be fair, Lydgate has never properly understood Rosamond’s needs and the strain on her is also mounting. Although she maintains outward composure, the cracks begin to appear. Despite being warned by Lydgate against revealing to Will the punitive contents of Casaubon’s codicil

(which effectively blocks any chance of future marriage between Will and Dorothea), she rejects her husband's sage advice and flirtatiously teases Will about the likelihood of an imminent marriage between himself and Dorothea – an effort designed to elicit from Will a denial of any feeling toward Dorothea and a confession from him that it is she, Rosamond, who is the unattainable object of his affections. Her 'fishing expedition' could not have a worse result. Will flies into a rage, accuses her of insulting both him and Dorothea and storms off. (Chap 59: 572–573).

When he was gone, Rosamond left her chair and walked to the other end of the room, leaning when she got there against a *chiffonnière*, and looking out of the window wearily. She was *oppressed with ennui*, and by that *dissatisfaction* which in women's minds is continually turning into a *trivial jealousy*, referring to no real claims, springing from no deeper passion than the vague exactingness of egoism, and yet capable of impelling action as well as speech. '*There really is nothing to care for much,*' said poor *Rosamond inwardly*, thinking of the family at Quellingham, who did not write to her; and that perhaps Tertius when he came home would tease her about expenses. *She had already secretly disobeyed him* by asking her father to help them, and he had ended decisively by saying, 'I am more likely to want help myself.' [Chap 59: 573]

We are reminded once again of Bakhtin's insistence that the primary responsibility of the author is "to grant integral wholeness to another consciousness" not only by exploring the character's "given traits" but also by affording the character "unexpected potential" (MB 88). Perhaps aware that she has not been without bias, Eliot sets about trying to ameliorate the impression she has given of 'poor' Rosamond by allowing the reader a glimpse of the disappointment and world-weariness that lies, hidden from Lydgate's view, beneath her impenetrable surface. However, the occasional 'insights' into her distress are not untouched by sarcasm and phrases like 'stricken creature', 'oppressed with ennui' and 'trivial jealousy' still all point towards a decidedly narcissistic and shallow nature, prone to assuming the role of the rejected heroine whose romantic 'claims' spring from 'no deeper passion' than vague egoism. Nevertheless, these occasional glimpses into her inner self do separate her from flat characters like Mrs General and Mrs Merdle in *Little Dorrit* and align her more with Fanny, who is also able to lay some claim to our sympathies especially since Ladislaw's violent rejection following swiftly on the heels of her unsuccessful application to her father for financial aid, and the continued silence from the 'family at Quellingham' begin to erode Rosamond's girlish dreams. Despite the many negative aspects of her personality, we cannot help but feel sympathy for one whose hopes have been shredded to the extent of leaving her feeling that there is 'nothing left to care for much', and who faces a future that holds little except further 'teasing' from Lydgate about expenses.

Even as Rosamond suffers so, too, does Lydgate, whose awareness that his creditors expect immediate payment has added considerably to his woes, and he begins to reflect on how "his self

was being narrowed into the miserable isolation of egoistic fears and vulgar anxieties for events that might allay such fears". Despite writhing "under the idea of getting his neck beneath this vile yoke" he is, nevertheless, aware that the "bitter moody state" in which he was falling was "continually widening Rosamond's alienation from him," and he makes a renewed attempt at drawing her closer to him (Chap 64: 617).

*'My dear* Rosamond, It is not a question of choice. We have begun too expensively. Peacock, you know, lived in a much smaller house than this. *It is my fault*: I ought to have known better, *and I deserve a thrashing* – if there were anybody who had a right to give it me – for bringing you into the necessity of living in a poorer way than you have been used to. But we married because we loved each other, *I suppose*. And that may help us to pull along till things get better. *Come dear, put down that work and come to me.*'

He was really in *chill gloom about her* at that moment, but he *dreaded a future without affection, and was determined to resist the oncoming of division between them*. Rosamond obeyed him, and *he took her on his knee, but in her secret soul she was utterly aloof from him*. The *poor thing* saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and *Lydgate was part of that world*. [Chap 64: 617 – 18]

In shouldering the blame for their situation it is fair to say that, although Lydgate does not yet become fully 'answerable', he nevertheless does put his 'signature' to his actions which, constitutes for Bakhtin "the first step toward the truth of any situation" (MB 69). This is because 'signing' is a *personal* act and only that which is personalised "can become available for clarification, wholeness and interaction" (MB 69 – 70).

Unfortunately, Lydgate's silent moodiness (which is partly responsible for the widening gap between himself and Rosamond) together with the implicit threat of losing her beautiful home, serve only to aggravate the situation and harden her conviction that not only is he the sole cause of her misery but he is also approaching its resolution in entirely the wrong way. With mounting resentment against him she obeys his request to sit with him but, secretly, she feels 'utterly aloof from him'.

Despite the 'chill gloom' that descends upon him, his is a personality that cannot imagine 'a future without affection' and he desperately attempts to restore some of the old tenderness between them. In yet another intentionally half-hearted and dialogical attempt at defending Rosamond, the narrator refers to her as a 'poor thing' whose only understanding was 'that the world was not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate was part of that world'. Nevertheless, Lydgate presses on, continuing in a tone of gentle reasonableness. In an effort to absolve Rosamond from blame, he casts about for more suitable targets (the wasteful servants) in a last-ditch attempt to break through the barricade between them.

‘I find, now I look into things a little *Rosy*, that it is wonderful what an amount of money slips away in our housekeeping. I suppose the servants are careless, and we have had a great many people coming. ***But there must be many in our rank who manage with much less:*** they must do with commoner things, I suppose, and look after the scraps. It seems, money goes but a little way in these matters, for Wrench has everything as plain as possible, and he has a very large practice.’

‘Oh, if you think of living as the Wrenches do!’ said Rosamond, ***with a little turn of her neck.*** ‘But I have heard you express your disgust at that way of living.’

‘Yes, they have very bad taste in everything – they make economy look ugly. We needn’t do that. I only meant that they avoid expenses, although Wrench has a capital practice.’

‘Why should not you have a good practice, Tertius? Mr Peacock had. ***You should be more careful not to offend people, and you should send out medicines as the others do.*** I am sure you began well, and you got several good houses. It cannot answer to be eccentric; you should think what will be generally liked,’ said Rosamond, in a decided little tone of admonition.

Lydgate’s anger rose; ***he was prepared to be indulgent towards feminine weakness, but not towards feminine dictation.*** The *shallowness* of a *waternixie’s soul* may have a charm until she becomes didactic. But he controlled himself, and only said, with a *touch of despotic firmness* –

‘***What I am to do in my practice, Rosy, it is for me to judge.*** That is not the question between us. It is enough to know that our income is likely to be a very narrow one – hardly worth four hundred, perhaps less, for a long time to come, and we must try to rearrange our lives in accordance with that fact.’

Rosamond was silent for a moment or two, looking before her, and then said, ‘My uncle Bulstrode ought to allow you a salary for the time you give to the Hospital: it is not right that you should work for nothing.’

‘It was understood from the beginning that my services would be gratuitous. That, again, need not enter into our discussion. I have pointed out what is the only probability,’ said Lydgate, impatiently.

[Chap 64: 618 – 19]

Although the spoken word is the most powerful way of communicating meaning, Holquist agrees with Bakhtin that it is only one of several ways in which dialogic relations are conveyed (41). A case in point is the little turn of Rosamond’s neck, which can mean very different things at different times but here acts as a sharp indicator of her displeasure at Lydgate’s implicit suggestion that others of their ‘rank’ are able to make do with less. It has to be said that Rosamond’s suggestions for improving Lydgate’s prospects do make sense but this kind of thinking runs counter to everything he holds professionally dear and he perceives her views on how he conducts his medical practice as ‘feminine dictation’ emanating from the shallowness of a ‘waternixie’s soul’ and, stung, he rebukes her sharply.

Once again the narrator chooses her words with great care for whereas, prior to this encounter, Lydgate had always associated Rosamond with enchanting watery images, having once compared her with a *water-nymph* (with its inference of deity) he now sees her as a *nixie* (which has a decidedly malignant ring to it). He despotically refuses to engage with Rosamond’s stated, and to be fair, quite reasonable opinion that he needs to increase his practice, earn more money, and avoid his fellow practitioners’ resentment by being more tactful. Owing, in part, to his own ideological goals and also because he is hurt and angered by her lack of understanding and support for his professional decisions, he abandons the idea of trying to make her understand his dual passion for medical research and reform, and refuses to discuss with her why it is so

important for him to dispense with the so-called medication, preferred by his peers but which actually offer little more than a placebo effect.

His continued refusal to compromise his ideals leaves Rosamond with little recourse but either to relinquish her own aspirations or to continue quietly to defy him, especially when his next stated intention is to offer their house and furniture to Ned Plymdale (shortly to be married) and move into a less expensive house. This effectively cuts her to the core and produces an onrush of emotions which erupt into their first full-scale argument.

*Tears rolled silently* down Rosamond's cheeks; she just pressed her handkerchief against them, and stood looking at the large vase on the mantelpiece. *It was a moment of more intense bitterness than she had ever felt before.* At last, she said, *without hurry* and with *careful emphasis* –

'I could never have believed that you would *like* to act in that way.'

'*Like it?*' burst out Lydgate, rising from his chair, *thrusting* his hands in his pockets and *stalking* away from the hearth; 'it's not a question of *liking*. Of course, I don't *like* it; it's the only thing I can do.' He *wheeled* round there, and turned towards her.

'I should have thought there were many other means than that,' said Rosamond. 'Let us have a sale and leave Middlemarch altogether.'

'To do what? What is the use of my leaving my work in Middlemarch to go where I have none? We should be just as penniless elsewhere as we are here,' said Lydgate *still more angrily*.

'If we are to be in that position it will be *entirely your own doing*, Tertius,' said Rosamond, turning round to speak *with the fullest conviction*. 'You will not behave as you ought to do to your own family. You offended Captain Lydgate. Sir Godwin was very kind to me when we were at Quellingham, and I am sure if you showed proper regard to him and told him your affairs, he would do anything for you. But rather than that, you *like* giving up our house and furniture to Mr Ned Plymdale.'

There was something of a *fierceness* in Lydgate's eyes, as he answered with a new violence, 'Well then, if you will have it so, I do *like* it. I admit I *like* it better than making a fool of myself by going to beg where it's of no use. Understand then, that is what *I like to do*.'

There was a *tone* in the last sentence which was equivalent to the *clutch of his strong hand on Rosamond's delicate arm*. But for all that, *his will was not a whit stronger than hers*. She immediately walked out of the room in silence, but with an *intense determination* to *hinder* what Lydgate *liked to do*.

[Chap 64: 620]

Despite having asked her to share his troubles (565), Lydgate fails to follow his own advice and it appears that his idea of a shared burden is strongly influenced by conventional values in which a wife has no real say in the way in which matters are decided. Having married an 'ideal' which materializes into something rather less than the perfection he had imagined, he is at a loss to understand the idealistic yearnings that make up Rosamond's psyche. Added to this, her own lack of disclosure allows him unwittingly to strip away the things that are of least importance to him without any realisation that these are the very things that are most important to her. Even though, at times, he is able to show sensitivity for her feelings, he ultimately acts in accordance with his own nature, and fails to recognise that her nature and needs are radically different from his own. For all his tenderness, he remains a 'bear' in the most delicate issues of their communication.



Lydgate's reckoning on moving house is a naïve solution for, by his own calculations, this would save sixty pounds a year, whereas rebuilding his practice back to its initial value would bring in at the very least, a further three hundred pounds a year (Chap 58: 560). In all fairness, Rosamond can hardly be blamed for objecting to his solution when, to her way of thinking, it must surely seem that his remedy requires *her* to bear the brunt of the sacrifices necessary for their financial survival. In his role of sole breadwinner it is understandable that he believes that final decisions ultimately belong to him, but Rosamond's allusion to his stubborn refusal to cultivate paying clients in preference to constantly attending to non-paying clients who run his business into the ground, perhaps deserves more attention than it gets. He seems to want to put Rosamond first but is unable to actually 'hear' much of what she has to say, particularly if it conflicts with his own ideas. Furthermore, he is too proud to approach his family, even for a loan. One might argue that his inordinate pride, ideological notions of perfect womanhood (to be seen but not heard), reckless spending, unwillingness to cultivate 'paying' clients and propensity for alienating his fellow practitioners are as much to blame for their financial difficulties as Rosamond's inability to adjust to their impoverished circumstances, especially since her training to become a society wife has equipped her only for ascending the social ladder and not for rapid descent.

Once again we perceive real emotion in Rosamond. As the tears roll silently down her cheeks we are told that she had never before felt such intense bitterness – especially since she truly believes that Lydgate is entirely to blame for their impoverished circumstances. Still, she is able to respond to Lydgate with studied composure. Her strong choice of words ('like to do' as opposed to 'think of doing') is her way of hitting back at Lydgate for his insensitivity in suggesting that Ned may be interested in taking over their home (her most conspicuous symbol of social rank) especially since Ned was one of the suitors she had previously rejected. As Bakhtin sardonically remarks, "Any sly and ill-disposed polemicist knows very well which dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent, in order to distort their meaning" (DiN 340). Rosamond knows very well that Lydgate does not 'like' to inflict such hardship on her – her deep-seated accusation is really "How can you prefer to hurt me rather than hurt yourself? How is it that you so easily choose the course of action that is best suited to your own nature, at the expense of mine?" But Lydgate fails to see the extent of the anguish prompting her confrontational words and chooses, instead, to take what she says at face value. However, as Morson and Emerson remind us, "every time we speak, we respond to earlier utterances about the topic" (MB 137). As they explain:

The complexities created by the already-spoken-about quality of the word, and by the listener's active understanding, create an *internal dialogism* of the word. Every utterance is dialogized *from within* by these (and some other) factors. Indeed, even a specific word can be dialogized in ways different from those dialogizing the rest of the utterance to which it belongs. In such cases, we sense that the word is somehow cited from another speaker whose tone is felt in it. In this case, not only is there the internal dialogism of the whole utterance but also a "microdialogue" in that word. [MB 138]

Simply stated, even though two utterances may appear congruent, they can never mean the same thing, if only because the listener or reader (to whom the utterance partly belongs) is aware of the repetition and includes this knowledge in his or her new response. Actually the speaker counts on the process of active understanding to such a degree that without it he (or she) could not continue to formulate his utterance (DiN 282). Essentially, it is the listener (who may be either real or imagined) who shapes everything about the utterance from the outset, including word choice, content, syntax and intonation (MB 128). This is why "utterances belong to their speakers (or writers) only in the least interesting, purely physiological sense; but as meaningful communication, they always belong to (at least) two people, the speaker and his or her listener" (MB 128 – 29).

Furthermore, Bakhtin submits that the same word often belongs simultaneously to "two languages, two belief systems" with the result that it frequently has "two contradictory meanings, two accents" (DiN 304). For this reason, people do not and cannot respond in the same way to utterances. Even when they are verbally identical, utterances cannot share everything simply because each utterance "is unique, and each therefore means and is understood to mean something different" (MB 126). Michael Holquist arrives at the conclusion that "all transcription systems – including the speaking voice in a living utterance – are inadequate to the multiplicity of the meanings they seek to convey," and that even though "my voice gives the illusion of unity to what I say, I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of which I am unaware" (TDI xx). Deliberating on the differences between utterances and sentences, Morson and Emerson humorously quip, "Sentences are repeatable. Sentences are repeatable" (MB 126). By contrast, the very nature of each utterance makes it unrepeatable as, even when utterances are verbally identical, they "can never mean the same thing, if only because the reader or listener confronts them twice and reacts differently the second time. Context is never the same. Speaker and listener, writer and reader, also change" (MB 126). This is why Bakhtin is able to say that "one can curl up and comfortably die with the abstract meaning of a sentence but not with its contextual meaning" ("Toward a Mythology for the Human Sciences. SG& 160).

Given, therefore, that the “encrustation of meanings” that has “accrued” to a particular word will inevitably affect the speaker’s intention (Danow 32), the word, ‘like’ assumes ever larger proportions until it becomes the battleground on which Rosamond and Lydgate enact their grievances against each other. Lydgate, too, reverts to type and reacts angrily, ‘thrusting his hands in his pocket’, ‘stalking away’ and looking at Rosamond fiercely. Despite the violence of his response (‘Understand then, that is what *I like to do*’), we are informed that ‘his will was not a whit stronger than hers’ as she leaves the room in silence, determined to ‘hinder what Lydgate liked to do’. Small wonder then that when he goes out he is left with ‘a deposit of dread’ at the thought of similar conversations, feeling as if “a fracture in delicate crystal had begun’ and fearing ‘any movement which might make it fatal’ (620 – 21).

The first *great disappointment* had been borne: the *tender devotedness and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced*, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have *lost their limbs*. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a *hold on his heart*, and it was his *intense desire* that the hold should remain strong. *In marriage, the certainty, ‘She will never love me much,’ is easier to bear than the fear, ‘I shall love her no more.’* Hence, after the outburst, his *inward effort* was entirely to excuse her, and to blame the hard circumstances which were partly his fault. He tried that evening, *by petting her*, to heal the wound he had made in the morning, and it was *not in Rosamond’s nature to be repellent or sulky*; indeed she welcomed the *signs* that her husband loved her *and was under her control*. But this was quite distinct from her loving him. [Chap 64: 621]

If Lydgate accomplished the first step towards responsibility by ‘signing his name’ to their financial problems he now takes a further step in the direction of self-development as he re-evaluates his present relationship with Rosamond and admits that his former wifely ideals of ‘tender devotedness’ and ‘docile adoration’ were unrealistic expectations. Despite his disappointment in her and his perception that her feelings for him have diminished in direct proportion to the downward turn of their fortunes, it occurs to him that far worse than her loss of love for him would be the withdrawal of his own affection towards her. Accordingly, when he returns home that evening, he makes a renewed effort to restore that feeling. As I have already mentioned, Bakhtin would have it that true becoming necessitates “understanding the self as a person who acts and who faces ethical choices involves understanding the self at particular moments and in unrepeatable circumstances” (MB 177). Lydgate’s inward reflections and subsequent acceptance of his lot provide one of these ‘particular moments’. He makes good on his resolve by seizing the moment – the ‘unrepeatable circumstance’ – to pamper Rosamond in an effort to ‘heal the wound’ he had inflicted on her that morning and to put an end to their war of words.

Bakhtin conceives of the ability to assimilate the discourse of another as fundamental to the “ideological becoming” of an individual because the other’s discourse strives to “determine the

very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour” (DiN 342). Trying desperately to assimilate not just Rosamond’s actual words but the discourse that lies beneath them, Lydgate begins to have a more realistic perception of their lives and knows that a different approach is required. Realising that it falls to him to attempt to salvage the remnants of their floundering relationship, he makes a conscious decision to ‘excuse her’ and blame, instead, ‘the hard circumstances that were partly his fault’. Rosamond, who clearly is not ready or able to ‘sign her name’ to any responsibility is, nonetheless, relieved partly because an atmosphere of dissent is abhorrent to her nature, but also because, even if they fail to rekindle her love, Lydgate’s renewed attentions serve to re-establish her ascendancy over him. As Gerald Bullett mentions, in *George Eliot: Her Life and Her Books*, “[Lydgate’s] will was not lacking in masculine forcefulness, but in tactics he was no match for Rosamond; and *her* will, which nothing could break or bend, was the more effective for being hidden under a show of feminine weakness, manifesting itself in tricks, evasions, deceptions and wilful misunderstanding” (223).

Fortified by a new sense of purpose, Rosamond visits both Mrs Plymdale and Mr Trumbull the following morning and covertly subverts Lydgate’s plans for giving up their house, putting her lack of transparency down to Lydgate’s inexcusable intentions and her conviction that she has devised a much better plan (Chap 64: 622 – 23) which she sets in motion the next day. After having extracted from Lydgate the amount necessary for clearing their immediate debts she writes to Sir Godwin for assistance.

Rosamond was *naively convinced* of what an old gentleman ought to do to prevent her from suffering annoyance. *And she wrote what she considered the most judicious letter possible – one which would strike Sir Godwin as a proof of her excellent sense* – pointing out how desirable it was that Tertius should quit such a place as Middlemarch for one more fitted to his talents, how the *unpleasant character of the inhabitants* had hindered his professional success, and how in consequence he was in money difficulties, from which it would require a thousand pounds thoroughly to extricate him. She did not say that Tertius was unaware of her intention to write; for she had the idea that his supposed sanction of the letter would be in accordance with what she did say of his great regard for his uncle Godwin as the relative who had always been his best friend. Such was the force of *poor Rosamond’s tactics* now she applied them to affairs. [Chap 64: 626]

Letter writing is perhaps one of the most obvious examples of an ‘utterance’ being orientated toward an anticipated ‘answer-word’ [DiN 280]. Rosamond certainly expects an answer but, largely owing to the contents of her letter being relayed by means of a hybrid construction rather than in direct speech, narratorial input alerts the reader to the very real possibility that the answer may not go as planned. Behind Rosamond’s ‘voice’ is an awareness of a distinct second voice which, as it were, places within inverted commas ‘the most judicious letter possible’, ‘proof of her excellent taste’, ‘the unpleasant character of the inhabitants’ of Middlemarch and the uncle

‘who had always been [Lydgate’s] best friend’. When taken together with ‘poor Rosamond’s tactics’ and her having been ‘naively convinced’ of Sir Godwin’s gallantry toward her, it becomes evident that Rosamond may have read into Sir Godwin’s prior behaviour towards her a higher regard for her than was intended by him, and that his answer is more likely to exacerbate, rather than alleviate, her problems.

Meanwhile Lydgate, disappointed at having had no positive response from Trumbull, tells Rosamond that he intends to advertise the house in the local papers and she is forced to admit that she has revoked his orders to the agent.

Rosamond knew that the inevitable moment was come. ‘I ordered Trumbull not to inquire further,’ she said, with a *careful calmness* which was *evidently defensive*.

Lydgate stared at her in mute amazement. Only half an hour before he had been fastening up her plaits for her, and talking the *little language of affection*, which Rosamond, *though not returning it*, accepted, *as if she had been a serene and lovely image*, now and then *miraculously dimpling* towards her *votary*.

With such fibres still astir in him, the shock he received could not at once be distinctly anger; it was confused pain. He laid down the knife and fork with which he was carving, and throwing himself back in his chair, said at last, with a cool irony in his tone –

‘May I ask when and why you did so?’

‘When I knew that the Plymdales had taken a house, I called to tell him not to mention ours to them; and at the same time I told him not to let the affair go any further. *I knew it would be very injurious to you if it were known that you wished to part with your house and furniture, and I had a very strong objection to it. I think that was reason enough.*’

‘It was of no consequence then that I had told you imperative reasons of another kind; *of no consequence that I had come to a different conclusion, and given an order accordingly?*’ said Lydgate, *bitingly*, the *thunder and lightning* gathering about his brow and eyes.

The effect of anyone’s anger on Rosamond had always been to make her *shrink in cold dislike, and to become all the more calmly correct, in the conviction that she was not the person to misbehave, whatever others might do.* She replied –

‘I think I have the perfect right to speak on a subject which concerns me at least as much as you.’

‘Clearly – you had a right to speak, but only to me. You had no right to contradict my orders secretly, and treat me as if I were a fool,’ said Lydgate, in the same tone as before. Then with some added scorn, ‘Is it possible to make you understand what the consequences will be? Is it of any use for me to tell you again why we *must* try to part with the house?’

‘It is not necessary for you to tell me again,’ said Rosamond, in a voice that *fell and trickled like cold water-drops*. ‘I remembered what you said. *You spoke just as violently as you do now.* But that does not alter my opinion that you ought to try every other means rather than take a step which is so painful to me. And as to advertising the house, *I think it would be perfectly degrading to you.*’

‘And suppose I disregard your opinion as you disregard mine?’

‘You can do so, of course. *But I think you ought to have told me before we were married that you would place me in the worst position, rather than give up your own will.*’

Lydgate did not speak, but *tossed his head* on one side, and *twitched* the corners of his mouth in *despair*. Rosamond, seeing that he was not looking at her, rose and set his cup of coffee before him; but he took no notice of it, and went on with an *inward drama and argument*, occasionally *moving* in his seat, resting one arm on the table, and *rubbing his hand against his hair*. There was a *conflux of emotions and thoughts in him that would not let him either give thorough way to his anger or persevere with simple rigidity of resolve*. Rosamond took advantage of his silence.

‘*When we were married every one felt that your position was very high. I could not have imagined then that you would want to sell our furniture, and take a house in Bride Street, where the rooms are like cages.* If we are to live in that way let us at least *leave Middlemarch.*’

‘These would be very strong considerations,’ said Lydgate, half ironically – still there was a *withered paleness* about his lips as he looked at his coffee and did not drink – ‘these would be very strong considerations if I did not happen to be in debt.’

'Many persons must have been in debt in the same way, but if they are respectable, people trust them. I am sure I have heard papa say that the Torbits were in debt, and they went on very well. It cannot be good to act rashly,' said Rosamond with *serene wisdom*. [Chap 64: 627 – 28]

Despite his inward acknowledgement that Rosamond is not someone to be easily mastered, Lydgate is repeatedly seduced by the alluring 'dimpling' with which she meets his little shows of affection and taken in by her calm negation of his objections ('I think it would be reason enough' to know that 'it would be very injurious to you, if it were to be known that you wished to part with your house and furniture'). Unable fully to comprehend the depths of her emotional withdrawal from him, he is shocked into silence each time he is forced to confront her underlying tenacity and strength of will. Far from being the recipient of her adulation as he had so desired, when she does respond favourably to him it has the ring of a 'serene' goddess who 'miraculously' bestows the occasional smile upon a devotee. After having digested her cool explanation for her latest 'disobedience', Lydgate relinquishes his attempts at emotional control and acceptance and gives in to 'biting anger'. Bakhtin warns that negation alone cannot produce a meaningful word. As he says, for the word to be "genuinely creative" it "cannot proceed entirely by destruction" (MB 42). Unfortunately for Lydgate his anger is both destructive and self-defeating, serving only to further alienate Rosamond who shrinks from his violent tone 'in cold dislike', consolidating her belief 'that she was not the person to misbehave, whatever others might do' and conducts herself toward him all the more 'calmly correct', and with implacable reasoning.

All the same, she does begin to reveal to him (albeit in an accusatory tone) the intense disappointment that lies at the root of her coldness toward him. One has to feel something for her pain as she finds herself having to relinquish her precious dreams which are as palpable and real to her as Lydgate's idealised view of life had once been to him. Despite her lack of disclosure, Rosamond does have a point in insisting that she has 'the perfect right' to voice her opinions on a subject which concerns her every bit as much as it concerns him. However, as no immediate narratorial intercession is made on her behalf, one must consider the possibility of the narrator's own prejudices against her, especially since the word 'wisdom' (if used on its own) could have afforded Rosamond undeniable merit but, qualified as it is, with the twice-uttered 'serene' the word becomes two-faced and distinctly dialogical. Then too, the ethereal nature of Rosamond's previous watery representation becomes swallowed up by the more pervasive and noxious 'waternixie' connotation (Chap 64: 619) as her voice trickles and falls 'like cold water drops'.

Whenever communication between Rosamond and Lydgate is attempted, it inevitably degenerates into a kind of cold war. This potentially negative aspect of any communication prompted Aaron Fogel to make the point that “communication itself is by nature more coercive and disproportionate than we think when we sentimentalize terms like *dialogue* and *communication*” (“Coerced Speech and the Oedipus Dialogue Complex”. Morson and Emerson. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* 195). For him, all dialogue, including inner dialogue, involves “coercive disproportion” as it allows for one speaker to have a far greater say than another in the struggle for dominance (Danow 133). Coercive measures have as much chance of erupting into violence as they do of yielding the truth in a given situation – a truth that, in any case, can prove to be destructive. David Danow makes the point that while Bakhtin recognised that monologism, insistent upon its own authority, may erupt into violence he did not perhaps fully explore the potential for violence in the aggressive modes of achieving dialogue (134).

In Bakhtin’s defence, I should have thought it obvious that even when dialogue is not actively coercive, it can be safely assumed that not all encounters are successful in revealing the truth in acceptable ways. In fact, the rule of thumb is that quite the opposite is likely to apply, because truth is often elusive and difficult to agree on. As Michael Holquist observes: “dialogism is based on the primacy of the social, and the assumption that all meaning is achieved by struggle” (39). Dialogic truth between people requires hard work, in which one’s own ideas necessarily undergo constant re-evaluation in the face of another’s ‘truth’. For this reason, Bakhtin felt that the advent of ‘real becoming’ could only be properly accomplished ‘in’ and ‘through’ the other in a process of ‘live entering’ into the other and not simply in dialogized opposition to the other, such as in the ‘war of words’ between Rosamond and Lydgate. Bakhtin does, after all, maintain that “agreement is as dialogic as disagreement” (MB 132), and not the other (more obvious) way round. Far more interesting for him was the somewhat less obvious nature of dialogy, a point taken up by Morson and Emerson who maintain that, because of its complexity of shades and gradations, “Bakhtin cautions that it is a crude understanding of dialogue to ‘picture’ it as disagreement” (MB 132). In fact, it quite often happens that it is when people think they are ‘agreeing’ that the potential for misunderstandings to become entrenched is at its greatest.

I mentioned previously that silence can convey various and, at times, conflicting meanings. Although vocalization is often an attempt to finalise meaning, the verbal utterance exhibits similar tendencies towards ‘incompleteness’ by virtue of its natural orientation towards an

‘answer word’. While the ‘unfinalizability’ of the utterance is clearly evident in dialogic disagreement (as is apparent in the above excerpt), Bakhtin maintains that the principle applies equally in dialogic agreement, insisting that, both “dialogue and the potentials for dialogue are endless,” and that “No word can be taken back, but the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken” (EaN 30). This aspect of dialogue is something he views as a positive rather than negative quality in the ongoing search for meaning. As he explains, “through contact with the present [...] every phenomenon, every thing, every object of artistic representation loses its completedness, its hopelessly finished quality and its immutability”. It becomes “attracted to the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making, and is stamped with the seal of inconclusiveness” (EaN 30).

In the above passage, however, it becomes quite clear that the ‘truths’ that emanate from Rosamond serve only to drive a deeper wedge between her and the despairing Lydgate who, now ‘withered’ and pale about the lips, begins to experience an inward argument in which he is at the mercy of a conflicting emotions that create in him a strange sort of inertia and prevent him from choosing between two diametrically opposed responses: to give full vent to his anger or ‘to persevere with simple rigidity of resolve’.

Lydgate sat *paralysed by opposing impulses*: since *no reasoning he could apply to Rosamond seemed likely to conquer her assent*, he wanted to *smash and grind* some object on which he could *at least produce an impression*, or else to tell her *brutally* that *he was master, and she must obey*. But he not only *dreaded* the effect of such extremities on their mutual life – he had a *growing dread* of Rosamond’s *quiet elusive obstinacy, which would not allow any assertion of power to be final*; and again, she had touched him in a spot of *keenest feeling* by implying that she had been *deluded with a false vision of happiness in marrying him*. *As to saying that he was master, it was not the fact*. The very resolution to which he had *wrought* himself by dint of logic and honourable pride was beginning to relax under her *torpedo contact*. [Chap 64: 628 – 29]

The potential for violence, even in inner dialogue, is clearly evident as Lydgate, ‘paralysed’ by his inability to get through to Rosamond, is beset by his desire ‘brutally’ to assert his dominance but also to allay his guilt at having placed her in what he now realises is, for her, an untenable position. Returning to Fogel’s contention that dialogic exchanges involve “coercive disproportion” by allowing one speaker to have a far greater say than the other (“Coerced Speech and the Oedipus Dialogue Complex”. Morson and Emerson. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* 180), it would appear that it is Rosamond who is able to put Lydgate at a disadvantage by having the ‘greater say’. But, as Bakhtin reminds us, although dialogue between characters is the most obvious form of dialogization it is also the most simple, which is why he believes that “novelistic double-voicedness cannot be unfolded into logical contradictions or into purely dramatic contrasts,” and that it is “the distinctiveness of novelistic dialogues, which push



to the limit the mutual nonunderstanding represented by people *who speak in different languages*" (DiN 356 – 57). Innumerable complexities arise when characters are dialogized both by each other *and* by the narrator, in whose power it finally rests to tip the scales in favour of one or other character. So although Rosamond appears to have gained ascendancy over Lydgate, the nature and frequency of his mediated thoughts allow him to impact on our sympathies to a far greater extent than does Rosamond's obstinate certainty that she has been hard done by. As I have already mentioned, Eliot does attempt to correct this imbalance by also revealing some insight into Rosamond's inner world and, on the rare occasions this happens, the effect is that of (temporarily) privileging Rosamond over Lydgate.

Privileging of Rosamond rarely lasts long and, in what Bakhtin might have referred to as stylization in passive double-voiced words (MB 147) we hear "two semantic intentions [. . .] two voices" (PDP 189) when the watery images Lydgate associates with Rosamond become increasingly negative. In David Danow's formulation, whilst the author's utilisation of passive double-voiced words purports to convey the feelings of his or her characters, what they really do is "express in oblique fashion" the author's own intentions (25). One might conclude that the negative narratorial metaphors and similes used to describe Rosamond (as Lydgate reflects on her 'torpedo contact') are meant to insinuate into the reader's consciousness off-putting images of remote, subversive and violent under-water shock-waves. Extending the metaphor even further, a torpedo fish has electric apparatus for numbing or killing its prey – clearly suggestive of the silent but deadly effect Rosamond's negative character has on Lydgate who evidently does not have the faintest idea of how to elicit any favourable response from her, let alone 'master' her. Passive double-voiced stylization continues into the next passage, albeit that the narrator *purports* to give Rosamond's perspective.

She *held it to* be very *odious* in him that he did not think the painful propositions he had to make to her were enough, without showing so unpleasant a temper. And when she put the moderate request that he would defer going to Trumbull again, it was *cruel in him* not to assure her of what he meant to do. *She was convinced of her having acted in every way for the best;* and each *grating or angry* speech of Lydgate's served only as an addition to the *register of offences* in her mind. *Poor* Rosamond for months had begun to *associate her husband with feelings of disappointment*, and the terribly inflexible relation of the marriage had lost its charm of encouraging delightful dreams. It had freed her from the disagreeables of her father's house, but it had not given her everything that she had wished and hoped. The Lydgate with whom she had been in love had been a *group of airy conditions for her, most of which had disappeared*, while their place had been taken by everyday details which must be lived through slowly from hour to hour, not floated through with rapid selection of favourable aspects. The habits of Lydgate's profession, his home preoccupation with scientific subjects, which seemed to her almost like a morbid vampire's taste, his peculiar views of things which *had never entered into the dialogue of courtship* – all these continually-alienating influences, even without the fact of his having placed himself at a disadvantage in the town, and without that first shock of revelation about Dover's debt, would have made *his presence dull to her*. There was another presence which ever since the early days of their marriage, until four months ago, had been an agreeable excitement, but that was gone: Rosamond would

not confess to herself how much the *consequent blank* had to do with her utter *ennui*; and it seemed to her (*perhaps she was right*) that an invitation to Quillingham, and an opening for Lydgate to *settle elsewhere than in Middlemarch* – in London, or somewhere likely to be free from unpleasantness – would satisfy her quite well, and make her indifferent to the absence of Will Ladislaw, towards whom she felt some resentment for his exaltation of Mrs Casaubon. [Chap 64: 629 – 30]

In moving to Rosamond's side of the story, the narrator unashamedly adopts Rosalind's distinctive and idiolectically-charged idiom: just as the word, 'held' smacks of obstinacy, 'odious' has the ring of frosty distaste. Both words are blatantly two-faced and clearly not intended to endear Rosamond to her readers. Had Eliot's intentions been to endorse Rosamond's point of view, one feels that she might have settled on the relative neutrality of something like, 'she felt it was unkind'. Almost as if to remedy the prejudice, Rosamond's very next words, 'she thought it was cruel of him' are somewhat more tempered and manage to convey a sense of Rosamond's hurt. But this is as far as the narrator's sympathies extend towards Rosamond who, like Lydgate, entertains bitter and angry thoughts but, unlike him, perceives herself to be utterly irreproachable.

Consequently Rosamond foists all the blame on Lydgate for the demise of her own 'delightful dreams'. The fact of Lydgate's having been a 'group of airy conditions for her, most of which have disappeared' could apply equally well to Lydgate's situation – the great difference being that, despite having to settle for less, he 'loved her as tenderly as ever, and could make up his mind to her negations' (Chap 58: 558). She, on the other hand, now feels that irrespective of their financial predicament, the 'habits' of his profession, the 'morbid vampire's' preoccupation at home with his research (aspects of him that had never entered into their courtship), now make him 'dull' to her.

As Rosamond's grievances against Lydgate mount up and she reflects on the bitter reality of 'everyday details', we are reminded of her ultimate failure to become a responsible being. Instead, her reported language resonates with "the language of internal *self*-sensation" in which "we imagine ourselves as the heroes of our own fantasies and dreams" (MB 75). Bakhtin alerts us to the fact that these type of "single-consciousness situations" can never result in recreating ourselves as others see us; they cannot "congeal into a whole" (MB 91), simply because a genuine other consciousness is required to draw "convincing boundaries for us, complete us and fill us in" (MB 75). In "Author and Hero," he expresses the view that "the value of my external personality as a whole [...] has a borrowed character; it is constructed by me, but is not experienced by me in an unmediated way" (Art 49). In other words, without an outside consciousness one cannot adequately fill oneself in. As Morson and Emerson put it, our attempts

at being the “unspecified potential other” for ourselves (becoming the hero of our own fantasies), always fail and render us “unfocused, transparent, empty, alone” (MB 75).

Deprived even of the company of Ladislav, about whom she had also begun to spin various fairy tales casting herself as the heroine, Rosamond slips into a general world-weariness and she becomes all the more convinced that nothing will suffice to remedy the situation short of quitting Middlemarch and settling elsewhere. Quite strangely the narrator adds, parenthetically, that ‘perhaps she was right’. One can only assume that this rather odd remark signposts the narrator’s own insecurity about what is right (or possible) for Rosamond and that real growth, or as Bakhtin would have it, ‘real becoming’ is simply not possible for everyone, especially when one’s character is as rigid as Rosamond’s.

Much to Rosamond’s relief, the long-awaited letter from Sir Godwin finally arrives and, believing that there might be a ‘particular note to her enclosed’ in reply to her ‘winning appeal’ (Chap 65: 632), she perks up visibly, barely able to conceal her excitement as Lydgate opens it.

[...] ‘My uncle Godwin!’ he exclaimed, while Rosamond reseated herself, and watched him as he opened the letter. She had expected him to be surprised.

While Lydgate’s eyes glanced rapidly over the brief letter, she saw his face, usually of a pale brown, taking on a *dry whiteness*; with nostrils and lips *quivering* he tossed down the letter before her and said *violently* –

*‘It will be impossible to endure life with you, if you will be always acting secretly – acting in opposition to me and hiding your actions.’*

He checked his speech and turned his back to her – then *wheeled round* and *walked about, sat down,* and *got up again restlessly, grasping hard objects* deep down in his pockets. He was *afraid of saying something irremediably cruel.*

Rosamond too had *changed colour* as she read. The letter ran this way –

‘DEAR TERTIUS, – *Don’t set your wife to write to me* when you have anything to ask. It is a roundabout wheedling sort of a thing which I should not have credited you with. I never choose to write to a woman on matters of business. As to my supplying you with a thousand pounds, or only half that sum, I can do nothing of the sort. *My own family drains me to the last penny.* With two younger sons and three daughters, I am not likely to have cash to spare. *You seem to have got through your own money pretty quickly,* and to have made a mess where you are; the sooner you go somewhere else the better. But I have nothing to do with men of your profession, and can’t help you there. I did the best I could for you as guardian, and let you have your own way in taking to medicine. *You might have gone into the army or the Church. Your money would have held out for that,* and there would have been a surer ladder before you. Your uncle Charles has had a grudge against you for not going into his profession, but not I. I have always wished you well, but *you must consider yourself on your own legs entirely now.* – Your affectionate uncle,

GODWIN LYDATE.’

[Chap 65: 632 – 33]

Some of what Danow refers to as the “aggressive modes of achieving dialogue” (134) clearly visible in this passage in which Lydgate’s ‘quivering lips’, ‘dry whiteness’, restless ‘wheeling around’ and ‘grasping hard objects’ in his pockets are voiceless indicators of the inner violence he experiences. Despite his aggressive outburst and subsequent biting back of his words for fear

of ‘saying something irremediably cruel’, what Lydgate communicates to Rosamond – the impossibility of a shared existence between them if she persists in covertly subverting him – echoes Bakhtin’s (previously stated) view that “truth is born *between people* collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogical interaction” (PDP 110). Reflecting on the nature of Bakhtin’s philosophy, Morson and Emerson submit that he “envisaged all life as an ongoing, unfinalizable dialogue, which takes place at every moment of daily existence” (MB 59).

In Bakhtin’s own formulation

The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. [PDP 293]

The converse of dialogical discourse is evident in Sir Godwin’s reply which, although orientated toward the listener (Lydgate), clearly does not anticipate a returning ‘answer word’. His letter constitutes, in effect, a monologic utterance (insofar as any utterance can be monologic) in which centrifugal impulses to keep the world open to ‘becoming’ are effectively delimited by centripetal forces that strive to unify by countermanding all possibilities for further dialogical response.

In that it actively seeks to foreclose on any further discussion on the matter at hand, the letter may be interpreted as being putatively authoritative, demanding unconditional allegiance to its indisputable authority which “does not permit any other to oppose it or offer any qualification or emendation” (Danow 24). Its purpose is purely denotative, reflecting Sir Godwin’s singular intention (‘don’t set your wife to write to me’, ‘you must consider yourself on your own legs now’) and ideology, or belief system (‘You might have gone into the army or the Church. Your money would have held out for that.’) So far as Sir Godwin is concerned his *is* the final word on the subject. As distinct from inviting or anticipating a qualifying view, it prohibits future dialogue by virtue of its presumptive finalization.

Having said that, Bakhtin does make a distinction between purely authoritative discourse and that which has been through what he calls a process of assimilation and reaccentuation which deprives discourse of its absolute authority. Sir Godwin’s letter expressing his exasperation is one such instance of reaccentuating, assimilation and testing for, although it expects no ‘answer word’, it is clearly written in a forceful way which both explains and defends Sir Godwin’s point

of view. It has the ring of authority but does not quite achieve that status. Firstly, as opposed to its conveying an indisputable ‘truth’, the letter constitutes a more personal opinion. Consequently it allows us “to play with it, integrate it, or merge it with other voices that persuade us” (MB 219). Secondly, as Morson and Emerson remark, “genuine authoritative discourse never sounds strident or defensive. It does not need to for it does not know the test” (MB 221). Contrastively, by dwelling on his own numerous expenses and by accusing Lydgate of getting ‘through [his] own money pretty quickly’ and setting Rosamond to do his dirty work, Sir Godwin’s letter is both defensive and vociferous in its condemnation of Lydgate.

When Rosamond had finished reading the letter she *sat quite still*, with her hands folded before her, *restraining* any show of her keen disappointment, and intrenching herself in *quiet passivity* under her husband’s *wrath*. Lydgate paused in his movement, looked at her again, and said, with *biting* severity –

‘Will this be enough to convince you of the *harm* you may do by *secret meddling*? Have you sense enough to recognise now your *incompetence* to judge and act for me – to *interfere* with your *ignorance* in affairs which it belongs to me to decide on?’

The words were hard; but this was not the first time that Lydgate had been frustrated by her. She did not look at him and *made no reply*.

‘I had nearly resolved on going to Quallingham. It would have cost me pain enough to do it, yet it might have been of some use. But it has been of no use for me to think of anything. You have always been *counteracting me secretly*. You delude me with a false assent, and then *I am at the mercy of your devices*. *If you mean to resist every wish I express, say so and defy me*. I shall at least know what I am doing then.’

It is a terrible moment in young lives when the *closeness of love’s bond has turned to this power of galling*. In spite of Rosamond’s self-control *a tear fell silently* and rolled over her lips. She still *said nothing*; but under that *quietude* was *hidden* an intense effect; she was in such entire disgust with her husband that she wished that she had never seen him. Sir Godwin’s rudeness towards her and utter want of feeling ranged him with Dover and all other creditors – *disagreeable people who only thought of themselves*, and did not mind *how annoying they were to her*.

Even her father was unkind, and might have done more for them. In fact there was but one person in Rosamond’s world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and that was *the graceful creature* with blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, *who had never expressed herself unbecomingly*, and had *always acted for the best – the best naturally being what she best liked*. [Chap 65: 633 – 34]

Many things happen in this scene to make it a climactic one. Sir Godwin’s reply is equally shocking to both – to Rosamond who has long been anticipating an entirely different answer, and to Lydgate who is forced to digest the contents of an unexpected missive. Lydgate’s obvious agitation and open wrath are contrasted with Rosamond’s passive restraint as their problems come to a head when her idealized view of Sir Godwin is shattered. Lydgate’s livid and disillusioned accusations of Rosamond’s ‘secret meddling’, interfering ignorance, ‘incompetence’ and ‘secret’ defiance of his wishes are met with silence and an unchecked tear as her illusions and fantasies are given a death’s blow by Sir Godwin’s resistance to her charms; for the first time she has had to suffer shocking, unimaginable indignity and Sir Godwin is added to her growing list of ‘disagreeable people’.

‘Disagreeable people who thought only of themselves, and who did not mind how annoying they were to her’ is an example of hybridisation in which the narrator’s voice can be discerned behind Rosamond’s silent thoughts, effectively turning them in upon themselves to reflect Rosamond’s defects. These defects are more forcefully dialogized in the next paragraph, as the ‘graceful creature’ who ‘never expressed herself unbecomingly’ and ‘always acted for the best – the best being naturally what she liked’ blames everybody but herself for her misfortunes. Quite obviously this kind of attitude precludes growth of character or, in Bakhtin’s philosophy, genuine ‘becoming’, in which the creation of an integral self is an ethical responsibility which demands that we “create integrity so as to *take* responsibility” (MB 31). Failure to do so, we may recall, results in living the life of a pretender, or one who lives representationally and ritualistically instead of from the ethical obligations of every situation at every given moment. Dishonesty, therefore “may result not from a motive but from a failure to undertake the project of responsibility” (MB 31).

Convinced he is ‘at the mercy of [her] devices’, Lydgate implores Rosamond, ‘If you mean to resist every wish I express, say so and defy me.’ The message is clear: their young love has reached a turning point – she is as much disgusted with him as he is galled by her secretive silence. Unless Rosamond is able to act responsibly by at least trying to communicate her feelings and intentions to Lydgate, and unless Lydgate is actually able to consider the validity of some of her views, particularly those regarding his lackadaisical attitude to the business side of his practice, there seems to be no hope of their ever becoming united.

Lydgate pausing and looking at her again began to feel that half-maddening sense of *helplessness* which comes over *passionate* people when their passion is met by an *innocent-looking silence* whose *meeek victimised air* seems to put them in the wrong, and at last infects even the justest indignation with a doubt of its justice. He needed to recover the full sense that he was in the right by *moderating his words*.

‘Can you not see, *Rosamond*,’ he began again, trying to be simply grave and not bitter, ‘that *nothing can be so fatal as a want of openness and confidence between us*? It has happened again and again that I have expressed a decided wish, and you have seemed to assent, yet after that you have secretly disobeyed my wish. In that way *I can never know what I have to trust to. There would be some hope for us if you would admit this*. Am I such an unreasonable, furious brute? Why should you not be open with me?’

*Still silence.*

[Chap 65: 634 – 35]

Rosamond’s protracted silence here takes on an ‘innocent-looking’ quality and becomes a source of great confusion to the passionate Lydgate who cannot guess what, specifically, within a number of possible meanings, it is meant to convey. Her ‘innocent-looking silence’ and ‘meeek victimised’ attitude only add to a sense of helplessness, leaving him feeling wrong-footed and compelled to question his method of approach to her. In an attempt to prise from her a concrete

response he makes a concerted effort to overcome his bitterness by carefully ‘moderating his words’.

Interestingly, he dispenses with his customary and affectionate ‘Rosy’, opting instead for the more formal ‘Rosamond’, when he addresses her. “Utterances,” write Morson and Emerson, “may be as short as a grunt or as long as *War and Peace*” (MB 125) and I would argue that Lydgate uses a single word, ‘Rosamond’, to convey the message that his gentle tone is not to be mistaken for capitulation when he goes on to plead the case for ‘openness’ and ‘confidence’ between them. As David Danow remarks, “The choice of one’s language to express a point of view is indeed as distinctive as a set of fingerprints or signature. One’s distinctive use of language is thus a critical sign of oneself” (60).

The ‘sign of himself’ that Lydgate presents to Rosamond is by turns wrathful, confused, bitter and contrite in response to Rosamond’s own ‘signature’ silence which conveys everything and nothing to him. But he knows – and Bakhtin himself could hardly have stated this better – ‘that nothing can be so fatal as a want of openness and confidence between [people]. ‘Being’ is not “just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*” (Holquist 25). Lydgate, who seems to grasp the importance of ‘co-being’, tries hard to persuade Rosamond to break her silence and engage in heartfelt conversation with him – even if it is only to reproach him for being ‘an unreasonable and furious brute’ – so that there may yet be some hope for them to sort out their differences. But still no ‘living conversation’ is forthcoming from Rosamond, whose only response is ‘still silence’.

‘Will you only say that you have been mistaken, and that I may depend on your not acting secretly in future?’ said Lydgate, *urgently*, but with something of *request in his tone* which Rosamond was *quick to perceive*. She spoke with *coolness*.

*‘I cannot possibly make admissions or promises in answer to such words as you have used towards me. I have not been accustomed to language of that kind. You have spoken of my ‘secret meddling’ and my ‘interfering ignorance’ and my ‘false assent’. I have never expressed myself in that way to you, and I think that you ought to apologise. You spoke of its being impossible to live with me. Certainly you have not made my life pleasant to me of late. I think it was to be expected that I should try to avert some of the hardships which our marriage has brought on me.’ Another tear fell as Rosamond ceased speaking, and she pressed it away as quietly as the first.* [Chap 65: 635]

When Lydgate urges Rosamond to be open with him in the future, unhappily his request does not have the desired effect. Sensing weakness in his softened tone, Rosamond changes tack and uses this to her advantage. Instead of gaining her compliance, her long-awaited response effectively quashes Lydgate’s pleas and dwells, instead, on her outrage at the type of language he *initially* used, after discovering that she had, once again secretly meddled in what he considers to be *his*

affairs. She maintains that she would never use similarly harsh language when addressing him. Whilst accrediting some truth to her allegation we recognise her use of language (her signature) is always carefully constructed from within the approved idiolect of Mrs Lemon's finishing school and the socially-driven norms to which she aspires. In effect, far from communicating a sense of herself, the 'language' in which she talks to him consists of nothing more than a chorus of others in which all sense of self is obliterated.

In his essay, "Freedom of Interpretation," Wayne Booth elaborates on Bakhtin's take on the diverse factors involved in the creation of selfhood:

What I call my "self" is essentially social. Each of us is constituted not as an individual, private atomic self but as a collective of the many selves we have taken in since birth. We encounter these selves as what he calls "languages," the voices spoken by others. Languages are of course made not only of words; they are whole systems of meaning, each language constituting an interrelated set of beliefs or norms. "Language" is often thus for him roughly synonymous with "ideology". Each person is constituted as a hierarchy of languages, each language being a kind of ideology-brought-into-speech. [Morson 151]

Rosamond's 'ideology-brought-into-speech' is clearly distinct from Lydgate's worldview. Reflecting the rigidity of the code by which she lives, her 'language' cannot accommodate the fundamental 'otherness' of Lydgate's language and instinctively recoils from Lydgate's spontaneous and violent outbursts. As Morson and Emerson point out, cultures and individuals accumulate habits and procedures which Bakhtin calls 'sclerotic deposits' of earlier activity. These habits are codified by the centripetal forces of culture which turn them into a fixed set of rules (a code) thereby restricting change. But, they argue, discourse is always 'evaluatively charged' and 'context specific'. For Bakhtin, therefore, "there is a crucial difference between 'context' and 'code'" (MB 58). In "From Notes Made in 1970 – 71" Bakhtin delineates the difference thus: "A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context" (147).

The code by which Rosamond lives is one such example of context-killing activity. Because she has so completely bought into, so to speak, its ideology she, like it, becomes closed to other possibilities. Thus without owning a shred of responsibility for her part in the drama, in breaking her silence Rosamond instinctively reverts to her 'code'; she sidesteps all meaningful discussion (the context), and demands, instead, an apology from Lydgate for his inappropriate use of language, especially since her actions were as a result of trying to avert some of the hardships she has had to endure as a result of her marriage. The combined effect of her speech and unchecked



tears leave Lydgate ‘feeling checkmated’ and ‘held as with pincers’ by the need to accommodate himself to her nature, which is ‘inflexible in proportion to its negations’ (Chap 65: 636).

‘Rosamond,’ he said, turning his eyes on her with a melancholy look, ‘*you should allow* for a man’s words when he is disappointed and provoked. *You and I cannot have opposite interests. I cannot part my happiness from yours. If I am angry with you, it is that you seem not to see how any concealment divides us.* How could I wish to make anything hard to you either by my own words or conduct? *When I hurt you, I hurt part of my own life. I should never be angry with you if you would be quite open with me.*’

‘I have only wished to prevent you from hurrying us into wretchedness without any necessity,’ said Rosamond, the *tears coming again from a softened feeling now that her husband had softened.* ‘*It is so very hard to be disgraced here among all the people we know,* and to live in such a miserable way. *I wish I had died with the baby.*’

*She spoke and wept with that gentleness which makes such words and tears omnipotent over a loving-hearted man.* Lydgate drew his chair near hers and pressed her *delicate* head against his cheek with his *powerful tender hand.* *He only caressed her; he did not say anything; for what was there to say?* He could not promise to shield her from the dreaded wretchedness, for he could see no sure means of doing so. When he left her to go out again, he told himself that it was *ten times harder for her than for him:* he had a life away from home, and constant appeals to his *activity on behalf of others.* He *wished to excuse everything in her if he could* – but it was *inevitable that in that excusing mood he should think of her as if she were an animal or another and feebler species.* *Nevertheless she had mastered him.*

[Chap 65: 636]

This scene constitutes by far the most poignant communication between Lydgate and Rosamond: one in which Lydgate makes a determined effort to accommodate himself to Rosamond’s nature by talking to her directly from the heart and in a ‘language’ he feels she will not object to. His renewed efforts bring to mind Bakhtin’s ethical and moral imperative that “one [should] come to feel at home in the world of other people” (AH 98) because the sense of self is inextricably involved with and complicated by images provided by others. A lack of understanding of the role played by others in shaping one’s own selfhood inevitably results in profound confusion (MB 191). This ‘confusion’ becomes evident to Lydgate who begins to realise the extent of the damage caused not only to their relationship but also to each individual if they do not open themselves to the other in ways in which they can both understand. What he tries to impart to Rosamond can be located in Bakhtinian terminology, as the “nonself-sufficiency” of the self and “the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness”. As Bakhtin explains, “the most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). Separation, disassociation and enclosure within the self [is] the main reason for the loss of one’s self” (PDP 287).

Lydgate’s efforts pay dividends of a sort, if only to draw forth from Rosamond a direct and ‘felt’ (not codified) response in which she, for the first time, begins to reveal to him the extent of her misery. When Rosamond begins to open her heart to Lydgate his view of her is affected and this, in turn, mediates our view of her. This continual reaccentuation takes us back to the delicate and

important task of establishing character zones which is an ongoing exercise throughout the novel.

As Morson and Emerson contend:

Because so much of the discourse and inner speech of the characters is presented as the author continually reaccents, in hybridized forms of “quasi-direct discourse,” “prepared-for discourse,” and other kinds of double-voicing, characters who infect the author’s speech may come to infect our sense of other characters’ speech as well. [MB 329]

The minute alterations and shifting opinions involved in the continual authorial reaccentuation of both Lydgate and Rosamond, together with their inner and outer discourses about each other, ‘infects’ both the author’s voice and the readers’ perceptions as they too, become engaged in continual reassessment of characters and situations. The complexity of the novelist’s task is explained by Morson and Emerson thus:

Properly visualised by the author, zones make it possible to show *from within* how a character thinks and feels from moment to moment. Even if the author ultimately condemns the character, the reader may be infected with a special sort of novelistic sympathy that comes from having lived with and dialogically shared the character’s perspective. Questions about the author’s ultimate view of a character are therefore likely to be particularly intricate in such cases. [MB 334 – emphasis added]

It is testament to Eliot’s psychological and philosophical insight into human nature which, as we recall, she found to be lacking in Dickens, that we are shown a new, intensely vulnerable side to Rosamond – one that, despite her glaring and exasperating limitations and self-absorption, lays claim to our sympathies. Notwithstanding obvious narratorial ambivalence towards Rosamond (which tends rather towards the negative view), because our view of her is also filtered through Lydgate’s genuine love for her, we find ourselves silently urging her to meet him in dialogical response. Even though she still sees everything in social terms – feeling the disgrace ‘among all the people we know’ – when eventually she softens (if only by virtue of unchecked tears and gentle helplessness) we experience a corresponding softening towards her.

However, the narrator does not allow us to dwell for any length of time on Rosamond’s unmediated, inner anguish. In ‘She spoke and wept with that gentleness which makes such words and tears omnipotent over a loving-hearted man’ we discern two distinctly oppositional orientations as Rosamond’s tearful response (that she had only wished to prevent them from ‘hurrying into wretchedness’), is curdled by acerbic narratorial hybridisation, the purpose of which is to draw the focus away from Rosamond’s actual feelings and redirect it towards the position of power over Lydgate her tears are likely to yield. Consequently, Rosamond’s response becomes a passive tool in the hands of the author, who “installs [her] own interpretation in it, forcing it to serve [her] own new purposes (PDP 197).

Eliot then seamlessly steers the reader towards Lydgate, whose wordless response and silent communication (as distinct from Rosamond's enigmatic silences) bespeak infinite tenderness. By lingering on *his* consideration for *her* needs the narrator covertly throws Rosamond's contrasting self-absorption into sharp relief against Lydgate's loving concern. Accordingly, our perception of the lopsidedness of their relationship increases when Lydgate tries to 'excuse everything in her that he could', believing that it was 'ten times harder for her than for him'. Having said that, that he *inevitably* thinks of her as 'an animal' or 'another feeble species', is a forceful hybridisation in which the narrator gestures towards Lydgate's objectifying Rosamond in what sounds suspiciously like a proto-feminist narratorial voice, in which she suddenly, and rather surprisingly, has a crack at Lydgate. Equally, the objectification can also be taken as a sardonic comment on Lydgate's growing attitude towards Rosamond – one that Bakhtin might have referred to as, "sentimental-humanistic dematerialization" (PDP 297) which is evoked by pity or lower forms of love, such as is given to children or the weak and small. Whilst "sentimental-humanistic dematerialization" does not relegate a person to being simply an object, that person does not become a complete personality and, as such "remains an object lying in the zone of *another*, experienced in the pure form of *another*, distanced from the zone of *I*" (PDP 297). Despite Rosamond's diminished status the narrator mordantly concludes that she had, nevertheless, 'mastered him'.

As a result of having failed so consummately in both his marriage and his profession, Lydgate subsequently becomes caught in the throes of depression. He tries (ineffectually) to escape with opium (Chap 66: 637) and gambling (Chap 66: 638) and even begins to "familiarise his imagination with another step even more unlike his remembered self" – that of succumbing to Rosamond's request to quit Middlemarch (Chap 67: 648), before finally conquering his pride and applying to Bulstrode for a loan which is politely but firmly refused (Chap 67: 652). As Karen Chase remarks in *Middlemarch in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, "Lydgate's tragedy is to observe the growing distance between his actions and intentions" (6). When his last remaining chance to make a tolerable life with Rosamond evaporates, his dejection turns into bitterness.

His misery is compounded when he returns home to find that a man had already been put in the house to take stock of his possessions and that Rosamond has retreated to her bedroom (Chap 69: 668).

He went up and found her stretched on the bed pale and silent, *without an answer even in her face* to any word or look of his. He sat down by the bed and leaning over her said with *almost a cry of prayer* – ‘*Forgive me for this misery, my poor Rosamond! Let us only love one another.*’

She looked at him *silently*, still with the *blank despair* on her face; but the *tears* began to fill her blue eyes, and her lip *trembled*. The *strong* man had had too much to bear that day. *He let his head fall beside hers and sobbed.*

He did not hinder her from going to her father early in the morning – *it seemed now that he ought not to hinder her from doing as she pleased*. In half an hour she came back, and said that papa and mamma wished her to go and stay with them while things were in this miserable state. Papa said he could do nothing about the debt – if he paid this, there would be half-a-dozen more. She had better come back home again till Lydgate had got a comfortable home for her. ‘Do you object, Tertius?’

‘Do as you like,’ said Lydgate. ‘But things are not coming to a crisis immediately. There is no hurry.’

‘I should not go till tomorrow,’ said Rosamond; ‘I shall want to pack my clothes.’

‘Oh, I would wait a little longer than to-morrow – there is no knowing what may happen,’ said Lydgate with bitter irony. ‘*I may get my neck broken, and that may make things easier for you.*’

*It was Lydgate’s misfortune and Rosamond’s too, that his tenderness towards her, which was both an emotional prompting and a well-considered resolve, was inevitably interrupted by these outbursts of indignation either ironical or remonstrant.* She thought them totally unwarranted, and the repulsion which this exceptional severity excited in her was in danger of making the more persistent tenderness unacceptable.

‘I see you do not wish me to go,’ she said with, with *chill mildness*; ‘*why can you not say so, without that kind of violence?*’ I shall stay until you request me to do otherwise.’

*Lydgate said no more*, but went out on his rounds. *He felt bruised and shattered*, and there was a dark line under his eyes which Rosamond had not seen before. *She could not bear to look at him. Tertius had a way of taking things which made them a great deal worse for her.* [Chap 69: 669]

In contrast to the manifold implications contained in her previous silences, Rosamond’s silence here is strangely monologic in nature, ‘speaking’ only of her inner state of ‘blank despair’. Lydgate, as we know, is acutely sensitive to her pain, for which he blames himself, and for which he begs for her forgiveness, or ‘signs’ his own name. However, Rosamond’s silent and tearful suffering is too much for him to bear and he, too, breaks down and sobs.

Despite Rosamond’s tears having once been the catalyst for bringing her and Lydgate together, by abruptly changing the subject to the acrimony of the next morning, the narrator signals that *his* tears appear to have had no similar effect on her. One might say that Rosamond’s very nature predisposes her to a monologic voice which, says Bakhtin, “at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights” and by means of which “another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness”. Pondering the peculiar characteristics of the monologic voice, he muses:

No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge it in any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. [PDP 292 – 93]

Whilst Lydgate’s constant self-examination and reaccentuation of himself through Rosamond’s eyes result in genuine attempts at amended behavioural patterns and signal real potential for

growth, Rosamond exhibits precisely this type of deafness to “the other’s response” and it becomes increasingly clear that she does not appear to have the inner resources for real growth which requires being “for another, and through another for oneself” (PDP 287). By sacrificing potential to pretentiousness, Rosamond inevitably experiences a loss of selfhood.

Bakhtin writes that a true self is “yet-to-be [and] what constitutes my inner self-confidence, strengthens my back, lifts up my head, directs my gaze forward [is the knowledge that] the real center of gravity of my self-definition lies in the future” (AH 111). Creating an integral self thus becomes both an ethical responsibility and the work of a lifetime which cannot ever be completed. It is within this sentiment that Morson and Emerson observe that “we perceive the connection between Bakhtin’s prosaics and his ethics, which demands that we create integrity so as to *take* responsibility” (MB 31). As we may recall, in Bakhtin’s eyes, failure to take responsibility results in our living the representational and ritualistic life of a pretender. Growth is a slow and arduous process requiring the help of an ‘outside other’ and the attainment of wholeness, therefore, “is always a matter of work: it is not a gift but a project” (MB 30).

Bakhtin also advances the idea that every discourse “presupposes a special conception of the listener, of his apperceptive background and the degree of his responsiveness” (DiN 346), and Lydgate, mindful of Rosamond’s tears of the previous evening, is determined to maintain his composure when she returns from her parents’ house the next morning. Unfortunately, despite beginning well, the turn his conversation takes is anything but sensitive and we are reminded of Bakhtin’s contention that, whilst our own discourse is “dynamically stimulated by another [it] will sooner or later begin to liberate [itself] from the authority of the other’s discourse” (DiN 346). Disillusioned by Rosamond’s negative response to his suggestion that she delay her departure, Lydgate becomes briefly liberated from Rosamond’s authoritative discourse, retorting that it would doubtless make things easier for her if he were to get his ‘neck broken’. Bakhtin suggests that although “[a] conversation with an internally persuasive word that one has begun to resist may continue, [. . .] it takes on another character: it is questioned, it is put in a new situation in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for the boundaries” (DiN 348). However, as the narrator wryly comments, ‘It was Lydgate’s misfortune and Rosamond’s too, that his tenderness towards her, which was both an emotional prompting and a well-considered resolve, was inevitably interrupted by these outbursts of indignation, either ironical or remonstrant’.

The extra edge provided by the marginal narratorial commentary that runs almost continuously through *Middlemarch* provides both a “complexity of viewpoint” as well as a “clarity concerning differences between one point of view and another” that Ermarth finds one of the great and fascinating achievements of George Eliot. As she observes, “George Eliot has few equals – perhaps no equals – when it comes to presenting this complex of awareness [in which] the narrative slide from one view to another engages readers in a kind of suspense that has little to do with plot”. Instead, it continually reminds us that “while nothing is final, there may be a point of rest in the middle distance” (“Negotiating *Middlemarch*”. Chase 111 – 12). Unfortunately, the chance of “rest in the middle distance” seems to recede ever further into an uncertain future for Rosamond and Lydgate when their latest conflict leaves Lydgate feeling ‘bruised and shattered’ and Rosamond feeling convinced that Lydgate’s way of taking things ‘made them a great deal worse for her’.

Earlier, I embarked on some discussion of the ‘hidden polemic’ employed by the narrator who, in anticipation of a hostile answer, strikes a ‘polemical blow’ at the other’s discourse (PDP 195), and here, I should like to add that Bakhtin makes the point that “internally polemical discourse” is not restricted to literary discourse but is also widespread in ordinary, everyday speech – in “barbed words” that “make digs at others”. Whereas “the overt polemic is quite simply directed at another’s discourse, which it refutes [. . .] the hidden polemic is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, and only indirectly striking a blow at the other’s discourse, clashing with it, as it were, within the object itself”. Another’s thought “does not personally make its way inside the discourse, but is only reflected in it, determining its tone and meaning” (PDP 196). Lydgate’s insinuation that Rosamond’s problems would be easily resolved if he were to break his neck is one such double-voiced “dig” at Rosamond in which he ‘strikes a blow’ at, and clashes with, her preferred mode of discourse. Whatever response Lydgate may have been hoping to achieve is not forthcoming from Rosamond who digests his words with distaste and directs her response (‘with chill mildness’) not towards his ‘death’ as such, but towards his unpleasant way of expressing himself, suggesting that he should say what he really means in simple terms and without violence. As Bakhtin puts it, “an element of response and anticipation penetrates deeply inside dialogic discourse” adding that “such a discourse draws in, as it were, sucks into itself the other’s replies” (PDP 197).

The couple’s situation is worsened when Bulstrode summons Lydgate to treat Raffles. Nervous that Lydgate may know or suspect that he is being blackmailed by Raffles, Bulstrode has a sudden change of heart and offers Lydgate a loan of a thousand pounds (Chap 70: 681).

Lydgate's orders are not properly carried out and Raffles dies. Bulstrode is suspected of foul play when his secret is exposed, and Lydgate is implicated in the ensuing scandal by having accepted Bulstrode's loan.

*He felt himself becoming violent and unreasonable* as if raging under the pain of stings: he was ready to curse the day on which he had come to Middlemarch. Everything that had happened to him there seemed a mere preparation for this hateful fatality, which had come as a blight on his honourable ambition, and must make even people who had only vulgar standards regard his reputation as irrevocably damaged. *In such moments a man can hardly escape being unloving. Lydgate thought of himself as the sufferer, and of others as the agents who had injured his lot.* He had meant everything to turn out differently; and *others had thrust themselves into his life and thwarted his purposes.* His marriage seemed an *unmitigated calamity*; and he was *afraid* of going to Rosamond before he had vented himself in this solitary rage, lest the *mere sight of her should exasperate him and make him behave unwarrantably.* There are episodes in most men's lives in which their *highest qualities* can only cast a deterring shadow over the objects that fill their inward vision: *Lydgate's tender-heartedness was present just then only as a dread lest he should offend against it, not as an emotion that swayed him to tenderness.* For he was very miserable. *Only those who know the supremacy of the intellectual life – the life which has a seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it* – can understand the grief of one who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances.

[Chap 73: 701]

Lydgate comes perilously close to falling into the same trap to which Rosamond succumbs, by abnegating responsibility, blaming outside circumstances for his misfortune, and thinking of himself as 'the sufferer' at the mercy of 'others' who had 'injured his lot'. But the narrator interposes, excusing his 'unloving thoughts' and 'infecting' our own views by deflecting criticism away from his being 'unloving'. However, as Ermarth argues, "Rosamond Vincy is, after all, the flower of Mrs Lemon's school, and Lydgate chooses her for that reason; it is no good then complaining of narcissistic performances that are put on in the first place at the request of the community and with their entire approval. Where was Rosamond to learn otherwise? ("Negotiating *Middlemarch*". Chase 118).

Bakhtin would have it that, in order to complete oneself, one "must take up a position outside of [oneself] – become another in relation to [oneself]" by looking at oneself "through the eyes of another" (AH 15). This sentiment is true of Lydgate who, despite his diminished tenderness toward Rosamond, is able to dialogise internally both his and Rosamond's anticipated reactions their disputes. To his credit, he resolves to avoid ongoing confrontation and its inevitable negative effects. More than anything, he is aware of the danger of becoming hardened if he sacrifices his natural 'tender-heartedness' and succumbs to the base thoughts that assail him.

The narrator once again intercedes on Lydgate's behalf and to the detriment of Rosamond who, by implication, is not one of those whose life has a 'seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it', and consequently, cannot be counted among the number of those who are able to have

a *genuine* outside view of herself. Of course, in one sense, Rosamond does constantly see herself from the standpoint of others (as the object of their admiration) but the implication is that this view serves only to constitute a narcissistic reinforcement of her *own* view of herself rather than a genuine ‘outside’ view. Moreover, the implication is that, because no real intellectual capacity exists in her, she is utterly incapable of appreciating and understanding Lydgate’s grief arising from the demise of his medical goals and career.

As Lydgate inwardly plays back the events which have placed him in an untenable position, he begins to evaluate his future options.

How was he to live on without vindicating himself among people who suspected him of baseness? How could he go silently away from Middlemarch as if he were retreating before a just condemnation? And yet how was he to set about vindicating himself?

As it was, he had rested in the consideration that disobedience to his orders, however it might have arisen, could not be considered a crime, that in the dominant opinion obedience to his orders was just as likely to be fatal, and that *the affair was simply one of etiquette*. Whereas, again and again, in his time of *freedom*, he had denounced the perversion of pathological doubt into moral doubt and had said – ‘the purest experiment in treatment may still be conscientious: my business is to take care of life, and to do the best I can think of for it. *Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma. Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breath of science is a contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive.*’ Alas! The scientific conscience had got into the debasing company of money obligation and selfish respects.

‘Is there a medical man of them all in Middlemarch who would question himself as I do?’ said *poor* Lydgate, with a renewed outburst of *rebellion against the oppression of his lot*. ‘*And yet they will all feel warranted in making a wide space between me and them, as if I were a leper!* My practice and my reputation are utterly damned – I can see that. Even if I could be cleared by valid evidence, it would make little difference to the blessed world out there. I have been set down as tainted and should be cheapened to them all the same.’ [. . .]

No wonder that in Lydgate’s *energetic* nature the sense of a hopeless misconstruction easily turned into *dogged resistance*. The scowl which occasionally showed itself on his square brow was not a meaningless accident. Already when he was re-entering the town after that ride taken in the first hours of stinging pain, he was setting his mind on remaining in Middlemarch in spite of the worst that could be done against him. He would not retreat before calumny, as if he had submitted to it. He would face it to the utmost and no act of his should show that he was afraid. It belonged to the generosity as well as defiant force of his nature that *he resolved not to shrink* from showing to the full his sense of obligation to Bulstrode [. . .] *he would not turn away from this crushed fellow-mortal* whose aid he had used, and make a pitiful effort to get acquittal for himself by howling against another. “I shall do as I think right, and explain to nobody. They will try to starve me out but –” he was going on with an obstinate *resolve* but he was getting nearer home, and *the thought of Rosamond* urged itself again into that chief place from which it had been thrust by the agonised struggles of wounded honour and pride.

*How would Rosamond take it all?* Here was another weight of chain to drag, and poor Lydgate was in a bad mood for bearing her *dumb mastery*. *He had no impulse to tell her* the trouble which must soon be common to them both. He preferred waiting for the incidental disclosure which events must soon bring about. [Chap 73: 702 – 04]

The passage begins with quasi-direct discourse – a form of discourse believed by Bakhtin to be one of the most widespread forms of transmitting inner speech in the novel. For Bakhtin, quasi-direct discourse is “transmitted in a way regulated by the author” so as to permit “another’s voice to merge, in an organic and structured way, with a context belonging to the author” (DiN 319). At the same time, it preserves the flexibility of the character’s inner speech – its “inability to



exhaust itself in words” – an accomplishment, he says, that would be not possible within the “dry and logical form of direct discourse (DiN 319). Although the syntactical markers (the absence of quotation marks) imply that the questions posed belong to authorial speech, it is clear that they also belong to the Lydgate in an emotional sense.

Whilst arriving at the private admission that although his pride is hurt by Rosamond’s lack of wifely ‘etiquette’, Lydgate is also beginning to realise that the result would still have been the same had she obeyed him. What he does not seem to realise is that a great many of his problems must surely lie with his arrogance and pride. Because he has neither taken the time nor made the effort to try to identify with or befriend his fellow practitioners, they are naturally suspicious (and perhaps jealous) of him. Bakhtin cautions that one should consider “the enormous psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us” (DiN 338) and it is true to say that Lydgate has consistently failed to do just this. Instead, his professional arrogance, insensitive approach to medical reforms, and criticism of the way in which other practitioners conduct their business is indicative of a consummate disregard for their opinion of him. So yes, viewed in broader terms, the affair probably is ‘a matter of etiquette’ – one of denied entry into a professional circle that is traditionally supportive, rather than suspicious, of one of its members. Iain Bamforth points out, in *The Body of the Library*, that being a new kind of doctor “who was trained in Paris and uses a stethoscope,” Lydgate was bound to arouse unease among physicians and apothecaries alike, and their resentment can be seen as “a kind of backhanded testimony to the fact that he represents change.” Unfortunately, he is “finally outdone by the massive forces of conservatism [in the] provincial life [of] Victorian England” (27). A similar case can be made with regard to the conservatism of the general public. However, the fact remains that, had Lydgate been able to identify more readily with people, it is highly unlikely that either his reputation or his practice would have been ‘utterly damned’.

Despite his previous shortcomings, Lydgate’s potential for personal growth becomes evident when he tries to see himself from the perspective of those he had once dismissed as being irrelevant. This characteristic prompts him to question the integrity of his actions, a course of action Bakhtin considers essential for the formulation of a genuine and ethically responsible self. As he observes in *Art and Answerability*:

To be sure, in life, too we do this all the time: we evaluate ourselves from the standpoint of others, and through others we try to understand and take into account what is transgredient to our own consciousness. Thus, we take into account the value of our outward appearance from the standpoint of the possible impression it may produce upon the other, although for ourselves this value does not exist in any immediate way (for our actual and pure self-consciousness). [. . .] In short, we are constantly and intently

on the watch for reflections of our own life on the plane of other people's consciousness, and, moreover, not just reflections of particular moments of our life, but even reflections of the whole of it. And while seeking to catch these reflections, we also take into account that perfectly distinctive value-coefficient with which our life presents itself to the other – a co-efficient which is completely different from the co-efficient with which we experience our own life in ourselves. [15]

As Lydgate becomes increasingly aware of the discrepancy between his own, and others' reflections on, not only 'particular moments' but also on 'the whole' of his life, he becomes more and more despondent. However, as the narrator stresses, Lydgate is still very much a man "in the making" with "both virtues and faults capable of shrinking and expanding" (15: 145). In the build-up to this passage, there are numerous references to the shrinking of his 'massive frame' which seems to shrivel in direct proportion to his shrinking resolve each time he anticipates Rosamond's negative responses to his self-revelations. But there are signs, too, that reflect his inner strength of character as he resolves not to 'shrink' or 'turn away' from his 'crushed fellow-mortal', Bulstrode.

Lydgate's decision to support Bulstrode, regardless of the cost to himself, reinforces his stated philosophy: 'to take care of life, and to do the best I can think of for it'. This kind of ethical decision-making would have found favour with Bakhtin who believed that all "systematic ethics, and all attempts to dissolve personal responsibility into a general political system, deny the value of one's own particular moral obligation" (MB 182). In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* he explores the relation between acting for the good of the human being and merely acting for the abstract good (moral/social or political principles). Consequently, he asks us to consider "the destruction and fully justified shaming of a person" I love. Whereas from the standpoint of "norms, rules and abstract 'content'" the punishment is justifiable, the agony one experiences is, and should be, different from the feelings one would have for a stranger in a similar situation (62). Whilst caring for strangers is a laudable activity, he believes that reacting to friends in the same way as one might react to strangers is irresponsible and immoral because, as I mentioned in my discussion Fanny and Amy in *Little Dorrit* (Book II, Chap 14: 648 – 49), "you love a person not because he is good, but, rather, a human being is good because you love him (TPA 62) or, in Morson and Emerson's translation, "the highest value is a human being, and the subordinated value is 'the good,' and not the other way around" (MB 182).

Lydgate's subsequent reflection on the conflicting nature of dogma, which seems to imply the existence of absolute truth by allowing for a margin of error (giving 'a charter to mistake'), and science, which opposes that mistake but, in so doing, also presumes a possible 'truth', is contiguous to the Bakhtinian notion that 'dogma' corresponds with the authoritative word,

monologism, pretendership, and alibis for being (excuses for being) and, as such, is closed to growth, openness and unfinalizability (real becoming). On the other hand, ‘science’, whose job it is to question everything, does not give ‘a charter to mistake’ being, instead, ‘a contest with mistake’ which keeps ‘the conscience alive’ by (presumably) aligning itself with independence, responsibility, openness, unfinalizability, creativity and potential for creativity and growth. In “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin observes that “an independent, responsible and active discourse is *the* fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being” (DiN 349 – 50). Consequently, “ethical responsibility and the project of selfhood require constant readjustment of ‘ones word’, of ‘authoritative words’ and of ‘innerly persuasive’ words” (MB 223) – that “thrive when they grow and change in response to experience and to other innerly persuasive voices” (MB 221). While Lydgate’s attitude to science cannot be conflated with the advent of true becoming or the project of selfhood, it does bear the mark of Bakhtin’s dialogical worldview: one that is opposed to the dogmatic, authoritative, or monological word that seems to stamp its seal on Rosamond’s brand of thinking.

Wishing to delay the inevitable response Rosamond’s ‘dumb mastery’ over him is likely to provoke, Lydgate puts off telling her about the ‘trouble which must soon be common to them both’ and it is some days before she is apprised of the situation by her parents.

The *shock to Rosamond was terrible*. It seemed to her that no lot could be so cruelly hard as hers – to have married a man who had become the centre of infamous suspicions. In many cases it is inevitable that the shame is felt to be the worst part of crime; and it *would have required a great deal of disentangling reflection, such as had never entered into Rosamond’s life*, for her in these moments to feel that *her trouble was less than if her husband had been certainly known to have done something criminal*. All the shame seemed to be there. *And she had innocently married this man with the belief that he and his family were a glory to her! She showed her usual reticence to her parents*, and only said, that if Lydgate had done as she wished he would have left Middlemarch long ago.

‘*She bears it beyond anything,*’ said her mother when she was gone.

‘*Ah, thank God!*’ said Mr Vincy, who was much broken down.

But Rosamond went home with a sense of justified repugnance towards her husband. What had he really done – how had he really acted? She did not know. *Why had he not told her everything?* He did not speak to her on the subject, *and of course she could not speak to him*. It came into her mind once that she would ask her father to let her go home again; but dwelling on that prospect made it seem utter dreariness to her; a married woman gone back to live with her parents – life seemed to have no meaning for her in such a position: she could not contemplate herself in it. [Chap 75: 718 – 19]

Of all the disappointments Rosamond has had to bear as a result of Lydgate’s not being the easy ticket into society she had thought him to be, the discovery that he is under suspicion of being complicit in underhanded dealings is by far the most mortifying and shameful thing she has ever had to endure. Actually, her parent’s disclosure constitutes one of the rare occasions in which she inwardly registers intense feeling and very real shock. Incapable of the ‘disentangling reflection’ which might have persuaded her of Lydgate’s innocence, she can only rage at the

‘shame’ that the unfortunate match she had ‘innocently’ made has wrought upon her. That she (apparently callously) disregards Lydgate’s possible innocence as irrelevant, is an indication of the extent to which she is unable to think beyond the effects on herself which, to her mind, are the same regardless of whether her husband is *actually* guilty or whether he is merely *thought* to be guilty.

We are reminded of the social aspect of Fanny’s early encounter with Mrs Merdle (LD, chap 20: 287 – 88) in relation to which I discussed Bakhtin’s view that the individual self is irrevocably linked to the social self; that the speaking person is always, to some extent “an *ideologue*” and his or her words are always “*ideologemes*” (DiN 333). Rosamond is, arguably, the archetypical ideologue, and it comes as little surprise that her *apparent* response to the awful news is a social contrivance, bearing little resemblance to her actual feelings. That her parents are duped into believing that ‘her usual reticence’ is a mark of her inner strength, equanimity and good sense, not only speaks of her parents’ unsuspecting naivety, but also of her own ability to conceal her conflicted emotions – in particular, her current outrage against, and repugnance toward her husband. Readers are immediately placed in a more privileged position than that occupied by her parents because they are afforded dialogical entry into her confused thoughts on her way home, particularly with regard to why he had ‘not told her everything’ (rather rich coming from her!) and her conviction that it was equally impossible for her to broach the subject with him.

It soon becomes evident to Lydgate that Rosamond has been made aware of his predicament and he uses her sustained silence as justification for not being the one to break the bad news to her.

Would she speak to him about it, or would she go on for ever in *silence* which seemed to imply that she believed him guilty? *We must remember that he was in a morbid state of mind*, in which almost all contact was pain. Certainly Rosamond in this case *had equal reason* to complain of reserve and want of confidence on his part; but in the *bitterness* of his soul he excused himself; – was he not justified in *shrinking from the task of telling her*, since now she knew the truth she had no impulse to speak to him: But a deeper-lying consciousness that he was in fault made him restless, and the *silence* between them became intolerable to him; *it was as if they were both adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other.*

He thought, ‘I am a fool. Haven’t I given up expecting anything: *I have married care, not help.*’

And that evening he said –

‘Rosamond, have you heard anything that distresses you?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, laying down her work, which she had been carrying on *with a languid semi-consciousness, most unlike her usual self.*

‘What have you heard?’

‘Everything, I suppose. Papa told me.’

‘That people think me disgraced?’

‘Yes,’ said Rosamond, faintly, beginning to sew again automatically.

There was a *silence*. Lydgate thought, ‘*If she has any trust in me – any notion of what I am, she ought to speak now and say that she does not believe I have deserved disgrace.*’

But Rosamond on her side went on moving her fingers languidly. Whatever was to be said on the subject she expected to come from Tertius. *What did she know?* And if he were innocent of any wrong why did he not do something to clear himself?

This *silence* of hers brought a new rush of *gall* to that *bitter* mood in which Lydgate had been saying to himself that nobody believed in him – even Farebrother had not come forward. He had begun to question her with the intent that their conversation should disperse the *chill fog* which had gathered between them, but he felt his resolution checked by *despairing resentment*. Even his trouble, like the rest, she seemed to regard as if it were *hers alone*. He was always to her *a being apart*, doing what she objected to. He *started* from his chair with an *angry impulse*, and *thrusting* his hands in his pockets, walked up and down the room. There was an *underlying consciousness* all the while that he should have to master this anger, and tell her everything, and convince her of the facts. *For he had almost learned the lesson that he must bend himself to her nature, and that because she came short in her sympathy, he must give the more.* Soon he recurred to his intention of *opening himself*: the occasion must not be lost. If he could bring her to feel with some solemnity that here was a slander which must be met and not run away from, and that the whole trouble had come out of his desperate want of money, it would be a moment for urging powerfully on her that they should be one in the resolve to do with as little money as possible so that they might weather the bad time and keep themselves independent. He would mention the definite measures which he desired to take, and *win her to a willing spirit*. He was bound to try this – and what else was there for him to do?

He did not know how long he had been walking uneasily backwards and forwards, but Rosamond felt that it was long, and *wished that he would sit down*. She too had begun to think this an opportunity for urging on Tertius what he ought to do. Whatever might be the truth about all this misery, there was one dread which asserted itself.

Lydgate at last seated himself, not in his usual chair, but in one nearer to Rosamond, leaning aside in it towards her, and looking at her gravely before he reopened the sad subject. He had conquered himself so far, and was about to speak with a sense of solemnity, *as on an occasion which was not to be repeated*. He had even opened his lips, when Rosamond, letting her hands fall, looked at him and said –

‘Surely, Tertius –’

‘Well?’

‘*Surely now at last you have given up the idea of staying in Middlemarch. I cannot go on living here. Let us go to London. Papa, and every one else, says you had better go. Whatever misery I have to put up with, all will be easier away from here.*’

Lydgate felt miserably *jarred*. *Instead of that critical outpouring for which he had prepared himself with effort, here was the old round to be gone through again.* He could not bear it. With a quick change of countenance he rose and went out of the room. [Chap 75: 719 – 21]

This is, arguably, the most crucial passage in the novel with regard to Lydgate and Rosamond’s inability to achieve selfhood in and through each other. It marks the climax of all the abortive attempts and near misses, preconceived ideas and misconceptions about each other. In Bakhtin’s view, overcoming alterity and “otherness” in language, in the novel is realised “in the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own horizon within someone else’s horizon” (DiN 365). As an unbearable silence hangs between them, Lydgate becomes acutely aware of the need to overcome their differences. He reminds himself of his intention to open himself up to her, to give her all the more sympathy despite (or perhaps even because of) her own deficiency in that area, and so to ‘win her to a willing spirit’. For a brief moment, the turning point in their relationship seems to hang in the balance, as each anticipates from the other a reassurance that could so easily have been given. However, it appears that Lydgate has almost, but not quite, ‘learned the lesson that he must bend to her nature’ and the chance is lost as the prolonged silence between them takes on a decidedly toxic quality.

What happens instead is that the perceived cool neutrality of Rosamond's impenetrable silence evokes in Lydgate a silence that bespeaks increasing agitation. Unfortunately he does not perceive that, here, the nature of her silence is atypically tinged with uncertainty. Taken together with the many dialogical implications of her previous unfathomable silences, it serves only to further confuse and disconcert him. Consequently, in his frustration he succumbs to his habitual impulse of vigorous movement, starting from his chair with an 'angry impulse' and walking 'up and down the room' with his hands thrust in his pockets. At the same time, he takes a 'sideward glance' at himself, having an 'underlying consciousness' of his own response being quite the opposite of what it should be.

In his essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin ruminates on the (sometimes discrepant) nature of the inner and outer body in self-experience:

A man who has grown accustomed to dreaming about himself in concrete terms – a man who strives to visualize the external image of himself, who is morbidly sensitive about the impression he produces and yet is insecure about that impression and easily wounded in his pride – such a man loses the proper, purely inner stance in relation to his own body. He becomes awkward, "unwieldy," and does not know what to do with his hands and feet. This occurs because an indeterminate *other* intrudes upon his movements and gestures and a second principle of axiological comportment toward himself arises for him: the context of his *self*-consciousness is muddled by the context of the *other's* consciousness of him, and his inner body is confronted by an outer body that is divorced from him – an outer body living in the eyes of the *other*. [Art 60]

Whilst acknowledging that Lydgate is not usually 'morbidly sensitive', and 'easily wounded in his pride', the 'chill fog' emanating from Rosamond does produce in him the kind of 'awkwardness' described above. His realisation that to Rosamond, who treated even his trouble 'as if it were hers alone', and to whom he was always 'a being apart, doing what she objected to' produces in him a self-consciousness response which is 'muddled' by Rosamond's consciousness of him and appears to 'intrude upon his movements and gestures'. The unvoiced violence inherent in Lydgate's animated silence speaks volumes to Rosamond in a 'language' to which she thoroughly objects and this serves only to harden her own attitude toward him. Her only wish is that he would cease his 'walking uneasily backwards and forwards' and that 'he would sit down'.

Hence, neither is able to supply the response the other needs in order to, as Bakhtin might have said, gain dialogical entry into the other and so 'fill themselves in'. Sadly, what could have resulted in a meaningful dialogic encounter between them produces, instead, yet another bout of isolation, 'as if they were both adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other'.

For Lydgate doubt, uncertainly, self-questioning, anger, self-pity and bitter resentment prevail but his thoughts ultimately turn to trying to restore his reputation in the most honourable way. He is acutely aware of the calamities he has unwittingly wrought upon Rosamond and he desperately wishes to spare her any more misery but, at the same time, is disappointed and frustrated by the absence of a corresponding sensibility towards him. So, while Lydgate's feelings always eventually find their way back to considering Rosamond's wellbeing, because her own feelings for him have never really gone beyond the abstract, idealized vision of the socially elevated life he represented for her, she is incapable of giving him equal consideration. When her fairytale goes horribly wrong her only recourse is to blame him and to concoct fabulous, implausible solutions. Not surprisingly, the fact that Rosamond already knows of his worsened circumstances, is reason enough for the narrator to excuse 'his shrinking from the task of telling her' and consolidate her own position in Lydgate's corner. Encouraging the reader to feel the same way, she entreats us to remember 'that he was in a morbid state of mind'.

To be fair, the narrator does point out that Rosamond has 'equal reason to complain' of Lydgate's 'reserve and want of confidence'. He, too, is at fault, being too thoroughly immersed in his own misery to consider Rosamond's emotional needs and decides too late that, because she came short in sympathy, 'he must give her more'. At the very moment he is about to break the interminable silence and open himself to her by explaining the 'definite measures' he is willing to take to win her over she, agitated by his perpetual prowling up and down the room, decides to state her case in unequivocal terms.

There are three distinct elements to what she says (or does not say) – all of which are anathema to Lydgate. In the first place, she fails to take into account the presumption of Lydgate's innocence. This omission is painful to Lydgate who had, perhaps unrealistically, hoped for some small measure of solidarity from her. Next, she rehashes her favourite theme – the need to quit Middlemarch. Finally, she does not even bother to try to persuade Lydgate of the merits of quitting Middlemarch for his own sake (other than saying that her father, and everyone else thinks 'he had better go'). The twice-uttered 'I' makes it doubly clear that she feels he owes it to her to take her away from Middlemarch. Morson and Emerson make the point that these apparent "echoes and foreshadowings are not the product of the author's plan, but of the character's obsessions [and that] possessed by ideas, the characters return to them over and over again, and so naturally certain repetitions develop" (MB 250 – 51). Therefore, the plot that *happens* to develop is "only one of many possible plots that could have developed [and] we are

invited to draw ‘dotted lines’ to other possible plots that might have developed out of the same dialogical material (MB 251). Unfortunately, Rosamond’s unilateral pronouncement closes off any possibility of the meaningful discussion Lydgate had hoped to achieve, had she responded differently. Instead, it evokes in him an added bitterness and gall, leaving him even more confused and crushed than by her initial silence which ‘seemed to imply that she believed him guilty’.

*Perhaps if he had been strong enough to persist in his determination to be the more because she was less, that evening might have had a better issue. If his energy could have borne down that check, he might still have wrought on Rosamond’s vision and will. We cannot be sure that any natures, however inflexible or peculiar, will resist this effect from a more massive being than our own. They may be taken by storm and for the moment converted, becoming part of the soul that enwraps them in the ardour of its movement.* But poor Lydgate had a throbbing pain within him, and his energy had fallen short of its task.

*The beginning of mutual understanding and resolve seemed as far off as ever; nay, it seemed blocked out by the sense of unsuccessful effort.* They lived on from day to day with *their thoughts still apart*, Lydgate going about what work he had in a mood of despair, and Rosamond feeling, *with some justification*, that he was behaving cruelly. *It was of no use to say anything to Tertius; but when Will Ladislaw came, she was determined to tell him everything. In spite of her general reticence, she needed some one who would recognise her wrongs.* [Chap 75: 721]

By abruptly switching to a narrative in the first person, Eliot chooses this critical moment to insert herself, once again, into the fabric of her novel by encouraging her readers to join with her in one of her stated objectives: the task of unravelling ‘human lots’(Chap 11: 94). Gillian Beer comments on Eliot’s use of “equivocalness” in *Middlemarch*, claiming that the “equal voices” that “inhabit many of her sentences [refuse] to establish secure authority [thus] inviting the reader to align himself or herself and then to take a new position”. This approach has the dual purpose of “making us aware of how unwary such alignments are as we read,” and “making us reassess what’s in, what’s out, what we harbour and what we would expel as perfidy if uttered aloud by another person” (Chase 30).

Similarly, Bakhtin alludes to the ‘polyphonic author’ as necessarily playing two roles, the first being to “create a world in which many disparate points of view enter into dialogue” and the second being one in which he himself participates in that dialogue, [thereby becoming] one of the interlocutors in the ‘great dialogue’ that he himself has created’ (MB 239). In this passage, Eliot’s primary concern appears to be centred on the two opposing natures that are unable to make meaningful contact with each other. Her conjectures about what might have been, could have been, should have been or, conversely, cannot ever have been, direct the reader towards similar questions, not only about the fictional characters of Rosamond and Lydgate, but also towards life in general as she teases out the possibility (or impossibility) of knowing what effect an encounter with a being ‘more massive [...] than our own’ is likely to yield. The author’s



ambivalence constitutes a clear example of Bakhtin's requirement for open-endedness in the novel, in which the answer ('the final word') eludes even the narrator and provokes reflection on the part of the reader.

Eliot's questions invoke reflection about how life ultimately turns on everyday, ordinary responses rather than on momentous or catastrophic events. As we will recall, for Wittgenstein, as well as for Bakhtin, although they often escape our notice, the simple and familiar are able to reveal what is 'most striking and most powerful'. Bakhtin argues that life is neither arbitrary nor inevitable but hinges on tiny alterations constituting the daily 'event of being' found in the 'prose of everyday life'. As Morson and Emerson elucidate:

He consistently opposed all ways of thinking that reduced the present moment – each present moment – to a simple derivative of what went on before. As he emphasized “the eventness” of the event and the necessity of the responsibility here and now, he also insisted on the *presentness* of each moment. Time is open and each moment has multiple possibilities. [MB 46]

Unfortunately, it seems neither Lydgate nor Rosamond is up to the task of recognizing the 'responsibility' each present moment yields, and Eliot's openly reflective frame of mind is summarily replaced by her virtually (but not completely) closing the book on any possibility of 'mutual understanding and resolve' between Rosamond and Lydgate who live on instead 'from day to day with their thoughts still apart'. It seems increasingly unlikely that real communication can ever take place between them. Eliot's views are analogous with those of Bakhtin for whom real dialogue demands partners who encounter each other on the same plane, with each being unfinalizable with respect to the other (MB 241). Directing our attention to what he calls the "tripartite" nature of dialogue (an utterance, a reply and a relation between the two), Holquist contends that the last is the most important of the three because without it the other two would have no meaning. For this reason dialogue "bears within it the seeds of hope: in so far as my 'I' is dialogic, it ensures that my existence is not a lonely event but part of a larger whole" (DBW 38).

When the archetypically self-contained Rosamond begins to think of finally unburdening herself to Will Ladislaw it underpins the basic human need for communication in order to be 'filled in' by someone else. Conversely, the aspect of closedness or self-containment is the negative correlative to dialogue, articulated by Bakhtin thus: "A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone" (PDP 177). It would seem that Lydgate's limited but

concerted efforts towards candidness with Rosamond show him to be aware of the critical role played by other people in the realisation of 'self'. Although he fails to draw *her* into any meaningful, shared experience, he does at least persist with "his intention of opening himself" (720), and it is in this limited sense that his efforts could be seen as a potential positive correlative of dialogized discourse, against the negative correlative of Rosamond's continued reticence toward him.

Eliot's portrayal of 'human lots' in *Middlemarch* as being interdependent and ineluctably intertwined (Chap 11: 94) resonates strongly with Bakhtin's view of the inseparability between self and other and the critical role played by interpersonal relations in order fully to realise oneself and, whereas this section has explored, in the main, the negative correlative of dialogic relations (inability or unwillingness to communicate dialogically) the main thrust of the next section tends toward the many factors that constitute the positive correlative of dialogic discourse (open discussion entered into freely) and its attendant effect on the project of selfhood.

### 3.4. Towards Real Becoming

This section explores the events that emerge when the respective character zones of Lydgate and Rosamond intersect with those of Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw. Unfortunately a detailed study of the intriguing and absorbing relationship between Dorothea and Will would necessitate a separate full-length dissertation. Consequently, my discussion of these two vital characters is limited to their interaction with Lydgate and Rosamond.

Some days later, Lydgate was riding to Lowick Manor, in consequence of a summons from Dorothea. [. . .]

Dorothea, awaited his arrival with *eager* interest. Though, in deference to her masculine advisers, she had refrained from what Sir James had called 'interfering in this Bulstrode business,' *the hardship of Lydgate's position was continually in her mind*, and when Bulstrode applied to her again about the hospital, she felt that the opportunity was come to her which she had been hindered from hastening. In her luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, *her thought was going out over the lot of others*, and her emotions were imprisoned. *The idea of some active good within her reach, "haunted her like a passion,"* and *another's need* having once more come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the *yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless*. She was full of *confident hope* about this interview with Lydgate, *never heeding what was said of his personal reserve; never heeding that she was a very young woman*. Nothing could have seemed more *irrelevant* to Dorothea than insistence on her *youth and sex when she was moved to show her human fellowship*. [. . .]

When Lydgate came in, she was almost shocked at the change in his face, *which was strikingly perceptible to her* who had not seen him for two months. It was not the change of emaciation, but that effect which even young faces will very soon show from the persistent presence of *resentment* and *despondency*. *Her cordial look*, when she put out her hand to him, *softened his expression*, but only with melancholy.

‘I have wished very much to see you for a long while, Mr Lydgate,’ said Dorothea when they were seated opposite each other; ‘but I put off asking you to come until Mr Bulstrode applied to me again about the hospital. I know that the advantage of keeping the management of it separate from that of the Infirmary depends on you, or, at least, on the good which you are encouraged to hope for from having it under your control. *And I am sure you will not refuse to tell me exactly what you think.*’

‘You want to decide whether you should give a generous support to the hospital,’ said Lydgate. ‘*I cannot conscientiously advise you to do it in dependence on any activity of mine.* I may be obliged to leave the town.’

He spoke curtly, feeling the ache of despair as to his being able to carry out any purpose that Rosamond had set her mind against.

‘Not because there is no one to believe in you?’ said Dorothea, *pouring out her words in clearness from a full heart. ‘I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable.’*

*It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on Lydgate’s ears.* He drew a deep breath, and said ‘Thank you.’ *He could say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him.* [Chap 76: 722 – 24]

We turn once again to Bakhtin’s sense of the *modus operandi* of the novel in which “highly particularized and sensitized *character zones*” are created (DiN 316). Michael Holquist glosses these zones as being “both a territory and a sphere of influence.” As he explains: “Intentions must pass through ‘zones’ dominated by other characters, and are therefore refracted. [...] There are no zones belonging to no-one, no ‘no man’s land’. There are disputed zones, but never empty ones. [. . .] [Because] a zone is the locus for hearing a voice it is brought about by the voice” (TDI 434). However, as we have already discussed, the voice does not belong only to a particular character but is “diffused throughout authorial speech” that surrounds him or her (DiN 316). Once such a character zone is created it is typically used at a distance from the character, thus enabling the reader to hear the “potential dialogue of two characters, of each with the author, and of all three together” (MB 329).

The ongoing value of establishing character zones throughout the novel is underscored by the above passage in which, even though Dorothea has not been the subject of interrogation in this thesis, we immediately learn a great deal about her and, through *her* reflections (refracted through the author), about Lydgate’s personal worth. Contained within the description of her eager anticipation of his visit and her intense sympathy for his look of ‘resentment and despondency’ (a change that is ‘strikingly perceptible to her), is an implicit narratorial comparison between Dorothea and Rosamond.

For one thing, Dorothea takes cognisance of the opinions of her male advisors and refrains from her own preferred course of action. That she puts off asking Lydgate to visit her until a seemingly opportunity presents itself is a marked contrast to Rosamond’s way of thinking which defers only to the ‘authoritative voice’ that both informs and justifies her every action. Rosamond, as we know, does ‘everything it becomes [her] to do’, is ‘quite sure that no one could justly find fault

with her' (564) and 'always acted for the best – the best naturally being what she liked best' (634). Another immediately observable difference between the two women is that, whereas Rosamond is only able to view life in terms of her own needs, Dorothea's outwardly orientated ideal to do 'some active good' renders her own ease 'tasteless' to her and prompts in her a desire to alleviate the troubles of others in general, and of Lydgate, in particular. Interestingly, although Dorothea listens to the advice of her male advisors she does not regard either her youth or her femininity as an inhibiting factor in talking frankly to Lydgate. Instinctively aware that true 'human fellowship' knows no boundaries between people, she is certain that he will not refuse to tell her his innermost thoughts.

The depth of Dorothea's concern for Lydgate once again reflects Eliot's own overarching preoccupation with 'human lots' – that she wished her readers to be able to "feel" the emotional ups and downs of other "struggling erring" beings (Haight (Ed.) *Letters* Vol. 3: 111). Dorothea's passionate yearnings, which begin to reformulate themselves less in terms of the abstract good and more in terms of 'another's need' about which she can do 'some *active good within her reach*' (emphasis added), are reminiscent, too, of Bakhtin's humanistic ideology which insists that abstract values (the general 'good') must be subordinated to the value of a human being and not the other way round (MB 182).

Consequently, when Lydgate arrives, and before any reported exchange takes place, there is a sort of 'unspoken' conversation between himself and Dorothea in which his facial expression, bespeaking 'resentment and despondency', immediately softens in response to her 'cordial look'. In Bakhtin's view, utterances, we recall, can take many forms in order to communicate something to someone else, including the 'extralinguistic' (MB 125). I have already put forward a case for silence having communicative powers and here it is evident that the warmth Lydgate discerns in Dorothea's eyes and general demeanour is a powerful communicator that lays the groundwork for their ensuing verbal communication.

Dorothea's expressed vote of confidence in Lydgate's opinion elicits the conscientious response from him that she should not donate funds to the hospital on his account as he may have to leave town as a consequence of the rumours which surround him. His directness invokes in Dorothea a passionate outpouring of her belief in his unquestionable integrity. That she instinctively 'knows' him incapable of doing anything 'vile' or 'dishonourable' refers back to, and is *implicitly* dialogized against, Rosamond's need for Lydgate to provide justification of his actions and a

specific denial of his having done anything wrong. The dialogical comparison with Rosamond becomes more overt as the narrator emphasises that Dorothea's is 'the first assurance of belief in him'.

Narratorial contextualisation is evident in that the growth of selfhood which had begun with 'signing his name' to his actions now begins to take shape as something 'new and strange' enters into Lydgate's psyche displacing his previously held ideology in which trust in a woman's judgement was rejected. It recalls, too, his initial response to Dorothea: it was 'troublesome to talk to such women' on account of her being 'a little too earnest' (91) as she did not look at things 'from the proper feminine angle' (93), and his preference for the kind of 'intelligence' and 'feminine radiance' that Rosamond appeared to offer: 'polished, refined, docile' and being 'moulded only for pure and delicate joys' (158 – 9). The narrator's prior wry observation, that he might possibly 'have experience before him which would modify his opinion as to the most excelling things in woman' (92) would seem to prefigure this 'new and strange' thing that he now begins to experience in Dorothea's company as she entreats him to confide in her.

'I beseech you to tell me how everything was,' said Dorothea, *fearlessly*. '*I am sure that the truth would clear you.*'

Lydgate started up from his chair, and went towards the window, forgetting where he was. *He had so often gone over in his mind* the possibility of explaining everything without aggravating appearances that would tell, perhaps, unfairly, against Bulstrode, and had so often decided against it – *he had so often said to himself* that his assertions would not change people's impressions – that Dorothea's words sounded like a temptation to do something which *in his soberness he had pronounced to be unreasonable*.

'Tell me, pray,' said Dorothea, with simple earnestness; '*then we can consult together*. It is wicked to let people think evil of any one falsely, when it can be hindered.'

Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and saw Dorothea's face looking up at him with a *sweet trustful gravity*. The *presence* of a *noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us*: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, *and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character*. *That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate*, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and *felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it*.

'I don't want,' he said, 'to bear hard on Bulstrode, who has lent me money of which I was in need – though I would rather have gone without it now. He is hunted down and miserable, and has only a poor thread of life in him. But I should like to tell you everything. *It will be a comfort* to me to speak *where belief has gone beforehand, and where I shall not seem to be offering assertions of my own honesty. You will feel what is fair to another, as you feel what is fair to me.*'

'Do trust me,' said Dorothea; 'I will not repeat anything without your leave. But at the very least I could say that you have made all the circumstances clear to me, and that I know you are not in any way guilty. Mr Farebrother would believe me, and my uncle, and Sir James Chettam. Nay, there are persons in Middlemarch to whom I could go; *although they don't know much of me, they would believe me*. They would know that I would have no other motive than truth and justice. I would take any pains to clear you. I have very little to do. *There is nothing better that I can do in the world.*'

Dorothea's voice, as she made this childlike picture of what she would do, might have been almost taken as a proof that she could do it effectively. The *searching tenderness* of her woman's *tones* seemed made for a defence against ready accusers. Lydgate did not stay to think that she was Quixotic: *he gave himself up, for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous sympathy, without any check of proud reserve*.

*And he told her everything.* [. . .]

[Chap 76: 724 – 25]

Bakhtin's conviction that "our own discourse is slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated" (DiN 345) is explored by Morson and Emerson who point out that innerly persuasive discourse "thrives when it grows and changes in response to other innerly persuasive voices" and, as opposed to authoritative discourse, "it is never a dead thing, never something finished; rather it is a kind of impulse toward the future" (MB 221).

Dorothea's fearless request for Lydgate to tell her everything in the certainty that the truth would clear him is a case in point. For Lydgate it sets in motion an inner dialogue in which he weighs his previously held conviction (that any explanation of his actions would be both self-defeating and unfair to Bulstrode) against the relief that confiding in Dorothea would bring. His inner dialogue coincides with Bakhtin's notion of the dividedness of language as it shapes the self in inner speech in which Bakhtin imagines the self "as a conversation, often a struggle, of discrepant voices with each other, voices (and words) speaking from different positions and invested with different degrees of authority" (MB 217 – 18). Just as the "true style of novels is in fact the combinations of styles, [so too], selfhood is not a particular voice within, but a particular way of combining many voices within" (MB 221). Some of the manifestations of what Bakhtin refers to as 'authoritative discourse' (which is compelling only because of the sheer force of its authority) have already been discussed in terms of Rosamond's codified responses. A similar effect is produced by innerly persuasive words when they do not grow and change in response to other innerly persuasive voices as they will then "bind us precisely because they are persuasive" (MB 221). In that Rosamond largely ignores the innerly persuasive voices of others and creates her 'selfhood' from only the combination of authoritative discourse and her own innerly persuasive discourse, she limits her potential for real growth. Lydgate's own innerly persuasive discourse is one of the markers that convince him of the logic of his sober conclusion that it would be 'unreasonable' to explain his actions.

However, when Dorothea repeats her request for him to be open with her, this time pledging her help, the 'sweet trustful gravity' in her eyes enables him to accept her persuasive word. This recognition and acceptance has an increasingly restorative effect on him as he begins to share his burden with her. As Bakhtin observes, "When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness" (DiN 345). The project of selfhood thus requires constant adjustment of one's own (innerly persuasive) word, of authoritative words and of others' (innerly persuasive) words. In fact, we may

remember that Bakhtin goes so far as to say that what distinguishes one as an “ethical, legal and political human being” is the ability to conduct “an independent, responsible and active discourse” (DiN 349 – 50).

Meditating on the effect produced in ‘us’ by the mere fact of our being in the presence of someone with a noble, generous and charitable nature, the narrator once again employs what Bakhtin refers to as the ‘chronotope’ (a unit of time-space) which places novelistic events in the ‘zone of familiar contact’ with her reader. Michael Holquist glosses the chronotope as a “unit of analysis for studying texts according to the nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented [in which] neither category is privileged.” Rather they are “utterly interdependent” and (together) used as an “optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (TDI 425 – 26). In her article, “ideological becoming,” [V]irginia [L]. [P]urvis-[S]mith refers to the chronotope as “bakhtin’s coined word for the <process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature>” (Holne and Wussow 49). Eliot uses this technique frequently throughout the novel to imply that her readers exist in a similar (although obviously not identical), ‘time-space’ locus as that occupied by the author, narrator and characters and she uses it now to include her readers in the enduring *similarities* that have unified and will continue to unify people regardless of space and time. ‘It changes the lights for us’, she tells us, in a way that enables us to see things objectively and in perspective, and to ‘believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character’.

The link between the ‘chronotope’ and ‘dialogue’ and between the author or narrator and readers is clarified by Morson and Emerson who explore the way in which the chronotopes of the author and of the listener or reader are presented. The text, they insist, is not “just a dead thing” which we see or perceive, not just something written on paper, but also an utterance in which we hear voices, and in so doing we encounter the human being:

The readers, too, are real people engaged in an activity that is performed in a specific time and place. Both author and reader, in other words, are “located in a real unitary and as yet incomplete historical world” (FTC, 253), which is to say, a world that is unfinalizable and in which the activity of writing and reading is shaped by presentness. [...] Readers may “enclose the work within its epoch by trying to see only the chronotope of original and ostensibly passive readers; that is, they may try to engage in pure empathy and to give up their outsideness as much as possible. Or, still less fruitfully, readers can “modernise and distort” the work by suppressing chronotopic differences in the opposite way, by seeing only their own chronotope. Finally they can take maximal advantage of the differences of their outsideness by an act of creative understanding that is truly dialogic in the best sense [...] and so become enriched by something truly in the work but needing their own special experience to provoke.

[MB 427 – 28 and 429]

For Bakhtin, then, it is by means of the chronotope, that all the novel's "abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – [. . .] take on flesh and blood," as opposed to being mere "lifeless abstraction[s]" (FTC 250). Implicit in Eliot's active and consistent attempts to engage with her readers – to draw them into a dialogical relationship with not only her characters but also with herself – is an appeal to them to use their 'creative understanding' and take advantage their 'outsideness' in order to simultaneously enrich, and be enriched by the novel.

Dorothea's enriching effect on Lydgate is such that he begins to regain a sense of his 'old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it'. To know 'the wholeness of our character' or one's image in the world requires another's finalising outsideness. An integral self in other words, requires an 'other'. Whereas internal finalization is undesirable in that it spells the end of personal growth, finalization by others (the view they have of us) continually changes and is imperative to our growth. Picking up on Bakhtin's exploration of the proper ratio of unfinalizability to finalization, Morson and Emerson submit that, inasmuch as I do not assume I can finalize myself, without the finalizing influence of another "I cannot achieve an image of myself, just as I cannot be aware of how my mind works when I am unselfconscious and cannot know how I really appear to the world by looking in a mirror" (MB 91).

The finalizing influence Dorothea has on Lydgate provides him with the ability to unburden himself without his first having to prove his integrity. It is this kind of discourse that Bakhtin refers to as dialogic agreement in which the listener (or second speaker), from her own experience, confirms the judgement of the first speaker, "who has arrived at it by a different experience" (MB 132). Because Dorothea has already formulated her view of Lydgate's character by another route (her previous encounters with him), she needs no proof of his innocence and is thus able to create an atmosphere wherein he is able to express himself freely without fear of judgement. As she says, they can 'consult together' and her being in full possession of the facts will enable her to convince others of his good character. That she expects a positive response even from those who barely know her indicates that, just as Lydgate's character finds agreement in her, her own reputation for integrity precedes her and she expects that it will give weight to her word, even, she believes, to those with whom she is not intimately acquainted. Her searching, tender tones and the simple, ardent nature of the declaration, 'There is nothing better that I can do in the world', confirm both Eliot's and Bakhtin's notion of what constitutes ethical responsibility.



Dorothea thus convinces Lydgate to give himself up, ‘for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous sympathy, without any check or proud reserve’. In so doing, Lydgate takes a critical step towards the formulation of selfhood, one that would seem to relate tangentially to Bakhtin’s broadly encompassing humanistic vision that “the genuine life of the personality is made available only through a dialogic penetration of that personality, during which it freely and intentionally reveals itself” (PDP 59). David Danow elaborates on the intentional revelation of meaning as being, “truth created in dialogue, on the borders where two consciousnesses meet [and which] is realized at the interstices of the self and other” (64). His view affirms the notion held by Bakhtin and his circle that “the reality of the word, as is true of any sign, resides between individuals” (MPL 14). It is this interpenetration of the linked utterances between the self and the other that yield what Danow refers to as a “fluid, ephemeral, and evanescent” truth that does not belong or reside with any one person but is wholly contextualised and realised in the realm of dialogue” (Danow 65). Bakhtin writes that, from the vantage point of truth, “there are no individual consciousnesses” (PDP 81), or, as Danow puts it, “someone’s earlier fragmented ‘truth’ – as well as the disintegrative self – are potentially made whole, if only fleetingly, by the interacting of several viewpoints” (65).

Lydgate tells her everything and his story reveals to Dorothea the extent to which he has been compromised and she, recalling his earlier ambitions, becomes increasingly concerned and sympathetic.

‘Oh, it is hard!’ said Dorothea. ‘I *understand* the difficulty there is in your vindicating yourself. And that all this should have come to you who meant to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways – *I cannot bear to rest in this as unchangeable*. I know you meant that. *I remember what you said to me when you first spoke to me about the hospital. There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that – to try to reach it, and yet to fail.*’

‘Yes,’ said Lydgate, *feeling that here he had found room for the full meaning of his grief*. ‘I had some ambition. I meant everything to be different with me. I thought I had more strength and mastery. But the most terrible obstacles are such that *nobody can see except oneself.*’

‘Suppose,’ said Dorothea, meditatively. ‘Suppose we kept on the hospital according to the present plan, and you stayed here though only with the friendship and support of a few, the evil feeling towards you would gradually die out; there would come opportunities in which people would be forced to acknowledge that they had been unjust to you, because they would see that your purposes were pure. You may still win a great fame *like the Louis and Laennec I have heard you speak of*, and we shall *all be proud of you.*’ she ended, with a smile.

‘That might do *if I had my old trust in myself,*’ said Lydgate, mournfully. ‘Nothing galls me more than the notion of turning round and running away before this slander, leaving it unchecked behind me. *Still, I can’t ask any one to put a great deal of money into a plan which depends on me.*’

‘It would be quite worth my while,’ said Dorothea, *simply*. ‘Only think. I am very uncomfortable with my money, because they tell me I have too little for any great scheme of the sort I like best, and yet I have too much. I don’t know what to do. *I have seven hundred a-year of my own fortune, and nineteen hundred a-year that Mr Casaubon left me, and between three and four thousand of ready money in the bank.* I wished to raise money and pay it off gradually out of my income which I don’t want, to buy land with and found a village which should be a school industry; but Sir James and my uncle have convinced

me that the risk would be too great. So you see that what I should most rejoice at would be to have something good to do with my money: I should like it to make other people's lives better to them. *It makes me very uneasy – coming all to me who don't want it.*

A *smile* broke through the gloom of Lydgate's face. The childlike grave-eyed earnestness with which Dorothea said all this was irresistible – blent into an adorable whole with her ready understanding of high experience. (Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, *poor Mrs Casaubon had a very blurred shortsighted knowledge*, little helped by her imagination.) But she took the smile as encouragement of her plan.

'I think you see now that you spoke too scrupulously,' she said, in a tone of persuasion. 'The hospital would be one good; and *making your life quite whole and well again* would be another.'

[Chap 76: 726 – 27]

Contained within Dorothea's ardent reflection on what it is 'To love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail' there resides a multiplicity of meanings, the most obvious of which is her intense sympathy for Lydgate's plight. That she is able to 'understand' the difficulty of his situation emanates from the depth of her own sorrows – for Casaubon, who failed to achieve his lofty goals, and for her own blighted relationship with Casaubon which effectively put paid to her own girlish ambitions of wanting to be of service to her late husband. One might say that her own difficulties allow her to empathise with Lydgate.

Bakhtin, however, has reservations about the use of the word empathy, feeling that certain usages imply a kind of fusion of personalities in which we duplicate ourselves. For him, the crucial values in the creation of real selves are 'non-fusion' and interaction. "What would I gain if another were to fuse with me?" he says. "Let him rather remain outside me" (AiG [AH] 78<sup>1</sup>. MB 184). Non-fusion allows us to supplement each other and enrich each other and the world in our daily (prosaic) creativity, through a "reassumption and a reconfirmation of one's own place after the other is encountered" (MB 185). Pure empathising, in Bakhtin's opinion, is an 'abstract moment' of aesthetic activity and should not be thought of as a 'temporal period'. Instead, he feels, that the "moments of empathizing and of objectifying interpenetrate each other." As he explains:

I empathize *actively* into an individual and, consequently, I do not lose myself completely, nor my unique place outside it, even for a moment. It is not the object that unexpectedly takes possession of me as the passive one: [...] empathizing is my act, and only that constitutes its productiveness and newness. It is I who empathize actively into the object. [TPA 15]

Preferable, then, to "empathy" is the notion of 'live entering' or "living into another" in which one "simultaneously renounces and exploits one's surplus" or that which is seen by others but cannot be seen by ourselves (MB 54). 'Live entering' paved the way to dialogics (which eventually replaced the term 'live entering') and became for Bakhtin the key to real understanding. Morson and Emerson note that, for Bakhtin, "the problem of the self was not strictly a psychological one but more broadly and loosely a philosophical one" (MB 174).

Consequently, Bakhtin proposes that the proper way to understand others is not by means of traditional psychology (“at best a pedagogic and at worst a monologic science”), which objectifies and thus finalizes them (MB 86). Rather, they should be studied dialogically, which allows for change and growth as each person responds in a unique and unrepeatable way to the other’s word. For him, then, “the dialogic relationship [is] the only form of relationship toward the human being’s personality [that preserves] its freedom and open-endedness” (PDP 291). Because, as previously stated, the dialogic word is a “vehicle for *others*’ creation of me, or for my creation of myself out of others,” what is important about it “is the impossibility of my ever *completely* signing it, because the very concept of ‘my’ is multiple” (MB 71); it involves others. So, although people are shaped “in essential ways by their social and historical environment,” their “surplus of humanness” is able to transcend that environment and “make them the unique and unfinalizable beings that they (and we) are” (MB 262 – 63).

What Dorothea is able to supply for Lydgate is a degree of ‘outsideness’ and a ‘surplus of humanness’ both of which allow him to resume and reconfirm his own place in which he finds ‘room for the full meaning of his grief’ which he had previously thought nobody would be able to understand. But, coming from her own experience of long-suffering, Dorothea begs Lydgate not to give up but to persevere at the Hospital, adding, ‘you may still win a great fame like the Louis and Laennec I have heard you speak of’. Although Bakhtin does not name it as such, this type of ‘outsideness’ that creates the possibility of dialogue, is referred to by Morson and Emerson as the *addressive* surplus or the surplus of a good listener, one capable of ‘live entering’ and which requires “an active (not a duplicating) understanding, a willingness to listen” (PDP 299). Expanding on this notion, Morson and Emerson proffer the view that “Without trying to finalize the other or define him once and for all, one uses one’s ‘outsideness’ and experience to ask the right sort of questions [and in which] one recognizes the other’s capacity for change [and] provokes or invites him to reveal and outgrow himself” (MB 242).

When Dorothea asks Lydgate to consider the possibility of the ‘evil feeling’ towards him gradually dying out so that he may yet achieve fame ‘like Louis and Laennec’ she demonstrates both her listening abilities (recalling, after her initial conversation with Lydgate, his medical idols and ambitions) and her questioning skills, by posing the kinds of questions that invite him to take up the challenge (outgrow himself). Having once had vocational ambitions of her own (unlike the conservative Rosamond), she understands Lydgate’s passion for his calling and his admiration for both René Laennec, who invented the stethoscope in 1816 and pioneered its use in

diagnosing various chest conditions, and Pierre Charles Louis, the precursor to epidemiology and the modern clinical trial. Interestingly, according to Pratt and Neufeld, in *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*, it should be noted that “although Tertius Lydgate is fascinated by ‘Louis’ ‘new book on fever,’ [. . .] his growing disinterest permits him to ignore Smith’s later and more inclusive work,” *A Treatise on Fever*, the publication date of which coincides with the time of the novel. As they say, “Here is but one more example of GE’s background knowledge establishing an extremely subtle irony: Smith’s *Treatise on Fever* is one of the books Lydgate should have read, but did not” (143).

Lydgate, however, feels compelled to reject Dorothea’s pressing offer to take over Bulstrode’s financial assistance to the hospital, stating that since he no longer has any trust in himself, it would be irresponsible of him to allow her to spend her money on a plan that depended on him. Interestingly, Dorothea has no qualms about revealing her exact income. In direct contrast to Rosamond’s ideology, her self-definition is not enhanced by her elevated financial status. On the contrary, she goes to great lengths to ‘sell’ Lydgate on the idea of accepting her help by insisting that he would be doing her a great service by helping her distribute her unwanted wealth. But her belief that his life could be made ‘quite well and whole again’ simply by implementing her simple plan is seen to be somewhat naïve by the narrator who, in one of her characteristic asides, adds that ‘poor’ Dorothea’s experience of the real world (‘lower experience’) is blurred by her high ideals.

Morson and Emerson argue that Bakhtin, too, may have been guilty of exhibiting a “naïvely appealing benevolence” in his presumption of “the potential friendly other” – an idea that appears to anticipate his subsequent formulation of the superaddressee (MB 217). The superaddressee is someone who, rather like God, “embodies a principle of hope present, more or less consciously in every utterance” (MB 135) and whose invisible presence” is a vital aspect of the very nature of discourse, “which always wants to be *heard*, always seeks responsive understanding, and does not stop at *immediate* understanding but presses further and further on (indefinitely)” (TPA 127). It must be said that, by engaging in dialogical agreement with Lydgate, Dorothea certainly seems to provide for him a *visible* (as opposed to an *invisible*) ‘friendly other’. Notwithstanding the idea that no speaker can ever count on perfect understanding from his listener, she does, in a sense, fulfil a function very similar to that of the superaddressee by virtue of the fact that the trustful generosity of her nature ‘embodies a spirit of hope’ that allows Lydgate, for the first time, the space to be able to *begin* to turn over his self to Dorothea whose only concern, *at this*

*particular moment in time*, is to assist him. Like Bakhtin's transcendent 'superaddressee' she is willing to understand but "does not require understanding in return" (MB 136).

Lydgate's smile had died away. 'You have the goodness as well as the money to do all that; if it could be done,' he said. 'But –'

He hesitated a little while, looking vaguely towards the window; and she sat in silent expectation. At last he turned towards her and said impetuously –

'Why should I not tell you? – *you know what sort of bond marriage is. You will understand everything.*'

Dorothea felt her heart beginning to beat faster. Had he that sorrow too? But she feared to say any word, and he went on immediately.

'*It is impossible for me now to do anything – to take any step without considering my wife's happiness. The thing that I might like to do if I were alone is become impossible to me. I can't see her miserable. She married me without knowing what she was going into, and it might have been better for her if she had not married me.*'

'I know, I know – you could not give her pain, if you were not obliged to do it,' said Dorothea, *with keen memory of her own life.*

'And she has set her mind against staying. She wishes to go. The troubles she has had here have wearied her,' said Lydgate, breaking off again, lest he should say too much.

'But when she saw the good that might come of staying –' said Dorothea, remonstrantly, looking at Lydgate as if he had forgotten the reasons which had just been considered. He did not speak immediately.

'*She would not see it,*' he said at last, curtly, feeling at first that this statement must do without explanation. 'And, indeed, I have lost all spirit about carrying on my life here.' He paused a moment and then, *following the impulse to let Dorothea see deeper into the difficulty of his life*, he said, 'The fact is, this trouble has come upon her confusedly. *We have not been able to speak to each other about it.* I am not sure what is in her mind about it: she may fear that I have really done something base. *It is my fault; I ought to be more open.* But I have been suffering cruelly.' [Chap 76: 727 – 28]

In Bakhtinian terms Lydgate's reluctant rejection of Dorothea's offer might be interpreted as an ethical choice in which Lydgate takes responsibility by 'signing his name' to his actions. The act is to be distinguished from the novelistic word which, as we have seen, cannot be completely signed. Morson and Emerson explain the difference between the act and the dialogic word thus:

In marked contrast to the novelistic *word* which Bakhtin will come to define as open, unfinalized, inhabited by many voices and therefore shot through with sideward glances or loopholes, the *act* is valuable as a concrete closed event around which I can wrap my responsibility. [MB 70]

It could be argued that, by refusing Dorothea's offer to help him remain in Middlemarch, Lydgate 'wrap[s] his responsibility around' Rosamond's wellbeing. Sensing in Dorothea a noble spirit, he begins to confide in her his feeling of guilt and consequent need to put Rosamond's happiness before his own. In so doing he denies his own ambitions but, paradoxically, exhibits a potential for growth of character in which he instinctively seems to recognise the need to "freely and reciprocally" reveal himself through "a *dialogic* penetration of his personality" (PDP 59) by Dorothea's. As Robert Stam observes, "Bakhtin foregrounds the human capacity to mutually 'author' one another, the ability to dialogically intersect on the frontiers between selves" (6). Furthermore, one does not become 'oneself' by "shedding others to disinter an originary essence, but rather by revealing oneself to another, through another, with another's help" (6). The 'other',

in this case is Dorothea, who ‘having a keen memory of her own life’ has to conquer her own sorrows when Lydgate impetuously blurts out that she knows, better than most the ‘sort of bond marriage is’ and ‘would understand everything’. Perceiving in his words, a possible innuendo with regard to Rosamond and Ladislaw’s relationship, she decides against further questioning. Setting aside her own fears and heartache, she consciously chooses, instead, to fulfil the role of catalyst for the outpouring of Lydgate’s feelings as he ‘follows the impulse to let [her] see deeper into the difficulties of his life’.

As Lydgate begins to express his feelings to Dorothea he arrives at the realisation that Rosamond has been similarly afflicted, and that it would have been better for her had she not married him. Discussing the “tragic potential” for relationships born of limited dialogic interaction David Danow cautions that “where there is restricted freedom and no reciprocation, one who denies the other and his potentially engaging word drastically reduces the possibility of spiritual fulfilment for himself primarily” (64). Lydgate realises too, the error of trying to inflict his views on Rosamond, of taking unilateral decisions without regard to her feelings and confesses to Dorothea that, although they have not yet been able ‘to speak to each other about it’, compromise on his part might bring about at least some kind of dialogical agreement between himself and Rosamond, with whom his duty ultimately lies. His admission to Dorothea: “It is my fault; I ought to have been more open” signifies yet another small step taken in the direction of self growth.

‘*May I go and see her?*’ said Dorothea, *eagerly*. ‘*Would she accept my sympathy?*’ I would tell her that you have not been blameable before any one’s judgment but your own. I would tell her that you should be cleared in every fair mind. I would cheer her heart. Will you ask her if I may go to see her? I did see her once.’

‘I am sure you may,’ said Lydgate, seizing the proposition with some hope. ‘She would feel honoured – cheered, I think, by proof that you at least have some respect for me. I will not speak to her about your coming – that she may not connect it with my wishes at all. *I know very well that I ought not to have left anything to be told her by others but –*’

He broke off, and there was a moment’s silence. *Dorothea refrained from saying what was in her mind – how well she knew that there might be invisible barriers to speech between husband and wife. This was a point on which even sympathy might make a wound.* She returned to the more outward aspect of Lydgate’s position, saying cheerfully –

‘And if Mrs Lydgate knew that there were friends who would believe in you and support you, she might then be glad that you should stay in your place and recover your hopes – and do what you meant to do. Perhaps then you would see that it was right to agree with what I proposed about your continuing at the hospital. Surely you would, if you still have faith in it as a means of making your knowledge useful?’

Lydgate did not answer, and *she saw that he was debating with himself.*

‘You need not decide immediately,’ she said gently. ‘A few days hence it will be early enough for me to send my answer to Mr Bulstrode.’

Lydgate still waited, but at last turned to speak in his most decisive tones.

‘No; I prefer that there should be no interval left for wavering. *I am no longer sure enough of myself –* I mean of what it would be possible for me to do under the changed circumstances of my life. *It would be dishonourable to let others engage themselves to anything serious in dependence of me. I might be obliged to go away after all;* I see little chance of anything else. The whole thing is too problematic; *I cannot consent to be the cause of your goodness being wasted.* No – let the new hospital be joined with

the old infirmary, and everything go on as it might have done if I had never come. I have kept a valuable register since I have been there; I shall send it to a man who will make use of it,' he ended bitterly. 'I can think of nothing for a long while but getting an income.'

*'It hurts me very much to hear you speak so hopelessly,'* said Dorothea. 'It would be a happiness to your friends, who believe in your future, in your power to do great things, if you would let them save you from that. Think how much money I have; it would be like taking a burden from me if you took some of it every year till you got free from this fettering want of income. *Why should not people do these things?* It is so difficult to make shares at all even. This is one way.'

'God bless you, Mrs Casaubon!' said Lydgate, rising as if with the same impulse that made his words energetic, and resting his arm on the back of the great leather chair he had been sitting in. 'It is good that you should have such feelings. *But I am not the man who ought to allow himself to benefit by them. I have not given guarantees enough.*'

*'Now that is not brave,'* said Dorothea, – 'to give up the fight.'

'No, it is not brave,' said Lydgate, 'but if a man is afraid of creeping paralysis?' *Then, in another tone, 'Yet you have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you; [ . . . ] You will do me another great kindness then, and come to see my wife?'*

'Yes, I will. I remember how pretty she is,' said Dorothea, *into whose mind every impression of Rosamond had cut deep. 'I hope she will like me.'* [Chap 76: 728 – 30]

Dorothea's eagerness to see Rosamond confirms her in her current role of 'superaddressee'. Instead of dwelling on her own confusion over the possibility that Rosamond may have formed a romantic attachment with Will, Dorothea consciously redirects her attention to how she can be of service to both Lydgate and Rosamond. In so doing, she is able to provide an invaluable and unexpected source of hope for Lydgate. Furthermore, her 'outsideness' enables her to say the right things, ask the right questions: 'May I go and see her?', 'Would she accept my sympathy?', 'I hope she will like me'.

When Lydgate breaks off mid-sentence and lapses into silence, Dorothea understands, from her own experience, the 'invisible barriers to speech between a husband and wife', and turns the conversation back to her intended visit, instinctively realising that 'this was a point on which even sympathy might make a wound'. Again we see in her "the surplus of a good listener, [who has] an active (not a duplicating) understanding, a willingness to listen" (PDP 229). Dorothea not only listens to the actual words spoken but is also able to 'hear' what lies beneath them and to gauge internally beforehand the damaging effects that any direct response from her would be likely to have on Lydgate. She notices too, Lydgate's internal debate with himself as to the possibility of his remaining in Middlemarch. In Bakhtin's idiom what she sees could be described as the 'forces at work' as he attempts to reassess his innerly persuasive word in terms of others' innerly persuasive words (which would include both hers and Rosamond's).

Dorothea tries once more to urge Lydgate to accept an annual stipend from her and when Lydgate decisively rejects her proposal on the grounds of her 'goodness being wasted', she remonstrates strenuously with him for giving up so easily and 'speaking so hopelessly', a view

that would seem perfectly reasonable had he only himself to consider. In fact, her oppositional viewpoint is consonant with that of Bakhtin for whom (in order for there to be a real sense of becoming), “the future, and especially the near future in which we concretely act, must be seen as significant, valuable, and open to change” (MB 397). His implication is that failure to view the future in this way results in the impoverishment of both ethical responsibility and creativity. But Lydgate has Rosamond to consider, and while his negativity may cause him to be *creatively* impoverished, he realises only too well where his *ethical* responsibilities lie and, even if he is not open to the kind of change suggested by Dorothea, he knows that he must be answerable for his actions, not only to himself, but to Rosamond as well.

Answering his own question as to what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person Bakhtin submits that it is the “unity of answerability.” As he explains:

I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. But answerability entails guilt, or liability to blame. [. . .] The individual must become answerable through and through; all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability. [Art 1]

‘Answerability’ is precisely what Lydgate is trying to accomplish and, despite its being a painfully incomplete process, with Dorothea’s help he is able to enter into a partial sense of ‘becoming’. One of the immediate benefits visible in his encounter with Dorothea is that he begins to break down the barriers he has put up – of pride, insularity and patriarchal values. Comparing the novel to the epic, Bakhtin earmarks as one of its distinguishing features the fact that, unlike its predecessor, its hero “is *continually* growing with experience, changing in response to external events, and his or her own decisions [and that] choices not only *reveal* the hero or heroine, but *make* them” (MB 382). That Lydgate is able, for the first time, to speak freely with someone is a liberating experience for him, and one which is likely to contribute to his growth. As he says to Dorothea, “You have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you.” Real dialogue for Bakhtin, we may recall, “demands partners who encounter each other on the same plane” (MB 241). For Lydgate (who is unable even to talk to his friend, Farebrother, in such frank terms) this kind of dialogical encounter is an entirely new and welcome experience. As he later reflects on his ride home, “She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before – a fountain of friendship toward men – a man can make a friend of her” and “her love might help a man more than her money” (730).



Dorothea on her side had *immediately formed a plan* of relieving Lydgate from his obligation to Bulstrode, which she felt sure was a part, though small, of the galling pressure he had to bear. She sat down at once *under the inspiration of their interview*, and wrote a brief note, in which she pleaded that she had more claim than Mr Bulstrode had to the satisfaction of providing the money which had been serviceable to Lydgate – that it would be *unkind in Lydgate not to grant her the position of being his helper in this small matter, the favour being entirely to her who had so little that was plainly marked out for her to do with her superfluous money*. He might call her a creditor or by any other name if it did but imply that he granted her request. She enclosed a cheque for a thousand pounds and determined to take the letter with her *the next day when she went to see Rosamond*. [Chap 76: 730 – 31]

It would seem that, like Bakhtin, Dorothea sees the world as “one in which the actions that each of us undertakes actually count” (MB 397). Her swift response exemplifies an openness to being “answerable through and through” (*Art* 1) and also a very real sense of the immediate future in which she concretely acts, as being “significant, valuable and open to change” (MB 397). Despite being unable to contribute in the way she had originally envisaged, she is quickly able to formulate a new plan to accommodate the changed circumstances in which her kind words are concretised into acts around which she wraps her responsibility (MB 70). Wording her letter in such a way as to avoid any feeling of obligation or indebtedness towards her is indicative of her keen insight into Lydgate’s character. Thus is she able to relieve his financial situation without injuring his pride. Sensing that relief must come soon or not at all, she wastes no time in visiting Rosamond and delivering the letter.

However, when she enters the Lydgates’ drawing room a shock awaits her as, seated very close to each other on the sofa, she sees Will and Rosamond. Before she can retreat unseen Will leans towards Rosamond, clasps both her hands in his and speaks to her in what appears to Dorothea to be an attitude of intimacy. When they notice her she manages to gather herself sufficiently to excuse her intrusion and ask Rosamond to give Lydgate her letter before bowing and exiting the room.

Even though the ensuing conversation between Will and Rosamond clearly does not exemplify the positive aspects of dialogue which shape ‘real becoming’, I have included it here, partly to maintain the flow of the narrative but more importantly because it is a climactic scene. As we recall, it was initially Rosamond’s intention to break with her usual self-containment and pour out her heart to Will in the full expectation of a positive response. Unfortunately for her Will’s goals are poles apart from hers and Dorothea’s untimely entrance is the catalyst that brings about a reversal of what Rosamond had intended; Will becomes the speaker and she the listener as he unleashes all his pent-up anger and frustration. The turn their conversation takes provides a useful example of how things can go awry when people do not encounter each other “on the

same plane” (MB 241). The excerpt that follows is somewhat lengthy but I felt that this rather unexpected and singular encounter between Rosamond and Will would lose much of its impact were I to divide it into smaller sections. Hence, my decision to leave it intact.

Rosamond and Will stood motionless – they did not know how long – he looking towards the spot where Dorothea had stood, and she looking towards him *with doubt*. It seemed an endless time to Rosamond, in whose inmost soul there was hardly so much annoyance as *gratification* from what had just happened. *Shallow natures dream of an easy sway over the emotions of others, trusting implicitly in their own petty magic to turn the deepest streams, and confident, by pretty gestures and remarks, of making the thing that is not as though it were.* She knew that Will had received a severe blow, but *she had been little used to imagining other people’s states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes; and she believed in her own power to soothe or subdue.* Even Tertius, that most perverse of men, was always subdued in the long-run: events had been obstinate, but still Rosamond would have said now, as she did before her marriage, that *she never gave up what she had set her mind on.*

She put out her arm and laid the tips of her fingers on Will’s coat-sleeve.

‘*Don’t touch me!*’ he said, *with an utterance like the cut of a lash, darting from her,* and changing from pink to white and back again, as if his whole frame were tingling with the pain of the sting. He *wheeled round* to the other side of the room and stood opposite to her, with the tips of his fingers in his pockets and his head thrown back, looking *fiercely* not at Rosamond but at a point a few inches away from her.

She was *keenly offended*, but the *signs* she made of this were such as *only Lydgate was used to interpret.* She became *suddenly quiet* and seated herself, untying her hanging bonnet and laying it down with her shawl. Her *little hands* which she folded before her were very *cold.*

It would have been safer for Will in the first instance to have taken up his hat and gone away; but he had felt no impulse to do this; on the contrary, *he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond with his anger.* [. . .] In *flute-like tones of sarcasm* she said,

‘You can easily go after Mrs Casaubon and explain your preference.’

‘Go after her!’ he *burst out, with a sharp edge in his voice.* ‘*Do you think she would turn to look at me, or value any word I ever uttered to her again at more than a dirty feather? – Explain! How can a man explain at the expense of a woman!*’

‘You can tell her what you please,’ said Rosamond, *with more tremor.*

‘*Do you suppose she would like me better for sacrificing you? She is not a woman to be flattered because I made myself despicable – to believe that I must be true to her because I was a dastard to you.*’

He began to move about with *the restlessness of a wild animal* that sees prey but cannot reach it. Presently he *burst* out again –

‘I had no hope before – not much – of anything to come. *But I had one certainty – that she believed in me.* Whatever people had said or done about me, *she believed in me.* – *That’s gone! She’ll never again think me anything but a paltry pretence – too nice to take heaven except upon flattering conditions, and yet selling myself for any devil’s change by the sly. She’ll think of me as an incarnate insult to her, from the first moment we . . .*’

Will stopped as if *he had found himself grasping something that must not be thrown or shattered.* He *found another vent for his rage by snatching up Rosamond’s words again, as if they were reptiles to be throttled and flung off.*

‘Explain! Tell a man to explain how he dropped into hell! Explain my preference! *I never had a preference for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman’s living.*’

Rosamond, while these *poisoned weapons* were being hurled at her, was *almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence.* She had no sense of *chill resolute repulsion, of reticent self-justification such as she had known under Lydgate’s stormy displeasure;* all her sensibility was turned into a *bewildering novelty; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before.* When Will had ceased to speak she had become an image of *sickened misery:* her lips were pale, and her eyes had a *tearless dismay* in them. *If it had been Tertius who stood opposite to her, that look of misery would have been a pang to him, and he would have sunk by her side to comfort her, with that strong-armed comfort which she had often held very cheap.*

*Let it be forgiven to Will* that he had no such movement of pity. He had felt no bond beforehand to this woman who had *spoiled the ideal treasure of his life,* and he held himself blameless. He *knew* that he was cruel, but he had no relenting in him *yet.*

After he had done speaking, he still *moved about, half in absence of mind*, and *Rosamond sat perfectly still*. At length Will, *seeming to bethink himself*, took up his hat, yet stood some moments *irresolute*. He had *spoken to her in a way that made a phrase of common politeness difficult to utter*; and yet, now that he had come to the point of going away from her *without further speech, he shrank from it as a brutality*; he felt *checked and stultified* in his anger. He walked towards the mantelpiece and leaned his arm on it, and waited in silence for – he hardly knew what. The vindictive fire was still burning in him, and *he could utter no word of retraction*; but it was nevertheless *in his mind* that having come back to this hearth where he had enjoyed a caressing friendship he had found calamity seated there – he had suddenly revealed to him a trouble that lay outside the home as well as in it. And it seemed a foreboding was pressing upon him as with slow pincers: – *that his life might come to be enslaved by this helpless woman who had thrown herself upon him in the dreary sadness of her heart*. But he was in gloomy rebellion against the fact that his quick apprehensiveness foreshadowed to him, and when his eyes fell on Rosamond's *blighted face* it seemed to him that he was the more pitiable of the two: *for pain must enter into its glorified life of memory before it can turn into compassion*.

And so they remained for many minutes, opposite each other, far apart, in *silence*; Will's face still possessed by a mute rage, and Rosamond's by a mute misery. The *poor thing* had *no force to fling out any passion in return*; the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her *little world* was in ruins and she felt herself *tottering in the midst of a lonely bewildered consciousness*.

*Will wished that she would speak* and bring some mitigating shadow across *his own cruel speech, which seemed to stand staring at them both in mockery of any attempt at revived fellowship*. But she *said nothing*, and at last *with a desperate effort over himself*, he asked, 'Shall I come and see Lydgate this evening?'

'If you like,' Rosamond answered, just audibly.

[Chap 78: 739 – 42]

What strikes one immediately is that, although she is initially secretly pleased about what just happened, for the first time Rosamond experiences a level of uncertainty as she awaits Ladislav's reaction. In lieu of speech she tentatively touches Will's coat-sleeve but he instantly recoils and repulses her with a sharp directive not to touch him. His unqualified reaction has overtones of the 'authoritative word' – monologic in orientation, and permitting no opposition or emendation (Danow 25), and allowing no response from her other than to obey. Actually, Will exhibits striking similarities to Lydgate in the violent way in which he uses his whole body to express himself, 'darting from her', wheeling round, and glaring in Rosamond's general direction with his fingertips placed in his pockets. In fact, much of the same imagery used to describe Rosamond's disputes with Lydgate is used here now as she reverts to her old habit of communicating her displeasure by sitting in impenetrable silence with her cold 'little hands' folded before her. Lydgate has by now learned to read (and accommodate) her silences but in Will (in his present state of mind) she discovers someone utterly indifferent to her own wishes and the sarcasm which so successfully subdues Lydgate becomes conversely, the catalyst that invokes a vitriolic outburst from Will when a 'horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond', overcomes him.

What actually happens is that it is not Rosamond but Will who, incensed by Rosamond's shallow and facile solution (to go after Dorothea and explain his 'preference'), is provoked into revealing his innermost soul to a most unlikely recipient. He vents his rage by repeatedly 'snatching up

Rosamond's words again, as if they were reptiles to be throttled and flung off'. This kind of violent interaction closely conforms to David Danow's description of the negative correlative of dialogue in which Will's diatribe is essentially monologic and Rosamond is coercively silenced, thereby "evoking a new, distinctly negative connotation" (124). Her coerced silence is a far cry from Rosamond's habitual, self-inflicted silence but, as Danow points out, "silence (itself a possible mode of communication) is, after all, either self-imposed or imposed from without. In either case, the potential for dialogue is significantly reduced" (124).

Notwithstanding that Will and Rosamond's 'conversation' cannot be described as a fertile ground for growth yielded by a discourse of dialogic agreement, something surprising often occurs in this somewhat more "aggressive way of achieving dialogue" (Danow 134). Here, Will's aggression elicits from them both new and unfamiliar responses: Rosamond becomes uncharacteristically nervous and tentative while Will, in angry ejaculations of staccato speech as he prowls around the room as if in search of imaginary prey, finally finds articulation for the depth of his feelings for Dorothea.

A number of critics have made the point that Will's final declaration of love to Dorothea (Chap 83: 767 – 72) lacks the intensity of Lydgate and Rosamond's coming together (Chap 31: 291 – 2). Kerry McSweeney, for one, "regrets" that the importance of "Dorothea's physical union with the man she loves and desires" should be obscured by being pitched "in so minor a key" (118), but I would argue that the passionate outpouring of grief and loss with which Will finally gives voice to the magnificence of Dorothea to the unwilling ears of her polar opposite can only, and *should* only be followed by the tentative and understated simplicity of the later scene. That Eliot intended the current scene to be climactic is obvious from her careful prior preparation for it in the preceding chapter, in which her discussion of human nature foreshadows Bakhtin's later articulation of the nature of the interrelationship between self and other:

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. "If you are not good, none is good" – those little words may give a terrific meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse.

[Chap 77: 743 – 44]

The narrator goes on to describe Dorothea's "believing conception" of others as one of the "great powers of her womanhood" – a power that "had from the first acted strongly on Will Ladislaw" who "felt that in her mind he had found his highest estimate." She adds, 'And he was right there. In the months since their parting Dorothea had felt a delicious sad repose in their relation to each

other, as one which was inwardly whole and without blemish' (Chap 77: 734). Therefore, despite having had no hope before, Will at least had 'one certainty' – that Dorothea believed in him. But now the integral, unblemished wholeness upon which their entire relationship stands or falls is compromised.

Within his polemical outburst to Rosamond, which could be said to "strike a blow at the other's discourse" (PDP 195), there resides another, even more complex phenomenon, in which Ladislaw internalizes Dorothea's imagined response to him. Speech of this sort Bakhtin calls 'hidden dialogicality' which he explains as follows:

We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person" [PDP 197]

In *Little Dorrit* I discussed a similar instance of hidden dialogicality (Book II, Chap 6: 550 – 51) but the concept bears repeating here. Ladislaw's emotions and motives are so very different from those expressed by Fanny with regard to Mrs Merdle.

Although Will's invective is ostensibly directed at Rosamond it also has an inward propulsion as he imagines the way in which Dorothea will, henceforth, see him: as 'a paltry presence', as someone who will settle for 'devil's change' and 'an incarnate insult to herself'. Bakhtin distinguishes this type of *internal* dialogism from the sort that encounters "an alien word within the object itself" (such as would be the case if Will were speaking to Dorothea directly). Internal dialogism bears a more "subjective, psychological, and (frequently) random character, sometimes crassly accommodating, sometimes provocatively polemical" (DiN 282). Will's response to Rosamond's suggestion that he might 'explain' his feelings to Dorothea is a case in point: 'Explain! How can a man explain at the expense of a woman! [. . .] Do you suppose she would like me better for sacrificing you? She is not a woman to be flattered because I made myself despicable – to believe that I must be true to her because I was a dastard to you'. Internally dialogising what he believes to be Dorothea's understanding of the scene she has just witnessed, he becomes provocatively polemical toward Rosamond, at whose door he clearly lays much of the blame for the situation he now finds himself to be in. His outrage at having been so horribly compromised in the eyes of Dorothea, drives him to cruelty as he rams home the reality that, for him, 'no other woman exists', and that he would 'rather touch [Dorothea's] hand if it were dead, than [he] would touch any other woman's living'.

For Rosamond, Will's objectification and vilification is devastating to the point of her 'almost losing the sense of her identity' and waking into 'a bewildering novelty' of 'some new terrible existence' in which she feels 'a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before' and in which she feels herself 'tottering in the midst of a lonely bewildered consciousness'. Here we perceive the tragic potential that inheres in the restriction of dialogical interaction. As David Danow explains:

In the 'monologic, self-negating domain, in which the double-voiced word is essentially denied the right to be heard, the shared rich potential of the dialogically engaged self and other yields to what might be termed instead, self and object'. By declaring the other, in effect, an object – or muted receiver – of the self's unresponsive authoritative word, the one reduces the other's as well as one's own self-fulfilling potential in the process. [64]

That said, the real question is whether Ladislav's tirade has any positive effect on either of them and I would argue that, in the long term, it most certainly induces growth of sorts – an argument to which I intend to return shortly but, for now, will confine myself to Bakhtin's maxim that "our own discourse is *slowly* wrought out of other's words that have been acknowledged and assimilated" (DiN 345 – emphasis added), and his oft-stated belief that "the creation of an integral self is a work of a lifetime" (MB 31). However, even in terms of the immediate present one cannot categorically state that this encounter has no beneficial aspect, for it forces them both to confront new and surprising aspects of themselves. Under assault from Will's 'poisoned weapons' Rosamond experiences an unprecedented and *real* feeling of dismay, terror, and abject misery for which she has no easy remedy other than the signs that 'only Lydgate was used to interpret' but whose comfort 'she had often held very cheap'. But neither 'chill resolute repulsion' nor 'reticent self-justification' are likely to hold any sway over Will, who 'had felt no bond beforehand to this woman who had spoiled the ideal treasure of his life', and whose verbal warfare signals 'the collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained', rendering her mute and listless. Silent response, which was once her chosen weapon of attack, now signals utter defeat, in the ruination of 'her little world'. However, it can be argued that the fictional world that she has so carefully erected is self-defeating and that its collapse may have fortuitous consequences for her own personal growth. At the very least, at least for the moment, she is able to her perceive life without the illusory protective shield afforded by 'pretendship' and, although it is not a pretty prospect, it has the potential to awaken her to a different perception of self, in which a different 'way of becoming', however remote, is nevertheless a possibility.

There is no doubt, however, that the initial impact of this kind of discourse is destructive and they both experience considerable difficulty in dealing with the aftermath of uneasy silence. Consumed by self-pity, Will ('let it be forgiven' him!) is unable and unwilling to offer any retraction or ameliorating words to the stunned and distraught Rosamond. Actually, neither is able to provide for the other the kind of dispassionate sympathy Dorothea seems able to summon or, as Bakhtin would say, neither can supply the necessary 'outsideness' for 'live entering' into another, and without which integral wholeness cannot be achieved (MB 242). All Will is able think of now is how to take his leave in a way that does not further aggravate the present situation or impact negatively on his future relationship with Lydgate.

A distinguishing feature of the novel, as Bakhtin sees it, is that it places greatest value on the immediate future "in which real problems must be solved and in which real becoming takes place" (MB 421). It understands 'presentness': "the sense of time as it is lived, the relation of that time to the past, and the value of the immediate future to which it is oriented" (MB 423). In "Epic and Novel," Bakhtin offers the following explanation of the present's orientation to the future:

The present, in its so-called 'wholeness' (although it is, of course, never whole) is in essence and in principle inconclusive; by its very nature it demands continuation, it moves into the future, and the more actively and consciously it moves into the future, the more tangible and indispensable its inconclusiveness becomes. [EaN 30]

Whichever way Will looks at it he cannot find a solution to his present problem. As both he and Rosamond are too wrapped up in their own hurt to be able to speak, a lengthy, almost contrapuntal silence ensues in which Will moves around half absent-mindedly in response to Rosamond's 'perfect stillness' and in which her look of 'mute misery' is countered by his own 'mute anger'. The narrator begs us to forgive his lack of sympathy for Rosamond's feelings on account of the rawness of his own feelings (or, perhaps, simply because she favours him over Rosamond) and his horror, 'pressing down on him as with slow pincers' at the thought that he may have unwittingly become enslaved by 'this helpless women who has thrown herself upon him in the dreary sadness of her heart'. Even though his pain is still too new and acute for him to have compassion for hers, to his credit, he does realise that, in view of his past, present and possibly future friendship with the Lydgates, he cannot simply leave Rosamond with his dreadful words resounding in her ears. His dilemma sets up a convoluted internal dialogue in which he "takes a sideward glance" (PDP 196) at how she is reacting to his previous words and what her likely response would be to whatever action he now decides to take.

Citing Jan Mukařovsky's understanding that monologue results in a single speaker articulating a point of view in the face of another's passivity – that is, silence, Danow points out that in Bakhtin's estimation, silence need not be simple passivity but “is a possible means of communication that can be “either self-imposed or imposed from without” (124). In this instance, Will feels charged to say *something* but is, simultaneously, ‘checked and stultified’ by his own anger. He is aware, too that he *consciously* casts out from his mind Rosamond's own obvious need for sympathy (believing *his* claim for sympathy to be the stronger of the two) but he understands the compounded brutality of his simply going away without further communication. Consequently he wishes that ‘she would speak and bring some mitigating shadow across his own cruel speech’. But when Rosamond either will not or cannot oblige, ‘the poor thing’ having ‘no force to fling out any passion in return’, he is compelled, ‘with a desperate effort over himself’, to enquire lamely (before leaving) whether he should return in the evening to see Lydgate.

When Lydgate returns home, he finds Rosamond prostrate and in an ‘apparent torpor’ on her bed.

The perception that she was ill threw every other thought into the background. When he felt her pulse, *her eyes rested on him with more persistence than they had done for a long while, as if she felt some content that he was there. He perceived the difference in a moment*, and seating himself by her put his arm gently under her, and bending over her said, ‘*My poor Rosamond!* Has something agitated you?’ *Clinging* to him she fell into *hysterical sobbings* and cries, and for the next hour he did nothing but *soothe and tend* her. He *imagined* Dorothea had been to see her, and that all this effect on her nervous system, which *evidently involved some new turning towards himself*, was due to the excitement of the new impressions which that visit had raised. [Chap 78: 742]

Picking up on my earlier inference that all might not be lost as a result of Will's ‘coercively disproportionate’ conversation with Rosamond, one cannot help wondering whether their altercation does yield some measure of immediate gain, if not for her, then at least for Lydgate. Notwithstanding that the demise of her latest fantasy has left her feeling “unfocused, transparent, empty, alone” (MB 75), and despite Lydgate's initial ‘perception that she was ill’, he perceives a change for the better in her attitude towards him. So much so that he mistakenly believes that he has Dorothea to thank for intervening on his behalf and being instrumental in Rosamond's ‘new turning towards himself’. The unspoken language of her present silence conveys a radically different message from the norm, having in it an element of ‘some content that he was there’. Remarkably, she does not move away from his touch as is her customary fashion but, instead, clings to him as the full flood of her emotions is released in ‘hysterical sobbings and cries’. Whereas Rosamond has, up until now, epitomised “separation, disassociation and enclosure within the self” with its attendant loss of real self (PDP 287), one could argue that in so turning to Lydgate she begins to take baby steps in the direction of selfhood, especially since her response



to him affords him the opportunity for being a sympathetic other, for “live entering” or “living into another” in the hope of producing a “new understanding” which may hold the *possibility* of future dialogue (MB 54). Of course, the converse may be equally true – having had no luck with Will she instinctively looks for sympathy in someone she knows she can control!

Providing a sympathetic ear for Rosamond is uppermost in Dorothea’s thoughts as she makes her way to the Lydgates’ house the next morning. She is met at the door by Lydgate who, still under the illusion that Dorothea has already been to see Rosamond, is certain that his wife would be cheered to see her again. Instinctively, Dorothea does not disabuse him of this notion and Lydgate goes upstairs to inform Rosamond of Dorothea’s arrival.

Rosamond *dared not say no*. She *dared not with a tone of her voice* touch the facts of yesterday. Why had Mrs Casaubon come again? The answer was a blank which Rosamond could only fill up with *dread*, for Will Ladislav’s lacerating words had made every thought of Dorothea a *fresh smart* to her. Nevertheless, in her new humiliating uncertainty she *dared do nothing but comply*. She did not say yes, but she rose and let Lydgate put a light shawl over her shoulders, while he said, ‘I am going out immediately.’ Then something crossed her mind which prompted her to say, ‘Pray tell Martha not to bring any one else into the drawing-room.’ He led her down to the drawing-room door, and then turned away, *observing to himself that he was rather a blundering husband to be dependent for his wife’s trust in him on the influence of another woman*. [Chap 81: 753]

When Lydgate announces Dorothea’s arrival, Rosamond’s habitual silence again takes on new meanings as she internalizes the instability of the spoken word. She feels she dare not refuse a meeting with Dorothea but, after Will’s ‘lacerating words’, she dreads having to meet with the very person for whom she has been cast off and is afraid of being obliged to discuss the events of the previous day. Lydgate, meanwhile, is engaged in an inner conversation of his own, of a decidedly self-deprecating nature, in which he pre-emptively the negative opinion a ‘blundering husband’ may evoke in others. The disembodied ‘voice’ underscoring his self-mockery is unspecified – it could be Rosamond’s or, given his former pride, it could belong to society in general. Elements of double-voicing take place as Lydgate’s inner language seems to ‘cringe’ in the presence of an *imaginary* other’s word and he begins to engage in what Bakhtin refers to as the ‘hidden polemic’, in which “one word acutely senses alongside it someone else’s word speaking about the same object” (PDP 196).

For Lydgate, the act of self-parody may, at first glance, appear to be self-limiting and negative but there is a decidedly positive aspect to inner speech in which speakers reveal inner reservations. As Bakhtin reflects in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, “By objectifying myself ... I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relationship with myself” (122). ‘I’ thus fulfil the dual role of speaker and listener, addressor and addressee or, in David

Danow's reformulation, "the other, in other words, may be oneself (and most frequently is) – but that 'other' is also understood to be an *ever changing self*" (23).

Unable to find the words to refuse to see Dorothea, Rosamond submits to being accompanied downstairs by Lydgate.

Rosamond, *wrapping her soft shawl around her* as she walked towards Dorothea, was *inwardly wrapping her soul in cold reserve*. Had Mrs Casaubon come to say anything about Will? If so, it was a liberty that Rosamond resented; and she *prepared herself* to meet every word with *polite impassibility*. Will had bruised her pride too sorely for her to feel any compunction towards him and Dorothea; *her own injury seemed much the greater*. Dorothea was not only the "preferred" woman, but had also a formidable advantage in being Lydgate's benefactor; and to poor Rosamond's pained confused vision it seemed that Mrs Casaubon – *this woman who predominated in all things concerning her* – must have come now with the sense of *having the advantage*, and with *animosity* prompting her to use it. *Indeed, not Rosamond only, but any one else*, knowing the outer facts of the case, and not the simple inspiration on which Dorothea acted, might well have wondered why she came.

Looking like the lovely ghost of herself, her graceful slimness wrapped in her soft white shawl, the rounded infantine mouth and cheek inevitably suggesting *mildness and innocence*, Rosamond paused at *three yards' distance* from her visitor and *bowed*. But Dorothea, *who had taken off her gloves*, from an impulse which *she could never resist when she wanted a sense of freedom*, came *forward*, and with her *face full of a sad yet sweet openness*, put out her hand. Rosamond *could not avoid* meeting her glance, *could not avoid* putting her *small* hand into Dorothea's, which clasped it with *gentle motherliness*; and immediately a *doubt of her own prepossessions* began to stir within her. *Rosamond's eye was quick for faces*; she saw that Mrs Casaubon's face looked pale and changed since yesterday, yet *gentle*, and like the firm softness of her hand. *But Dorothea had counted a little too much on her own strength*: the clearness and intensity of her mental action this morning were the continuance of a nervous exultation which made her frame as dangerously responsive as a bit of finest Venetian crystal; and in looking at Rosamond, *she suddenly found her heart swelling, and was unable to speak* – all her effort was required to keep back the tears.

She succeeded in that, and the *emotion* only passed over her face like *the spirit of a sob*; but it added to Rosamond's impression that Mrs Casaubon's state of mind must be something quite different from what she had imagined.

So they sat down *without a word of preface on the two chairs that happened to be nearest, and happened also to be close together*; though Rosamond's notion when she first bowed was that *she should stay a long way off from Mrs Casaubon*. *But she ceased thinking how anything would turn out – merely wondering what would come*. Dorothea began to speak *quite simply*, gathering firmness as she went along. [Chap 81: 753 – 54]

Rosamond's and Dorothea's wordless exchange, within which so many conflicting emotions are portrayed, brings to mind the complexity of communication and that meaning is not solely dependent on vocal articulation but can be created *extralinguistically* (MB 125). What precedes and will continue to permeate the utterances of both Rosamond and Dorothea is the intense non-verbal communication conveyed by the outward expression of face, movement, gesture and proximity of the speakers. Rosamond's internal insecurity and external appearance of infantile innocence is accentuated by the twice-mentioned 'soft white shawl' in which she protectively wraps the 'pale ghost of herself'. At odds with her wraithlike appearance is the symbolic need to wrap 'her soul in cold reserve' as she nurses her own injury which seemed to her 'much the greater' than that of this woman who was not only preferred by Will but also happens to be her own husband's benefactor. Consequently she stands aloof from Dorothea and bows, prepared 'to

meet every word with polite impassivity'. But her intentions cannot withstand Dorothea's impulsive movement towards her or the 'gentle motherliness' with which she clasps Rosamond's hand in her own, ungloved one. Unable to avoid looking into Dorothea's eyes, she discerns in her visitor's face a sweet sadness and pallor that causes her rethink her former prejudices.

Actually, their encounter does not conform to what either had expected as Dorothea, similarly affected by Rosamond's fragile appearance, is also more moved than she had anticipated. The unspoken emotion that passes over her face like 'the spirit of a sob', acutely communicates to Rosamond, perhaps more than words, that her previous conjectures about Dorothea's wanting to 'use her advantage', and with 'animosity', were incorrect. Consequently, in direct contrast to the rehearsed 'alibi for being' she usually employs, in which self-justification is purchased at the expense of the project of selfhood and integrity (MB 31), Dorothea's quiet influence shocks her into an unprecedented response in which she desists from attempting to pre-programme or regulate the future. Instead, she gives herself over to 'merely wondering what would come'.

As opposed to the notion of *finalization*, which denotes a closing off of creative becoming, Bakhtin advances the notion of *unfinalizability* which, despite its being an etymologically negative term, he defines positively, to specify its nature and function in our lives (MB 38) and depict the world as an open place (MB 45). As we may recall, unfinalizability designates a complex of values Bakhtin holds to be crucial for real becoming: "innovation, 'surprisingness', the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity" (MB 36 – 7), all of which are orientated towards the future. Rosamond's simple act of being open to events thus allows her a real opportunity for future growth.

The narrator has already prepared her readers for a possible change in Rosamond's attitude by encouraging them to reflect on the fact that most people in 'poor' Rosamond's situation would have had similar antagonistic feelings towards a "'preferred'" someone who 'had predominated in all things concerning [them]'. This is just one of many examples of Eliot's profound psychological insight into both her characters and people in general. Above all, she is determined to be equitable and open-minded and seems to want to encourage a similar attitude in her readers as she guides us into weighing up *all* the facts before making snap decisions about anything or anyone. By this means, too, she again catapults her novel into the same *chronotope*, or temporal and spatial category as those of her current, and even future readers.

Morson and Emerson make the point that, in his discussion of narrative genres, Bakhtin stresses the way in which each genre represents the present. “Does a given genre describe the present as open or closed, conclusive or inconclusive?” they ask, answering that, for Bakhtin “only the novel could come close to representing the ‘open present’” (MB 46 – 7). In delineating some of the differences between epic and novel, Bakhtin advances the view that whilst reality in the novel is neither “inevitable” nor “arbitrary” it is only “one of many possible realities” and bears within itself “other possibilities” (EaN 36). The same goes for the individual whose “epic wholeness” disintegrates in a novel as a result of a crucial tension that develops between the external and internal being which denies a character the ability to “inhabit” the kind of form that could conclusively embody all his or her human potential (EaN 37). This odd incongruity of a character with his or her self is brought about by the character’s being in “the zone of contact with an inconclusive present (and consequently with the future),” thus creating unrealized potential and demands, and a need for a future. Because the future exists it “ineluctably touches upon the individual, has its roots in him” (EaN 37). Significantly, Bakhtin maintains that this “surplus of unfleshed-out humanness” is not limited only to characters in a novel but also pertains to and is realised in the author’s point of view (EaN 37) – a point of view Eliot would surely have found confluent with her propensity for encouraging reader-participation in her assessment of her characters and the choices they make.

Rosamond surprises us in other ways too. Quite distinct from her usual self-absorption, she notices Dorothea’s pale appearance and responds to its gentleness – a response that elicits the unexpected in Dorothea, who suddenly finds her previous strength of will deserting her as her heart swells and she has difficulty in speaking. Rosamond sees the emotion that passes over Dorothea’s face ‘like the spirit of a sob’ and it adds to her impression that she has been wrong about Dorothea and they sit down, we are informed, ‘on the two chairs that happened to be nearest, and happened to be close together’, despite Rosamond’s prior wish to maintain a healthy distance between herself and Dorothea.

The future of Rosamond and Lydgate is Dorothea’s primary concern and, with exquisite tact, she finally requests permission to speak of the injustices shown towards Lydgate, pointing out that he has warm friends who, she believes, would wish to vindicate him.

The *cordial, pleading tones* which seemed to *flow with generous heedlessness* above all the facts which had filled Rosamond’s mind as grounds of obstruction and hatred between her and this woman, *came as soothingly as a warm stream over her shrinking fears*. Of course Mrs Casaubon had the facts in her mind, but she was not going to speak of anything connected with them. The *relief* was too great for Rosamond *to feel much else* at the moment. She answered *prettily*, in the new ease of her soul –

‘I know you have been very good. I shall like to hear anything you will say to me about Tertius.’

We perceive in Rosamond the ‘tension’ that develops between the external and the internal being, elicited by Dorothea’s ‘cordial, pleading tones’, and we are reminded once again of the importance of tone in determining the reception of an *utterance*, which Bakhtin distinguishes from a mere *sentence*. As previously discussed, whereas for Bakhtin the sentence is simply a traditional unit of language, he regards the utterance as a unit of *speech communication* in which someone, in anticipation of a response, communicates something to someone else. As he says: “One does not exchange sentences any more than one exchanges words (in the strict linguistic sense) or phrases. One exchanges utterances that are [partially] constructed from language units” (SG& 75).

Bakhtin is especially sensitive to the fact that sometimes tone is all that is needed to supply meaning. In his estimation, “the basic elements constituting the form of the utterance are first of all the expressive sound of the word, its intonation, then the choice of words” (Danow 131). This is precisely the case in the above excerpt: Rosamond is so relieved by the generous tone of Dorothea’s voice that she is barely cognizant of the actual words Dorothea speaks, other than to conclude that it is not Dorothea’s intention to speak of the tête-à-tête she had witnessed between herself and Will the previous day. But *Middlemarch* is no romantic fairy tale – it is a novel about ‘real’ characters with ‘real’ flaws, and relief alone does not magically transform Rosamond’s personality. As we recall, in Bakhtin’s view, creating an integral self can never really be completed (MB 31) and Rosamond is only at the beginning of that journey, unable as yet fully to convert her inner reflections into a similar outward response. Consequently, her immediate answer does not reflect what she is really feeling but is largely determined by the ideological image she wishes to portray and so she answers Dorothea ‘prettily’ with her customary social charm. To her credit she does, however, acknowledge Dorothea’s kindness and show a willingness to hear what Dorothea has to say.

In conveying to Rosamond the gist of her conversation with Lydgate, Dorothea continues to show sensitivity for Rosamond’s feelings, insisting that the only reason he confided in her was because she had boldly asked him to (755).

Dorothea’s face had become *animated*, and as it *beamed* on Rosamond very close to her, *she felt something like bashful timidity before a superior*, in the presence of this *self-forgetful ardour*. She said, with *blushing embarrassment*, ‘*Thank you: you are very kind.*’

‘And he felt that he had been so wrong not to pour out everything about this to you. *But you will forgive him.* It was *because he feels so much more about your happiness than anything else – he feels his life bound into one with yours*, and it *hurts* him more than anything, *that his misfortunes must hurt*

*you*. He could speak to me because I am an indifferent person. And then I asked him if I might come to see you; because I felt so much for his trouble and yours. That is why I came yesterday, and why I am come to-day. Trouble is so hard to bear, is it not? – ***How can we live and think that any one has trouble – piercing trouble – and we could help them, and never try?***

Dorothea, completely swayed by the feeling that she was uttering, ***forgot everything but that she was speaking from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's***. The emotion had wrought itself more and more into her utterance, till the tones might have gone to one's very marrow, like a low cry from some suffering creature in the darkness. And she had ***unconsciously*** laid her hand again on the ***little*** hand that she had pressed before.

***Rosamond, with an overmastering pang, as if a wound within her had been probed, burst into hysterical crying*** as she had done the day before when she clung to her husband.

Poor Dorothea was feeling a great wave of her own sorrow returning over her – her thought being drawn to the possible share that Will Ladislav might have in Rosamond's mental tumult. She was beginning to fear that she should not be able to suppress herself enough to the end of this meeting, and while her hand was still resting on Rosamond's lap, though the hand underneath it was withdrawn, she was struggling against her own rising sobs. She tried to master herself with the thought that ***this might be a turning-point in three lives*** – not in her own; no, there the irrevocable had happened, but – in those three lives which were ***touching hers*** with the solemn neighbourhood of danger and distress. The fragile creature who was crying close to her – ***there might still be time to rescue her*** from the misery of false incompatible bonds; ***and this moment was unlike any other***: she and Rosamond would never be together again with the same thrilling consciousness of yesterday within them both. She felt the relations between them to be peculiar enough to give her a peculiar influence, though she had no conception that the way in which her own feelings were involved was fully known to Mrs Lydgate.

It was a ***newer crisis in Rosamond's experience*** that even Dorothea could imagine: she was under the first great shock that had ***shattered her dream-world*** in which she had been easily ***confident of herself and critical of others***; and this ***strange unexpected manifestation of feeling*** in a woman whom she had approached with a ***shrinking aversion and dread***, as one who must necessarily have a jealous hatred towards her, ***made her soul totter all the more with a sense that she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her***.

When Rosamond's convulsed throat was subsiding into calm, and she withdrew the handkerchief with which she had been ***hiding her face, her eyes met Dorothea's as helplessly*** as if they had been blue flowers. ***What was the use of thinking about behaviour after this crying?*** And Dorothea looked ***almost as childish***, with the ***neglected trace of a silent tear***. ***Pride was broken down between these two***.

[Chap 81: 755 – 57]

Earlier I explored the way in which Lydgate's 'innerly persuasive discourse' was enhanced by responding to Dorothea's innerly persuasive voice and suggested that Rosamond was incapable of a similar response – an indictment I now wish to revisit and qualify. In this encounter with Dorothea a new and different type of consciousness begins to emerge, as Dorothea's 'animated' and 'self-forgetful ardour' steals over Rosamond and elicits from her an uncharacteristically shy and embarrassed response, quite distinct from the idiolect she habitually falls back on. In Bakhtin's view, what actually occurs "is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse" when thought takes over and "begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way," rejecting what he calls "those congeries of discourse that do not matter to us; that do not touch us" (DiN 345). This is precisely what seems to be happening to Rosamond when she encounters Dorothea. That Rosamond's awe seems to be inspired rather more by Dorothea's altruistic nature and radiant face, than by her societal status is in itself significant, for Rosamond is used to combining the two aspects of being into a single formula, in which social class equals personal worth.

In describing the extent of Lydgate's pain for the hurt he has caused Rosamond, to 'whom he is bound' as one, and whose happiness he values beyond all else, Dorothea unconsciously covers Rosamond's hand with her own. The persuasive blend of gesture and Dorothea's 'speaking from the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's' has a powerful influence over the latter who responds by stripping herself bare of all social niceties and giving herself over to floods of hysterical tears, 'as if a wound within her had been probed'. In effect, what has been ruptured is the once impenetrable membrane she had wrapped around her inner being, with the result that her particular brand of 'pretendship' with its attendant propensity for constructing an 'alibi for being' gives way to an unrehearsed and visceral response as she clings to Dorothea. Bakhtin uses the term 'assimilation' in order to describe the way in which the response of others plays a determining role in our own inner speech. This description corresponds with Dorothea's internal struggle in which she 'assimilates' the signs of Rosamond's distress and tries to reformulate her response accordingly. In so doing she also incarnates Bakhtin's perception of the "truly novelistic, mature and responsible self [who] knows a minimum of authoritative discourse." Morson and Emerson remind us that it is not Bakhtin's intention to suggest that "mere hostility to authority is a mark of maturity". Likewise, he does not mean to "condemn agreement with authority as a mark of immaturity or irresponsibility." What he actually means is that "to take on responsibility with respect to a discourse, or to any kind of authority, it is necessary not to dislike it, but to enter into dialogue with it – that is, to *test*, *assimilate*, and *reaccent* it" (MB 220). In an earlier discussion about Rosamond's former 'codified' responses, I made the point that, so long as it remains as such in the psyche, 'authoritative discourse' is closed to growth and 'creative becoming' or 'unfinalizability'. As Morson and Emerson put it: "If the psyche were composed only of [authoritative discourse], then people would 'fully coincide with themselves', be defined once and for all in a way potentially knowable to all" (MB 219) thus stripping them of any potential for change, personal growth and real becoming.

Because Dorothea is labouring under a misconception regarding the nature of Rosamond and Will's relationship, her response is even more pertinent. Her own fraught emotions are eventually mastered by the thought that a constructive response from her might be able to exert a positive influence on the three lives conjoined with hers in distressful circumstances. Bakhtin, who understands psychology in terms of inner speech that has been "internalized and brought into interaction," is of the opinion that novelistic discourse is especially suited to "portraying the dynamics of psychological life" (MB 343). His feeling is that, "When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between

internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse” (DiN 345). Internally persuasive dialogue is seen as a particular way of combining many voices from within. As he explains:

In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-somebody else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*. [DiN 345 – 46]

Sometimes, on reflection, innerly persuasive words may become less persuasive, as if “overlaid with quotation marks” but at other times they become even more assertive in their “persuasiveness through all layers” (MB 343). This latter aspect holds true for Dorothea, whose innerly persuasive words (‘half-hers’) are strengthened by Lydgate’s affirmation of Rosamond (half-somebody else’s).

That she realises that ‘this moment was unlike any other’ and that she has the chance of rescuing Rosamond from ‘incompatible bonds’ can also be located in the Bakhtinian notion of unrepeatability in which, as previously discussed, entails “understanding the self at particular moments and in unrepeatable circumstances” when acting or making ethical decisions (MB 177). Discussing ‘creative becoming’, in what they call Bakhtin’s “oft noted equanimity, even benevolence,” Morson and Emerson cite Bakhtin’s implicit case against the “everyday temptations of envy, passivity, and despair” as follows: “because of the multiple factors particularizing me, *no one else* is ever in a position to do what I, at this moment can do” (KFP [TPA] 112 – 13<sup>2</sup>. MB 43). Seemingly able to put aside her own feelings for Will, Dorothea is fully able to appreciate the uniqueness of the moment in which she and Rosamond find themselves and her recognition of its unrepeatable nature motivates her to engage with Rosamond in a sensitive, tactful and empathetic way, with the objective of restoring her feelings for her husband.

Bakhtin submits that in addressing a character, the author may make use of a kind of ‘*addressive surplus*’ which “should never be used as an ambush, as a chance to sneak up and attack from behind.” Instead, “this is an honest and open surplus, dialogically revealed to the other person, a surplus expressed by the addressed and not the secondhand word” (PDP 299). This ‘addressive surplus’ is often found in novelistic characters and, as we have already discussed during the



course of Dorothea's conversation with Lydgate, it resides in a good and willing listener with an active understanding (PDP 299). Once again, Dorothea provides this kind of addressive surplus – she is able to maintain her 'outsideness' and is willing to make proper use of it. Accordingly, Dorothea asks the right questions in the right kind of empathetic way and, in so doing, she invites Rosamond to reveal and outgrow herself, just as she had previously done with Lydgate.

Rosamond's initial shock at the demolition of her 'dream-world' is exacerbated by Dorothea's extraordinary kindness and this causes her to review her own prior self-confidence and critical views of others. Feeling quite lost in an 'unknown world' she begins to realise the inadequacy of received models of social behaviour in this new 'unknown world' and responds quite naturally by withdrawing the handkerchief used to hide her face and looking helplessly into Dorothea's eyes, which register a similar vulnerability. This kind of mutual 'interillumination' is dwelt on by Bakhtin who observes:

I *can* strive in an unmediated way for self-preservation and well-being, defend my life with all the means at my disposal, and even strive for power and the subjection of others, but I can never experience within myself in any unmediated way that which constitutes me as a legal person, because my legal personality is nothing else but my being guaranteed certainty of being granted recognition by *other* people – a certainty I experience as *their* obligation in relation to myself. [Art 49]

Up until now, Rosamond's definitive measure for self-evaluation has been subject only to her view of herself as exemplifying, in every way, the dictums of Mrs Lemon's finishing school, the consequence of which has led to a lifetime of pretendership. Now, for the first time, she is able to acknowledge the value of recognition and acceptance bestowed upon her by an outside 'other' in the form of Dorothea's unqualified kindness that becomes the 'gift' of grace, by which means Rosamond is properly authenticated. The effect on Rosamond is, at first, shattering then quite startling as she begins to shed her artificial skin, so to speak, and starts emerging as a more natural and open being who registers the utter inadequacy and inappropriateness of socially 'correct' behaviour at a time such as this in which pride has been broken down, and both must try to assimilate what has just happened between them. Bakhtin's point is that these moments of real self-validation are simply not possible without the finalizing outsideness provided by an 'authentic other' who fleshes out and fills in one's perception of oneself. Dorothea is here the authenticating outside other whose own openness and vulnerability provide the catalyst for growth in Rosamond. Rosamond's dialogical response also elevates her status to that of a genuine other consciousness which allows, in turn, finalization or validation of the ongoing project of selfhood in Dorothea.

In much the same way that the mutual interillumination of languages occurs in the context of heteroglossia, by means of which languages are changed with each subsequent use as they dialogically encounter and respond to other languages so, too, does the phenomenon of selfhood change and grow when it enters into a dialogically charged relationship with another being. The result is that participants are able to create something new, and both their faces reflect a kind of childish helplessness as pride is broken down between them.

‘We were talking about your husband,’ Dorothea said, with some *timidity*. ‘I thought his looks were sadly changed with suffering the other day. I had not seen him for many weeks before. **He said he had been feeling very lonely in his trial; but I think he would have borne it all the better if he had been able to be quite open with you.**’

‘Tertius is so angry and impatient if I say anything,’ said Rosamond, imagining that he had been complaining of her to Dorothea. ‘He ought not to wonder that I object to speak to him on painful subjects.’

‘**It was himself he blamed for not speaking,**’ said Dorothea. ‘What he said of you was, that he could not be happy in doing anything which made you unhappy – that his marriage was of course a bond which must affect his choice about everything; and for that reason he refused my proposal that he should keep his position at the Hospital, because that would bind him to stay in Middlemarch, and he would not undertake to do anything which would be painful to you. **He could say that to me because he knows that I had much trial in my marriage,** from my husband’s illness, which hindered his plans and saddened him; **and he knows that I have felt how hard it is to walk always in fear of hurting another who is tied to us.**’

Dorothea waited a little; she had discerned a *faint pleasure stealing over Rosamond’s face*. But there was no answer, and she went on, with a gathering tremor, ‘Marriage is so unlike everything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings. Even if we loved someone else better than – than those we were married to, it would be no use’ – poor Dorothea, in her palpitating anxiety, could only *seize her language brokenly* – ‘I mean, marriage drinks up all our power of giving or getting any blessedness in that sort of love. I know it may be very dear – but it murders our marriage – and then the marriage stays with us like a murder – and everything else is gone. And then our husband – if he loved and trusted us, and we have not helped him, but made a curse of his life ...’

Her voice had sunk very low: there was a *dread upon her of presuming too far*, and of speaking *as if she herself were perfection addressing error*. She was too much preoccupied with her own anxiety, to be aware that Rosamond was trembling too; and filled with the need to express *pitying fellowship rather than rebuke, she put her hands on Rosamond’s*, and said with more agitated rapidity. – ‘I know, I know that the feeling may be very dear – it has taken hold of us unawares – it is so hard, it may seem like death to part with it – and we are weak – I am weak –’

*The waves of her own sorrow, from out of which she was struggling to save another*, rushed over Dorothea with conquering force. She stopped in speechless agitation, not crying, but feeling as if she were being inwardly grappled. Her face had become of a *deathlier paleness*, her lips trembled, and she pressed her hands helplessly on the hands that lay under them.

*Rosamond, taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own – hurried along in a new movement which gave all things some new, awful, undefined aspect – could find no words*, but involuntarily *she put her lips to Dorothea’s forehead* which was very near her, and then for a minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck. [Chap 81: 757 – 58]

The above exchange provides a powerful example of the fact that even the most simple and direct utterances are half one’s own and half another’s (DiN 345) and are therefore always open to interpretation determined by a host of influential factors including the emotions, predispositions and presuppositions of both speaker and listener. One of the reasons why Bakhtin favours the novel over other genres has to do with its ability to orchestrate the “diverse languages of everyday life into a heterogeneous sort of whole” (MB 16) and the fact that it allows characters to grow as they struggle to shape their lives. The entire encounter between Dorothea and

Rosamond is fraught with the struggle for meaning against the diverse factors that shape each of their lives.

Despite the delicacy and timidity with which Dorothea relates the details of her interview with Lydgate, Rosamond reacts defensively, necessitating from Dorothea further careful explication of the strength of Lydgate's love for his wife. Lydgate, she says, was able to confide in her because he knew she had experienced a similar desire to protect her late husband from pain. For Bakhtin, "the dialogic sense of truth manifests unfinalizability by existing on the 'threshold' [. . .] of several interacting consciousnesses, a 'plurality' of 'unmerged voices'" (MB 236) which, even if they agree (as do Lydgate and Dorothea), they do so from different perspectives and a different understanding of the world. Bakhtin refers to these variously spoken perspectives of truth as 'voice ideas' (MB 237), the interaction of which produces a dialogue that potentially changes them and results in new insights and dialogues. Just as for Bakhtin the novelistic style is, in fact, a combination of styles, so too, selfhood is not a "particular voice within, but a particular way of combining many voices within" (MB 221). Dialogical truth, then, cannot ever be identical with the truth of another; rather it surfaces as a 'unified feel' in conversation (MB 237). Consequently Bakhtin observes in the Dostoevsky book:

It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that in principle cannot be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of every potential* and is born at every point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving truth is only one of many possible ways [in which] the genuine interaction of consciousness is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well.

[PDP 81]

As opposed to the monologic sense of truth then, a dialogical sense of truth emerges as "consciousness takes shape and never stops taking shape, as a process of interaction among authoritative and innerly persuasive discourse" (MB 221). Bakhtin uses the example of looking at oneself in the mirror with one's own and with other's eyes simultaneously to clarify his point that creative unity is not "an innate one-and-only" but a "dialogical *concordance* of unmerged twos or multiples." This happens because, as one's own eyes meet the other's eyes "an intersection of worldviews" and "an intersection of consciousness" takes place (PDP 289). Put simply, we depend on other *people* as the 'mirror' that defines us and tells us who we really are. Non-coincidence with self or dependence on a source outside of oneself is critical for a creative understanding which requires "both a gradual accumulation of real personal experience and the existence of genuine others as the ground for true learning" (MB 230). It is in this sense that we may understand Bakhtin's remark, "Quests for my own word are in fact quests for a word that is

not my own, a word that is more than myself; this is a striving to depart from one's own words, with which nothing essential can be said" (N70 – 71, 149. MB 230).

When Dorothea discerns a glimmer of pleasure in Rosamond's silence she is encouraged to continue, but her own self-conflictedness results in a breaking down of language. For Bakhtin, it is this self-conflictedness in novelistic characters that marks, for the novel, yet another point of departure from the epic. Whilst admitting that there are characters in the novel who think, act and talk "in compliance with the author's wishes" and exactly as they are supposed to, in his view, this type of "novelistic irreproachability" is very different from what he calls the "naive conflictedness" found in the epic – conflicted a conflictedness brought about by outer events (DiN 334 – 35). Novelistic self-conflictedness, on the other hand, is of the kind that requires a conscious effort for one to develop and grow as a character. Because a character lives in an ideological world of his own, rather than in the "unitary world of the epic", he has a unique perception of the world – one that is "incarnated in his action and in his discourse" (DiN 335). So it is with Dorothea, who, realising that she can never adequately express the whole of what she is trying to impart, without sounding peremptory or didactic, makes a *conscious effort* to communicate tenderly with Rosamond before the 'waves of her own sorrow from out of which she was struggling to save another' render her pale and speechless.

Words having escaped her, she is yet able to communicate the depth of her feelings by helplessly pressing her hands on Rosamond's and it is this open display of vulnerability that triggers a turning point in Rosamond, who, for the first time, becomes conscious of an emotion stronger than her own, one for which no 'pretty' words will suffice as a response. Instead she is 'hurried along in a new movement' in which she dispenses with social nicety and, instead, acts from the heart. Succumbing to Dorothea's kindness, she puts her own lips to Dorothea's forehead and clings to her. The two women, clasping each other 'as if they had been in a shipwreck', invokes a memory of another 'shipwreck' in which Rosamond and Lydgate are described as appearing to be 'adrift on one piece of wreck' (Chap 75: 719). However, in that instance, they look away from, and not towards each other, as Dorothea and Rosamond do now.

What Rosamond and Dorothea experience could be seen as a kind of 'nonmonologic unity', which Bakhtin claims is different from the 'unity of conformity' because it produces the real change or 'surprisingness' essential for creativity and growth of self, as opposed to the latter which, by conforming to a pre-existing pattern or system of laws, limits genuine development.

(MB 2). Real development takes place in the constant activity of the everyday, articulated by Morson and Emerson as being not only the source of all individual creativity but also that of all social change. In delineating Bakhtin's position they maintain that it is the prosaic therefore, "that is the truly interesting and the ordinary is what is most noteworthy" (MB 23). Bakhtin demands the unexpected and firmly believes that great authors are able to capture the everyday aspects of others in language that can help us appreciate the "richness, complexity, and the power of the most intimate and most ordinary exchanges" (MB 34) that we might otherwise have overlooked. This view largely coincides with Eliot's belief that a great artist should be able to provide a view of life in which, even the most selfish people can surprise themselves by paying attention to something outside of themselves (Pinney 270).

In the Dostoevsky book Bakhtin reflects on real-life situations:

We very keenly and subtly hear all those nuances in the speech of people surrounding us, and we ourselves work very skilfully with all these colors on the verbal palette. We very sensitively catch the smallest shift in intonation, the slightest interruption of voices in anything of importance to us. All those verbal sideways glances, reservations, loopholes, hints, thrusts do not slip past our ear, are not foreign to our lips. [PDP 201]

Although Rosamond has always had a keen ear for the shades, tones and nuances in another's speech, this is the first recorded instance of her being genuinely moved by altered speech patterns and signs of distress. Hence, her response to Dorothea, in the passage that follows, is uncharacteristically truthful.

'You are thinking what is not true,' said Rosamond, in an *eager half-whisper*, while *she was still feeling Dorothea's arms round her* – urged by a mysterious necessity to *free herself from something that oppressed her* as if it were blood-guiltiness.

They moved apart, *looking at each other*.

'When you came in yesterday – it was not as you thought,' said Rosamond in the same tone.

There was a movement of surprised attention in Dorothea. She expected a vindication of Rosamond herself.

'*He was telling me how he loved another woman, that I might know he could never love me,*' said Rosamond, getting more and more hurried as she went on. 'And now I think he hates me because – because you mistook him yesterday. He says it is through me that you will think ill of him – think that he is a false person. *But it shall not be through me*. He has never had any love for me – *I know he has not* – he has always thought slightly of me. He said yesterday that no other woman existed for him besides you. *The blame of what happened is entirely mine*. He said he could never explain to you – because of me. He said you would never think well of him again. But now I have told you, and he cannot reproach me any more.'

*Rosamond had delivered her soul under impulses which she had not known before. She had begun her confession under the subduing influence of Dorothea's emotion;* and as she went on she had *gathered the sense that she was repelling Will's reproaches, which were still like a knife-wound within her*.

The revulsion of feeling in Dorothea was too strong to be called joy. It was a tumult in which the terrible strain of the night and morning made a resistant pain: – she could only perceive that this would be joy when she had recovered her power of feeling it. Her immediate consciousness was one of immense sympathy without check; *she cared for Rosamond without struggle now*, and responded earnestly to her last words.

‘No, he cannot reproach you any more.’

[Chap 81: 758 – 59]

Drawing attention to the various systems of “value and expression,” or ‘languages’, that overlap, in a complex way, in *Middlemarch*, Ermarth points out that the system within which Rosamond functions is not unique to her alone; that an entire social group uses similar “practiced manners” to mark the boundaries of its knowledge.” “Learning otherwise,” she states, “as Rosy heroically does for at least a moment, involves nothing less than changing one’s language and the boundaries it provides and imposes” (“Negotiating *Middlemarch*”. Chase 118).

The boundaries from which Rosamond here seeks to free herself when she answers Dorothea truthfully instead of in her practised idiolect are, in Bakhtinian terms, the limits imposed by her always coinciding with herself. For Bakhtin, real freedom involves a radical non-coincidence of self. As Morson and Emerson explain, “As long as a difference can be charted between oneself and some other self, and between one’s remembered past and a creative reassessment of it, one possesses the conditions for creativity and freedom. One needs the limitations of one’s own past and the other selves” (MB 230). An individual’s separateness and specific place in time, space and culture are thus affirmed as a precondition for all dialogue and creativity as he or she interacts with, and is shaped by others.

Rosamond’s reassessment of her position and consequent half-whispered ‘confession’ would not have been possible had they not been ‘shaped’ by Dorothea’s non-judgemental acceptance and generosity toward her, compelling her to deliver ‘her *soul* under impulses which she had not known before’. Those impulses are directly attributable to Dorothea who, once again, appears to fulfil a role not dissimilar to that of Bakhtin’s imaginary superaddressee, whose voice is both innerly persuasive and authoritative and who is “always the loving other, the one who has special authority for me, because I will always agree with the story of my life that [s]he tells” (MB 217).

It is interesting that, whereas Bakhtin uses the term ‘spirit’ to describe an ‘I-for-myself’ experience from within (such as Dorothea’s ‘waves of her own sorrow’ and Rosamond’s hurt as a result of Will’s reproaches), he uses the word ‘soul’ for an ‘I-for-others’ experience which responds to another’s concrete need (MB 192 – 93). We have seen how Dorothea repeatedly conquers her own pain to achieve her goal of responding to Rosamond’s needs, but what is truly surprising in this passage is that Rosamond, too, sufficiently overcomes her ‘I-for-myself’ experience of dread, cold reserve and impassivity, in order to be able to surrender her ‘soul’ to Dorothea. Commenting on the somewhat paradoxical nature of the soul as perceived by Bakhtin,

Morson and Emerson describe it as a sort of oxymoron, simultaneously ‘social’ and ‘individual’ owing to its being the result of a complex process in which “others finalize me and I incorporate their finalization of me.” Quoting Bakhtin, they continue:

My soul is a moment of my inner, open-ended, task-oriented self (my spirit) that some other consciousness has temporarily stabilized, embodies, enclosed in boundaries, and returned to me ‘as a gift’ [. . .] (AiG [AH], pp. 89, 90<sup>1</sup>). ‘The soul is a gift of my spirit to the other’ (AiG [AH] p. 116). [. . .] Spirits [by contrast] are unfinalized, non-coincident with themselves, and always yet-to-be.

[MB 192 – 93]

While spirit is always ‘open’ and has a ‘loophole’, rhythm denotes closure in the present moment and implies a certain ‘hopelessness’ with regard to meaning – by denying it the possibility of *new* meaning (MB 193). However, as pointed out by Morson and Emerson:

I can be enriched by the other’s ‘rhythmicizing’ of me because I know that a particular image of me does not define me completely. But I can only be impoverished if I try to live as if another could rhythmicize me completely; such an attempt would be another path to ‘pretendship’. If I become alienated from myself, if I no longer live so as to generate value from myself, and if I try to live completely in and for the patterns set by others then I will readily assimilate myself to their rhythm. In that case, I will live as if I had no creativity, no loophole.

[MB 194]

Clearly Rosamond has fallen prey to all the negative aspects of ‘pretendship’ alluded to in the above quotation but, as if following Dorothea’s lead, Rosamond now also seems to understand the uniqueness of the particular moment in which *she* is in a position to do what no-one else can. In delivering her confession to Dorothea, she finally begins to take responsibility. By accepting full blame for what happened, she ‘signs her name’ to her actions and in so doing, begins to free herself of the mould in which she had previously cast herself. For Bakhtin, real freedom constitutes an ongoing event in daily life, one which is “inseparable from the ongoing demands of ethical responsibility” (MB 40). By admitting responsibility and by accepting Dorothea’s “finalizing outsideness” (MB 91), Rosamond is able to begin to reformulate a new, albeit tentative, definition of herself. That she has a chance to redefine herself is also attributable to her painful encounter with Will, which I previously intimated might have beneficial aspects. Those benefits are now in evidence: Rosamond opens up and allows Dorothea entry into her innermost being and, in so doing, embraces ethical choices that allow her begin to develop as a morally responsible being.

That said, growth is not a once-and-for-all occurrence and there still exists a great deal of self-preservation. Consequently, there is a triple awareness in ‘as she went on she gathered the sense that she was repelling Will’s reproaches, which were still like a knife-wound within her’ – her words belonging partly to Dorothea (whom she wishes to reassure), partly to Will (whom she

wishes to repel) and partly to herself (in which it is obvious that she still harbours a deep sense of her own hurt). Nevertheless the benefits of her confession extend to both Will and Dorothea. Will is exonerated and Dorothea is simultaneously freed of her own struggle in dealing with Rosamond to whom she is now able to respond earnestly and with natural, unreserved sympathy. It is in this sense that we can understand Bakhtin's contention that novels are powerful tools for enriching our moral sense of particular situations (MB 27).

With her usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others, *she felt a great outgoing of her heart towards Rosamond for the generous effort which had redeemed her from suffering, not counting that the effort was a reflex of her own energy.*

After they had been silent for a little, she said –

‘You are not sorry that I came this morning?’

‘No, you have been very good to me,’ said Rosamond. *‘I did not think that you would be so good. I was very unhappy. I am not happy now. Everything is so sad.’*

*‘But better days will come. Your husband will be rightly valued. And he depends on you for comfort. He loves you best. The worst loss would be to lose that – and you have not lost it,’* said Dorothea.

*She tried to thrust away the too-overpowering thought of her own relief, lest she should fail* to win some sign that Rosamond's affection was yearning back towards her husband.

*‘Tertius did not find fault with me, then?’* said Rosamond, *understanding now that Lydgate might have said anything to Mrs Casaubon,* and that she certainly was different from other women. *Perhaps* there was a faint *jealousy* in the question. A smile began to play over Dorothea's face as she said –

*‘No, indeed! How could you imagine it?’* But here the door opened and Lydgate entered.

[Chap 81: 759 – 60]

Michael Holquist makes the point that “quite ordinary people caught up in lives of quiet desperation [. . .] have been correct to hope that outside the tyranny of the present there is a possible addressee who will understand them” (38). While Lydgate hopes that Rosamond will understand him and Rosamond wants Lydgate to understand her, it is Dorothea who provides the role of an understanding addressee for both. Added to her compassion for Rosamond and her natural tendency for overestimating the good in others, she experiences an element of gratitude to Rosamond for admitting that, for Will, there has never been anyone but Dorothea. Consequently she is released to maintain, more naturally, the ‘outsideness’ required for understanding Rosamond's pain. But even when she thought Rosamond's pain to be inextricably enmeshed with her own pain, she was able to speak, albeit brokenly and with ‘palpitating anxiety’, from ‘the waves of her own sorrow from out of which she was struggling to save another’ (757 – 58).

In “Response to a Question from the *Novyi Mir* Editorial Staff” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin emphasises that in language and in life our orientation should be towards dialogic, or ‘creative’, understanding:

*Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, space and culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our



real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*. [7]

Rosamond, too, is finally able to acknowledge Dorothea's goodness but lacks a similar ability to separate out her own unhappiness. Hence, she says to Dorothea, "I was very unhappy. I am not happy now. Everything is so sad." Despite having made great strides towards dialogic understanding, her personality does not and cannot undergo a sudden once-and-for-all transformation. Night has not suddenly changed into day for her and everything in her life still feels out of kilter and "messy".

Regarding what he calls the "essential messiness" of the imperfectly designed world, Bakhtin strongly believes that "messiness and tinkering, not perfect adaptation are the true marks of historicity (MB 46). In his view, messiness has an upside to it, for it renders the world "an open place" (MB 36) and, as such, it goes hand-in-hand with unfinalizability. Reiterating the sentiment held by Dostoevsky: "Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (PDP 166), Bakhtin makes the point that this inconclusiveness is actually a cause for celebration rather than dismay, this because it is precisely in the messy 'unfinalizability' of the world that innumerable 'potentials' for innovation, growth and creativity can be located.

Dorothea's exhortative response to the perceived messiness of Rosamond's life arises from the *surplus of vision* she possesses; a surplus Rosamond does not possess. Drawing on Bakhtin's essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Morson and Emerson elucidate the Bakhtinian notion on the surplus:

The surplus allows me to finalize and complete an image of you, to create a finalizing environment in which you are located for me [and] the essentially aesthetic art of creating such an image of another is most valuable when we seek not to merge with or duplicate each other, but rather to supplement each other, to take full advantage of our special fields of vision. In daily creativity – the real prosaic creativity on which more noticeable creative acts depend – you and I formally enrich each other and the world. Properly performed, the aesthetic act in daily life involves a reassumption and a reconfirmation of one's own place after the other is encountered. Rather than fuse, we produce something new and valuable. As Bakhtin concludes, "I experience [another's suffering] precisely as *his* suffering, in the category of the *other*, and my reaction to him is not a cry of pain but a word of consolation and a gesture of assistance" (AiG [AH], pp. 25 – 6<sup>1</sup>).

[MB 185]

Such is Dorothea's determination to provide assistance to Rosamond that she forcefully puts out of her mind all thoughts that might deter her from perceiving in Rosamond any possibility of her affection 'yearning back towards her husband', and is quick to reassure Rosamond of Lydgate's

deep love for her, that ‘better times will come’ when Lydgate will be ‘rightly valued’ and, sensing a change of heart towards him – a faint jealousy in Rosamond’s tentative question – ‘Tertius did not find fault with me then?’ she lightens the mood with a smiling negation, ‘No, indeed! How could you imagine it?’ Her assurances and Rosamond’s response prefigure Bakhtin’s “world according to the novel” in which “the image of a person necessarily changes over time” (MB 424) because people are always “noncoincident with themselves” (EaN 36) – a view taken up by Morson and Emerson:

Main characters in novels can and do become different, and they never exhaust the possibilities they can become and could have become. At every moment also, old potentials die, seem as if they had never been, and new ones, only some of which can be realised, come into existence, at which point other potentials are lost and still newer ones are produced. [MB 424]

Rosamond’s newfound ability to open herself to Dorothea as a person she now understands as being one to whom Lydgate might have been able to say anything, reflects the novel’s capacity for representing the “open present” (MB 47) favoured by Bakhtin who, as we recall, professes that reality in the novel “is only one of many possible realities” (EaN 37).

Having laid the groundwork for, perhaps, different possibilities for Rosamond and Lydgate, Dorothea takes Lydgate’s return as her cue to leave and he sees her out.

When he came back to Rosamond she had already *thrown* herself on the sofa, in *resigned fatigue*. ‘Well Rosy,’ he said, standing over her, and touching her hair, what do you think of Mrs Casaubon now you have seen so much of her? ‘*I think she must be better than any one,*’ said Rosamond, ‘*and she is very beautiful. If you go to talk to her so often, you will be more discontented with me than ever!*’ Lydgate laughed at the “so often.” ‘But has she made you less discontented with me?’ ‘*I think she has,*’ said Rosamond, *looking up in his face. ‘How heavy your eyes are, Tertius – and do push your hair back.’* He lifted up his large white hand to *obey* her, and felt *thankful for this little mark of interest in him. Poor Rosamond’s vagrant fancy had come back terribly scourged – meek enough to nestle under the old despised shelter.* And the shelter was still there: Lydgate had *accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation.* He had *chosen* this fragile creature, and had *taken the burthen of her life upon his arms.* He must walk as he could, carrying that *burthen* pitifully. [Chap 81: 760 – 61]

Rosamond’s ‘resigned fatigue’ and the way she throws herself on the sofa has echoes of Lydgate’s quality of movement and his own tired resignation. Nevertheless, she responds favourably to his inquiry about her opinion of Dorothea, quickly acknowledging Dorothea’s beauty and goodness. Having said that, she cannot resist testing the water, so to speak, hinting that Lydgate would doubtless become increasingly discontented with her, should he continue to see Dorothea so often.

We have already heard her tease Lydgate in this manner but, this time, her remark is uttered with less flirtation and more insecurity. One detects a ‘hidden polemic’, in which she gets her word in before Lydgate does, in the hope that he will offer a suitable rebuttal. He laughs at the ‘so often’ but picks up on the word ‘discontent’, turning it around on himself, and his own rejoinder, ‘But has she made you less discontented with me?’ may be interpreted in terms of what Bakhtin calls a type of double-voiced word that constitutes “intensely dialogic discourse” (PDP 197). Moreover, words change slightly with each usage and the context in which the utterance is made “can refract, add to, or, in some cases, even subtract from the amount and kind of meaning the utterance may be said to have when it is conceived [. . .] independent of context” (TDI xxviii). It is clear that the word ‘discontent’ is here somewhat ameliorated by Dorothea’s earlier disavowal of Rosamond’s fears in that regard. Because of her conversation with Dorothea, she is now able to engage with Lydgate more directly and she actually looks up into his face and notices ‘heavy eyes’ before instructing him to push his hair back. This crumb of encouragement is gratefully accepted by Lydgate and gives rise to a glimmer of dialogic agreement between them.

In exploring Bakhtin’s position on dialogic agreement and unity, Morson and Emerson proffer the opinion that “real dialogism will incarnate a world whose unity is essentially one of multiple voices, whose conversations never reach finality and cannot be transcribed in monologic form. The unity of the world will then appear as it really is: polyphonic” (MB 61). In other words, dialogic agreement does not mean having identical opinions. Rosamond and Lydgate’s form of agreement is especially non-monologic. Rosamond, who in Karen Chase’s view, is so “frighteningly consistent” that “time leaves no trace on her” (7), cannot refrain from correction of Lydgate’s appearance. I would venture that Rosamond’s implied criticism is issued in softer, more affectionate tones than she normally uses when addressing him. Ermarth would appear to agree, observing that “Even Rosamond Vincy has her chance to differ from herself” (“Negotiating *Middlemarch*”. Chase 121). Lydgate is thus able to interpret her words as ‘a little mark of interest in him’.

In *Middlemarch*, as in life, instant transformation of character is highly improbable and Eliot leaves us in no doubt that happy endings are not her primary concern. Rather like Bakhtin whose absorption lay with the “everyday ways we have of imagining other people” (MB 34) she, too, seems to be more interested in the gradual changes that are slowly wrought in the minutiae of everyday life, the slow movement and interconnectedness of humanity (‘our human lot’), and the power invested in each individual to make a dialogical contribution to the ‘lots’ of others as lives

intersect, weave in and out of, and intermingle with others. Rosamond's *tentative* turning towards Lydgate ('the old despised shelter') validates Bakhtin's view that creativity, innovation and growth are the "product of innumerable small changes, taking place incessantly" (MB 23). Despite what Ermarth calls "Rosamond's heroic achievement of speaking to Dorothea for the first time in a new way about herself," ("Negotiating *Middlemarch*", Chase 120) Karen Chase does have a point when she argues that Rosamond cannot be counted among those who are able to make significant and meaningful changes in their lives, but is one of the few characters who "manage to uphold their original intentions" (7). Author of *George Eliot*, R. T Jones, agrees, and humorously sets about proving his point by invoking a version of Maurice Hare's 1905 limerick on predestination and free will:

There was a young man who said, Damn!  
I am perfectly sure that I am  
A creature that moves  
In predestined grooves  
In fact not a bus but a tram!

"Can a tram become free?" he asks, to which he wittily quips, "Only, the novel suggests, if derailed by a bus. [. . .] Lydgate does not derail Rosamond; Dorothea, however briefly does, [. . .] but a derailed tram does not turn into a bus; Rosamond does not turn into a brave free spirit" (90 – 91). On a more serious note, notwithstanding the progress she has made with Dorothea, resulting in the "small changes" evident in her response to Lydgate, the narrator would seem to imply that, in the main, it will fall to Lydgate, 'thankful for this little mark of interest in him', to accommodate her at the expense of his past and future dreams. The narrative of their ongoing lives thus reaches a somewhat cheerless conclusion, amplified by the repeated use of the word 'burthen' – one that Lydgate, now resigned to his 'narrowed lot', will henceforth continue to shelter and 'carry'.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Taking into account Bakhtin's view on open-endedness and unfinalizability, it seems inappropriate and 'un-Bakhtinian' to attempt to round off, conclude or finalize any discussion, either about his theories or about this thesis. Consequently, I have chosen briefly to highlight some of the salient features of the novel as Bakhtin sees it, and which my thesis has, hopefully, endorsed and illustrated in its approach to *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch*. In particular I have elected to focus on those aspects that open up a window to ongoing discussion and debate. Just as no single dialogic interaction can exhaust the potential value of future exchanges, neither can any concluding remarks exhaust a novel's potential to continue to mean different things to different people. For Bakhtin, "the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken" (EaN 30). Meaning cannot be fully located either in the text or in the author's original intentions but relies on others' continual interpretation and *reaccentuation*. In this way, "works genuinely grow in meaning over time" (MB 285).

Morson and Emerson submit that Bakhtin's high regard for the novel "reflects some of his essentially extraliterary concerns, [and specifically] it derives from his ethical agenda, his war on theoretism, and his global concerns of dialogue, unfinalizability, and, especially, prosaics" (MB 308). In particular, Bakhtin valorizes the novel's ability to explore the ways people use the resources of language to shape selves, which is why, in his view, the novel is "the richest form yet devised for understanding selves" (MB 173). This enriching aspect of the novel is attributable partly to the ways in which novels relate closely to prosaic values, have an appreciation of centrifugal forces, and a sense of the world's essential messiness (its resistance to being concluded or finalized), and partly to the fact that, of all genres, the novel is the most dialogic, treating character, society and knowledge as unfinalizable and thus open to growth and change. In contrast to genres that are disposed towards "claims of certainty, expressions of absolute truth and assertions of timeless wisdom," the novel is "ever skeptical, experimental, and open to the unpredictable experience of every present moment" (MB 303). Whilst other genres may claim to *know*, the novel's awareness of "the multiplicity of languages, conceptual schemes, and social experiences" disposes it towards *how* we know so that, "where others might prophesy, the novel merely conjectures" (MB 303). In the process of creation, therefore, great authors evaluate their work not only by its ability to express what they mean, but by the "richness of its possible meanings" (MB 285).

These possible meanings are uncovered in a process of “creative understanding” which presumes that the text is “truly *other*,” and contains semantic depths not consciously available to the author at the time of writing (MB 289). Creative understanding thus requires ‘outsideness’ on the part of the reader, whose own cultural experience becomes a key element to his or her interpretation of the text. Even though great writers invariably intentionally include potential meanings, these may not be recognized or fully revealed in his or her epoch, and it falls to readers to discover potential. As Bakhtin explains, “The author himself and his contemporaries see, recognize and evaluate primarily that which is close to their own day. The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from this captivity, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation” (RQ 5. MB 289). In fact, in creative understanding, a special sort of dialogue is created by the interpreter, by which means both the text and its interpreter are enriched, creating “new and valuable meanings” possessed by neither the author nor the interpreter at the outset (MB 289). Consequently, the depth of a meaning is only revealed “once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning [and] they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of [. . .] particular meanings [and] cultures” (RQ 7. MB 289).

As Morson and Emerson see it, *reaccentuation*, or creative understanding, is the process in which, against a different background, the “value, nature and interrelation of voices visible in a genuinely ‘prosaic image’ of a language or languages is changed” as, for example “when a voice that was once a relatively inert parodied target may become active and offer powerful resistance to the parodying voice” (MB 364). Or, as Bakhtin puts it, the word is not “dead material” but a “living word” which may become “anachronous and comic” or reveal its “narrowness and one-sidedness” and, while its original meaning can never be totally extinguished, “under changed conditions this meaning may emit bright new rays, burning away the reifying crust that had grown up around it and thus removing any real ground for a parodic accentuation” (DiN 419). Morson and Emerson warn that reaccentuation runs the risk of distorting a text – that it has the potential to silence “a complex play of voices” or to suppress “the ‘otherness’ of other cultures and worldviews” – but concede that it is a vital aspect of the novel. As they explain:

Great works contain great potentials that are really *in* them, and which the author has deliberately created, even though he [or she] is not aware of the specific meanings to which they may lead. For those new meanings to arise, the potentials of the text must enter into dialogic relations with other perspectives the author cannot predict or concretely imagine. This sort of understanding is not distorting because it serves to unlock potentials really there, and it enriches the text. Reaccentuation is an important vehicle for such creative understanding, and a principal one for novels. [MB 364]

There are countless reasons why the evaluation and meanings of works change over time, not the least of which is that dialogue activates potentials *already present* in the works. As Bakhtin observes, “great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation; they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth” (DiN 422).

David Danow expresses the opinion that even though the word, within a given context, penetrates the object with its own intention, thus “permeating it temporarily with a new meaning born of a unique and unrepeatable context,” at the same time “it is presumed that there inheres in both the word and its corresponding object an infinitely open-ended series of meanings, affording, with each contextual usage, a potentially new sense” (32 – 33). Citing what he refers to as Bakhtin’s extreme formulation: “The meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context” (MPL 79), Danow regards this conception of the word as being “the bearer of a potential multiplicity of meanings” whilst, at the same time, the word and its object are “perpetually unfinished constructs, to which additions and emendations can always be made” (33). Bakhtin sees this ‘unfinished’ quality in a positive light, enabling it to be “further elaborated on in a never-ending process, whose goal is further dialogue, from which accrues additional, deeper meaning” (Danow 33). In fact, ‘further dialogue’ is implicit in all literary speech, which “senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view” (PDP 196).

Bakhtin stresses that, in order for language to be truly novelistic, it cannot remain naïve or undialogized and that both heteroglossia and intense dialogization are necessary. As he puts it:

There – on the rich soil of novelistic prose – double-voicedness draws its energy, its dialogized ambiguity, not from *individual* dissonances, misunderstandings or contradictions (however tragic, however firmly grounded in individual destinies); in the novel, this double-voicedness sinks its roots deep into a fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-languagedness. True, even in the novel, heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in social heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it. [DiN 325 – 26]

Especially important is to view the ‘languages’ of the heteroglossia from each other’s perspective. This enables them to be hybridized “so that an *interminable dialogue* is created among them” (MB 314 – emphasis added). Interminable dialogue gives rise to ever-new potentials which, in turn, creates new dialogue.

Bakhtin cautions that we should not attempt to ‘squeeze’ *Shakespeare*, for example, into the Elizabethan period, but that we should view his works as unfolding within ‘great time’ (RQ 4. MB 287 – emphasis added). Citing Bakhtin, Morson and Emerson write, “Like other great works, [. . .] they have a ‘posthumous life’ even richer ‘more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time [because] all truly great works ‘outgrow what they were in the epoch of their creation’” (RQ 4. MB 287). The same principle applies to the works of Dickens and Eliot. In *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*, Cora Kaplan pays tribute to Dickens’s “formidable gifts” in terms of the “colourful, complex social and political world [he] inhabited and influenced.” Accordingly, “Dickens’s gifts [. . .] have been celebrated from the perspective of twentieth-century critics or theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, (1895 – 1975), who made Dickens the exemplar of a new kind of novelistic practice, praising the way in which his fiction includes and orchestrates the heterogeneous voices of Victorian England.” She believes that the ‘new kind of novelistic practice’ does not disengage the author from his work. “Rather,” she says, “*Dickens* is driven by theories of art and authorship derived from romanticism, but adapted to give the novel the aesthetic status and transcendent authority that it did not have in the first half of the nineteenth century” (51).

Likewise, in his essay, “Critical Approaches to George Eliot,” Terence Wright is adamant “that there can be no single ‘right’ reading of her novels,” (Smith 32) and of *Middlemarch*, in particular, Karen Chase has the following to say:

What better justifies a collection of new essays on an old classic than an acknowledgement of interpretive evanescence? The phrase, “the varying experiments of Time” (prelude, 3) suggests why criticism always benefits from renewal, but it hardly narrows the field. With a few editorial alterations, the text of *Middlemarch* remains unchanged: the novel withstands the pressures of time, circumstance, and personality. However its meaning changed both within the culture and within the consciousness of individual readers. It is for each generation to chart the differences that ensure that the novel will not become a relic, but will continue to exert a pressure on the twenty first century as vitally as it did in its nineteenth and our twentieth centuries. [3]

The novel, more than any competitive genre, treats “character, society, and knowledge as unfinalizable” and, whereas rivals are set “at a reverential distance from their readers,” the novel “partakes of everyday life” (MB 303). Consequently, as Morson writes in the preface to *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, “Bakhtin continually sought and found unexpected ways to show that people never utter a final word, only a penultimate one. The opportunity always remains for an appending qualification that may lead to yet another unanticipated dialogue. Humanity is defined by its ‘unfinalizedness.’” Regardless of whether existence is “wholly determined” or “partially free,” or whether knowledge is possible or not, “we retain the capacity



to surprise ourselves and others” (vii). It is this potential to remain alive, to ‘surprise’, visible in authors, narrators, and in characters – even those in whom it may seem least likely to reside, such as Fanny Dorrit and Rosamond Vincy – that I have attempted to make visible through my readings of *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch*. I trust that, in the spirit of ‘interpretive evanescence’ and in the knowledge that (to quote Morson and Emerson in their essay, “Who Speaks for Bakhtin”), “our evaluations are always renegotiated and ever renegotiable” (Morson 12), my own critical observations will also be subject to, and benefit from, reaccentuation and renewal.

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