

Re-vitalising the Memory through Narrative: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Realist Text.

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1. Introduction

I am concerned with the widely-held view that the realist novel is a particularly apt receptacle for the conservation of human experience. Novel writers and theoreticians of the genre comment upon the novel's heterogenous style and form as being particularly well-suited to the task of inscribing diverse experiences. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the "vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages" which intermingle in the dialogic novel. (*Dialogic* 367) In *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt writes that the primary convention of the realist novel is that it provides a "full and authentic report of human experience," and "is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned" and "the particulars of the times and places of their actions." (35) Describing the mechanics of this kind of reporting, Régine Robin claims that the novel is a privileged place for the recording of experience because it allows for a polyphonous interaction of diverse voices:

Le roman [...] est le seul type de discours permettant non seulement la polyphonie, l'inscription du discours social, le seul type de discours qu'on puisse lire [...] littéralement et dans tous les sens; le seul encore qui permette de dire une chose et son contraire, par l'utilisation de différents personnages, par le discours rapporté, par l'anti-phrase, par le système des modalités de l'écriture, par la prétérition (Robin 86).

The emphasis in these descriptions is on diversity, heterogeneity, referentiality and open-endedness. I would like to explore an related concept, the vitality of the novel form, to demonstrate that the realist novel is a purveyor of authentic and polyphonic discourse because it is teeming with voices which, through their continuous interaction, create an animated voice. My use of the words animated, teeming and vitality reflects my belief that the heterogenous, open-ended discourse in the novel is an active and sustaining force in our culture, and that this voice ensures the longevity and the vitality of cultural memory.

My thesis is that by attempting to fill the novel with vast areas of minutely described experience, writers like Balzac, Dickens and Dostoevsky have attempted to preserve lived experience in the novel. The text takes on flesh by virtue of its presence, its 'lisibilité' and its influence within the social collective; and such flesh remains subject to the process of degeneration, as it has since the beginning of time. The regeneration occurs when Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is brought to bear on the novel. Drawing attention to the heteroglossia, the various speech genres, and the transgression of social discourse, Bakhtin demonstrates how levels of interaction between formal and contextual elements contributes to the vitality of the most multi-voiced of all genres, the novel. The memory here acts on various contextual components of the reading experience (the interaction between the memory of the reader and the memory described in the historical text, for example) and on formal components (insofar as any semiotic system is based upon an attempt to inscribe experience for future recall in an accepted sign system).

In order to explore these notions I will make reference to Bakhtin's work on dialogism, and I shall use short passages from letters and novels written by Fyodor Dostoevsky to explicate how Bakhtin's work can be applied to a study of memory conservation through narrative. I will also analyze Charles Dickens' Christmas story *The Haunted Man* since it offers a privileged locus for a study of how narrative can help "keep my memory green" (one of the refrains of the text), that is, how the story can play the role of an ever-active animated voice which sustains the cultural memory of a society, while at the same time acting a disruptive force against the lethargy, stasis or oppression of the status quo. This disruptive force exists because memory, both individual and cultural, can grow, thrive, reproduce, wither, and regenerate within different spatio-temporal contexts.

By looking for a mind-material connection, I will be working on areas of research that Bakhtin may know through his interest in Vitalism. This branch of research originated in primitive animism, and elements thereof are present in the ideas of thinkers of classical Greece — (Plato's concept of immortal soul, Aristotle's treatises *On the Soul* and *On the Generation of Animals*). There was a revival of interest in this field in the 19th century (J.F. Blumenbach, G. R. Treviranus, Lemoine, J. Müller, H. Driesch), and it is probably through these later thinkers that Mikhail Bakhtin encountered the theories which allowed him to pursue studies of the mind-body link evident in his theory of dialogism. It is extremely important to note that Bakhtin's use of Vitalist notions differs in important ways from major proponents in the field, since he was primarily interested in seeing "ways for conceiving the relation of mind and world as a dialogic continuum rather than as an unbridgeable gap." (Clark 175). Bakhtin is describing the characteristics of a living system, and by extension he is discrediting systems of analyses which transform living systems into non-living systems for the sake of analysis:

All this determines the work of art as a living artistic event — an effective moment in the unitary and unique event of being, and not as a thing — an object of purely theoretical cognition devoid of the validity or force of an event,

devoid of any weight with respect to value. And it is precisely as such an event that we must understand and know the work of art — we must understand and know it in the very principles of its value-governed life, in its living participants, and not as something that has been first put to death and reduced to the bare empirical givenness of a verbal whole.... (Author 189, authors emphasis).

Bakhtin was also interested in the Dostoevskian attempt to explore the many facets of the “idea” through a study of how it interacts with members of a given community. Dostoevsky, (and by extension Bakhtin, since Bakhtin’s ideas seem to accord directly with Dostoevsky’s notions in this area of study) realize that a dialogic multi-faceted presentation of a single idea was the only way to ensure its continuity and its development. In *The Idiot*, the character Ippolit declares that

...in every idea of genius or in every new human idea, or more simply still, in every serious human idea born in anyone’s brain, there is something that cannot possibly be conveyed to others, though you wrote volumes about it and spent thirty-five years in explaining your idea; something will always be left that will obstinately refuse to emerge from your head and that will remain with you forever; and you will die without having conveyed to anyone what is perhaps the most vital point of your idea. But if I too am now unable to convey all that has been tormenting me for the past six months, then at all events you will understand that, having attained my present “last conviction”, I have perhaps paid too much for it; it is this I thought it necessary, for certain reasons of my own, to emphasize in my “Explanation.” (406)

Ippolit is trying to name the vital element, the “something [that] will always be left out” from any description. Bakhtin has shown, in his study of chronotope, that individual perspective will make every repetition of an event “creative.” This is part of Ippolit’s point; however, analyses of the text which take into account the diversity of elements that make up narrative and which allow for continued re-entry, provide the best chance that the memory created by the narrative, and the memory to which the narrative refers, will be animated “green,” rather than closed and deadened.(1)

2. Memory

The preservation of memory in the novel is in fact a hopeless endeavour; Marc Angenot alerts us to the futility of such a strategy in “La Fiction, l’oubli et la trace:”

Ma thèse sera que le roman apparaît dans un ordre symbolique où l’insurmontable et quasi-universel oubli sur lequel s’établit la mémoire officielle des sociétés est désormais perçu comme frustrant et problématique, tout en restant insurmontable en effet. (144)

Bakhtin echoes the sentiments at the outset of “Art and Answerability” when he writes that “[w]hen a human being is in art, he is not in life, and conversely. There is no unity between them and no inner interpenetration within the unity of an individual person.” (1) But the illusion of realism, or the creation of a situation that appears to have been taken from life, can occur in the novel through the recognition that voices interact dialogically to continually re-create the spaces from which ideas and experiences emerge. Bakhtin shows that this interconnectedness of experience on a semiotic level leads to a living interaction between formal and contextual elements of a text. This sense of a ‘living’ text is at the basis of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, and was for him most fully elucidated in the realist novels of Dickens and Dostoevsky:

Dialogic relationships, therefore, are extralinguistic. But at the same time they must not be separated from the realm of discourse, that is, from language as a concrete integral phenomenon. Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic interaction is indeed the authentic sphere where language ‘lives’. The entire life of language, in any area of its use... is permeated with dialogic relationships....These relationships lie in the realm of discourse, for discourse is by its very nature dialogic.... (Dostoevsky 183)

An examination of the novel as a space in which is inscribed authentic experience brings us into a space where “language lives,” and where memory is examined with respect to what it does rather than to what it is. This has significant political consequences; Pierre Nora writes:

[Les lieux de la mémoire sont] politiques aussi, et, peut-être, surtout, si l’on entend par politique un jeu de forces qui transforment la réalité : la mémoire en effet est un cadre plus qu’un contenu, un enjeu toujours disponible, un ensemble de stratégies, un être-là qui vaut moins par ce qu’il est que par ce que l’on en fait. (Lieux viii)

Memory, as a set of strategies and a frame within which present reality is viewed, is a political force that acts upon present reality; if Nora’s view is adopted, then fiction becomes a potentially disruptive political force which can act at any moment to alter the present context of a given social collective by acting upon the memory of the individuals who comprise that social collective.

3. The Realist Narrative

The works of (among others) Richardson, Defoe, Fielding, Austen, Dickens, James, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola are literary expressions of the 'realist' doctrine. The presuppositions underlying this "discours concontraint" of the realist novel determine the role and the effectiveness of the novel as memory:

1. le monde est riche , divers, foisonnant, discontinu, etc.
2. je peux transmettre une information au sujet de ce monde;
3. la langue peut copier le réel;
4. la langue est seconde par rapport au réel (elle l'exprime, elle ne le crée pas, elle lui est "extérieure");
5. le support (le message) doit s'effacer au maximum;
6. le geste producteur du message (style) doit s'effacer au maximum;
7. mon lecteur doit croire à la vérité de mon information sur le monde; etc.(2)

Hamon is attempting to respond to the question "comment la littérature nous fait-elle croire qu'elle copie la réalité?" (421) Taking realism as a kind of 'speech act' Hamon inserts the reader and the reader's response into his evaluation of the representation of the 'real' in 'realism.' An evaluation of the functioning of the realist novel, this study helps to eradicate "la fausse antimonie entre connaissance historique et configuration narrative," and it takes on broader questions concerning the space that is created, and the space that is occupied, in the society of the novel. Here I am turning towards the analysis of the realist novel as "une écriture de la socialité" proposed by Claude Duchet.(3) Following the tenets of the broader project of sociocriticism, Duchet sketches out "les pratiques romanesques en tant que production d'un espace social" which he calls "la société du roman" (Duchet 448). The society of the novel is most fully articulated in the dialogic novel, and the life of this form exists in the unresolvable conflicts, contradictions, and incompatible interpretations present in the text. This is part of the novel's socialisation, and it is of crucial importance to a study of memory as a vital and animated element in dialogism because it orients the researcher towards moving, interacting, shifting social elements which make the novel a space for active dialogism without imposing a vulgar equivalence between the body and the body of the text.

This socialisation of novelistic space is exemplified and elaborated through a comparison between the events of everyday life recorded in the newspaper and the events of everyday life recorded in the realist narrative. The example is from two letters Dostoevsky wrote while he was working on *Brothers Karamazov*; the first one was written on March 16, 1878 to Vladimir Vosilevich Mikhailov, an educator who directed a boarding school for boys and who later taught vocational school:

I have been planning, and will soon start writing, a long novel in which, among other things, a considerable part will be played by children, and specifically young children from the ages of about seven to fifteen. There will be several portrayals of children. I am studying them now and have studied them all my life, and I love them and have children of my own. But the observations of a person like you... would be of great value to me. And so, write me what you yourself know about children ... anything you can tell me about them (various incidents, their habits, their answers, the words and sayings they use, their special talents, their family life, their beliefs, their evil deeds and innocence; nature and the teacher, Latin, etc., in short — whatever you know about them). [author's emphasis(4)]

Dostoevsky is trying to solicit accurate information about children and he wants specific examples of their behaviour so that he will be able to provide a true description of their behaviour. The letter points out that Dostoevsky's intention in writing the novel is to 'get it right' by inscribing the lives of the characters into the text as accurately and as fully as possible. The presuppositions about the realist novel enumerated by Hamon are found here in this description of how Dostoevsky constructed *Brothers Karamazov*; Dostoevsky is suggesting that he will be able to record and transmit information about the world in the language of the novel (see Hamon's points 1,2, and 3), and that by basing his narrative on actual events (point 3) he will be able to act as a (maximally effaced) transcriber of events (see points 5 and 6). In a letter written a year later to the Managing Editor of the *Russian Messenger*, Dostoevsky defends his narrative by insisting on both the variety of the events described, and the accuracy of his sources.

Everything that my hero says in the text that has been sent to you is based in reality. All the stories about the children are actually true, they were reported in newspapers that I could refer you to, and there is nothing that I have invented. The general who set his dogs on a child — it's all fact, an actual event that was reported last winter in *Archives*, [a contemporary newspaper] I think, and then re-printed in a number of other newspapers.... I do not think that there is a single unseemly word in the text I have sent you. There is only that bit about the torturers who, to train a little girl of five not to soil her bed at night, smeared her with her own excrement. But I beg and beseech you not to delete that. It is taken from a current criminal trial. In all the newspapers (only 2 months ago — *Mecklenburg*, the mother, the *Voice* [a contemporary newspaper] they used the word "excrement." [author's emphasis] (*Letters* 465)

Dostoevsky inscribes material from everyday life, personal experience, reported speech, different newspaper reports (of unrelated stories), etc., into *Brothers Karamazov* with the intention of recreating the vitality (a notion which is similar to "keeping my memory green" referred to earlier on) of living speech as it was actually heard; Duchet's analysis of how the realist author attempts to give life to the text is apparent here both on the level of the

experience recorded (Dostoevsky's insistence on the accuracy of his portrayals) and on the level of language (he uses the word "excrement" which is normally censured out of literary texts because the newspapers used it in their description of the event). Notice, however, that Dostoevsky has reservations about his own tactics; despite his efforts to describe 'reality' he seems to be continually afraid of being condemned for telling untruths. He presents a similar dilemma in *The Idiot*, when Prince Myshkin says that

"I know of a case of murder for the sake of a watch — it's in the papers now. If some novelist had invented it, the critics and experts on the life of our peasants would at once have cried out that it was improbable. But when you read it in the newspapers as a fact, you can't help feeling that such facts give you an insight into Russian life...." (503)

Memory (individual and collective) generates and legitimizes the diegetic space of the novel by acting as a receptor, transmitter and codifier of the memories of the author and of the collective to which the author and his or her production belong. Authoring in this sense becomes a project of self-making, whereby the author seeks to enmesh experiences by providing the kinds of minute details that point to both the abundance of life and the distinctiveness of the individual. These minute details are then explored with respect to the social context when the author brings them into contact dialogically with a broad range of discursive practices. Here, Bakhtin's dialogic novel becomes a kind of storehouse for voices and for 'genres.' Since diverse areas of human activity involve diverse forms of language, then the author must select a literary genre which can inscribe vast areas of human experience by incorporating a multiplicity of individual concrete utterances. Furthermore, "relatively stable types of these utterances," that is, the "speech genres" which become associated over time with particular spheres of communication, can themselves become a re-presentation, the recollection of a particular kind of discursive practice. The presence of different speech genres in the dialogic novel is, therefore, the preservation through the content, linguistic style and compositional structure, of the memory of different spheres of communication. (see *Problems* 60) As vessel, the novel is more enduring, more flexible, and more receptive to the heteroglossia of discourse than, say, the newspaper reports in the *Archives* or the *Voice*, or the oral narratives (Vladimir Vasilevich's descriptions of children) that it absorbs. The novel becomes, or at least seems to become, "l'inscription dans l'imaginaire de l'impossible trace des humains sans illustration" (Angenot "Fiction" 144). The nineteenth-century novel is not a direct source of memory, in the sense that history or sociology would claim to be. Nonetheless, it is the nineteenth-century novel "qui pose les nouvelles questions de la société, même maladroitement, même avec de mauvais documents ou avec des prénotions non remises en question au niveau explicite" (Robin 94).

The novel exists in a grey area, it supplants but does not subsume memory, it often contradicts and therefore does not confirm a particular memory, it is a narration of events which may or may not have occurred and yet which have an effect upon the reader by adding to 'la mémoire culturelle,' it can be viewed as autonomous and part of a literary tradition whose role it is to create its own kind of memory. The heterogeneity of the novel form places it in a privileged, though precarious position: "tantôt elle n'est pas crédible, tantôt, au contraire, elle est ce qui fait "mémoire culturelle", ce qui enregistre un événement dans la longue durée" (Robin 37).

For the memory to live, there can be no resolution of these various memories, there can be no "collective memory." To imagine that a memory exists because a community has agreed that it exists poses the danger of misappropriation. Bergson's work on collective memory, in which he proposes that there exists a 'snapshot' of memory — "une mémoire pure et spontanée of l'image s'est du premier coup imprimée dans la mémoire"(5) is incongruent with our broader notion of multiple interacting memories. So too is Maurice Halbwachs' work on *La Mémoire collective* in which he suggests that all memory exists in relation "avec toute la vie matérielle et morale des sociétés dont nous faisons ou dont nous avons fait partie" (*Cadres* 38). The individual is able to remember or to situate his or her memory by virtue of fixed social frames (language, space and time) within which certain experiences are located. Forgetting, in this system, occurs when the memory no longer serves a purpose for the group — "du moment où l'événement considéré a, en quelque sorte, épuisé son effet social, le groupe s'en désintéresse" (*Cadres* 130). Within the logic of Bakhtin's work on the novel, this theory is politically dangerous and immobilising. Namer notes that there is a prescriptive element of the collective memory:

Il naît alors de la mémoire collective subie un besoin de la mémoire collective, d'une mémoire qui pourrait recoudre, revauder, qui réunifie les bouts de mémoires collectives dispersés et en lambeaux. C'est à partir de ces besoins de mémoire collective qu'il est possible d'imaginer une éthique et une politique de la mémoire collective. (239)

The need for such a memory leads to a closing-off of alternative viewpoints or possibilities; and furthermore, the stability of the framework that situates the memory of the individual is a normative force that works against 'living language' in the sense suggested by Bakhtin in *Dostoevsky* ("Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it" p. 183). In Halbwachs' work I sense a kind of false dichotomy between an authentic past and an un-authentic past — the criteria of which is in the hands of the collective. The memories of the individual and the memories inscribed into the body of the dialogic novel are interactive and heterogeneous. A 'snapshot' of an event or a time period is more likely to be a series of oft-incompatible memories. We are closer here to Proust's "temps psychologique," with its interaction between different levels of experience at given moments:

Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est une vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats. Ce que nous appelons la réalité est en certain rapport entre ces sensations et ces souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément — rapport qui supprime une simple vision cinématographique, laquelle s'loigne par là d'autant plus du vrai qu'elle prétend se borner à lui.... (Proust 889.)

In short, the novel is the locus where all of these already interactive memories meet (as in the vase) and enter into new kinds of relations. Following the kind of sensibility called for in Dostoevsky's description of the novel, I am arguing for the virtues of a maximally interactive text that goes beyond the interaction of narrative voices with narrative voices, author and character, author and patriarchal precursor, or novel and official version. I am arguing for a broader interchange between body and text, which will operate on a literal and not a metaphorical level.

4. Memory, Novel and the Body

There are aspects of the novel's treatment of narrative time which help explain its relationship to memory, particularly if we examine the novel's corporal status within social space. On November 6, 1848 Dickens wrote to Miss Coutts that he had "hit upon a little notion for the book, which I hope is a pretty one, with a good Christian tendency" (Intro to *Haunted Man* 235). This notion was that "bad and good are inextricably linked in remembrance, and that you could not choose the enjoyment of recollecting only the good;" (236) the book to which he refers is *The Haunted Man* and *The Ghost's Bargain* — the last of the series of 'Christmas Books,' and it serves as an important example of how remembrance follows the interactive threads of a narrative, and in doing so helps to keep memory alive. *The Haunted Man* is a study of how the dialogic discourse of everyday life is objectified, disconnected, disavowed, in a sense rendered morbid, when structures of past events inscribed into the memory are removed by, in this case, the callous desire to live in a world without memories of guilt, remorse or unhappiness, a world of empirical facts accumulated systematically in the interest of scientific progress.

Mr. Redlaw is the "haunted man," an accomplished and well-known chemist and teacher who, though troubled by "some old echoes in his mind," laboured relentlessly on Faust-like experiments of combining and uncombining liquids and vapours, with an omnipotent ability to "give back their component parts to fire and vapour" (246). His solitary world of test-tubes and apparatus, hidden away in a "vault-like" edifice erected by "forgotten architects," is dark, cold, and "unaccustomed to the tread of feet" or "the observation of eyes." This place was once a part of an "ancient endowment for students," a "brave edifice, plunged in an open place;" but it had become, like its occupant, "smoke-age-and-weather darkened," a place where "no sun had straggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun's neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when in all other places it was silent and still" (247). The scientist, this 'haunted man,' who studied and experimented in this "forgotten crypt," is introduced to the reader as he sits gazing at the fire late at night "in the dead of winter" (248) "surrounded by shadows" in the likenesses of forms and faces from the past, from the grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that might have been, and never were, are always wandering" (240). He is haunted by a dread companion, "an animated image of himself dead," who appears, bidden or unbidden (one of the many aspects of this phantom which make him similar to 'memory'), to recall Redlaw's dreaded past.

"Why do you come, to haunt me thus?"

"I come as I am called," replied the Ghost.

"No. Unbidden," exclaimed the Chemist.

"Unbidden be it," said the spectre. "It is enough. I am here." (264)

The other characters are the lively and active characters of the society around Redlaw; the servant Mr. William, a "fresh-coloured and busy man" (251), Mrs. William, a "simple, innocent-looking person" who acts a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen that come up from a variety of parts, and Philip, Mr. William's eighty-seven-year-old father who is forever "merry and happy" in the thought that even after eighty-seven years, he has a perfect memory to recall persons from the past in their once "alive and healthy state." For Redlaw, Christmas time recalls that the past year has been a period characterized by "more figures in the lengthening sum of recollection that we work and work at to our torment, till Death idly jumbles all together, and rubs all out" (255), whereas for Philip, who for the past fifty Christmases has garnished the walls and windows of the house with a holly which helps to "keep his memory green." The green-ness of Philip's memory symbolizes its continued life and vitality:

"Is his memory imparied with age? It is to be expected now," said Mr. Redlaw, turning to the son, and speaking lower.

"Not a morsel of it, sir," replied Mr. William. "That's exactly what I say myself, sir. There never was such a memory as my father's. He's the most wonderful man in the world. He don't know what forgetting means...." (256-7)

It is evident in the story that Philip is capable of forgetting; the point of Mr. William's speech is both to appease his father and also to make a connection between a green memory and the happiness and vitality that is instilled in

Philip by the presence of his memory. To keep the memory green is also a reference to the memory of one of the club's founders who "left in his will, among other bequests he made us, so much to buy holly, for garnishing the walls and windows, come Christmas." To commemorate this late founder, the members of the club hung a picture of him in the Dinner Hall (the picture, of course, keeps the memory of the founder green). On a scroll beneath the frame, in old English letters, is inscribed the motto: "Lord! keep my memory green!" Philip brings the personal memory to the level of the social in his statement that

"...he has helped to keep my memory green, I thank him; for going round the building every year, as I'm a doing now, and freshening up the bare rooms with these branches and berries, freshens up my bare old brain. One year brings back another, and that year another, and those other numbers! At last, it seems to be as if the birth-time of our Lord was the birth-time of all I have ever had affection for, or mourned for, or delighted in — and they're a pretty many, for I'm eighty-seven!" (254)

The subject of these respective reminiscences is Christmas, a period in which the (Christian) community is drawn towards recollection. The memory of Christmas, like the memories of a national holiday, is a shared experience; but the individual's intimate response is subjective. For example, freshening up the building for Christmas freshens up Philip's brain. Later on we learn that Philip undergoes physical changes with the welcome recall of Christmas past; his cheek "warmed into a ruddier glow" and his "blue eyes brightened while he spoke." Redlaw is the counter-example; he is unable to function in the future because of the weight of his memory. Throughout these gay reminiscences, he remains downcast, and with his brooding manner comes "a heavy gloom and a shadow [the Ghost] gathering behind the chemist's chair" (262). When Philip, Mr. Williams, and Mrs. Williams leave the chemist's chambers (complaining of the "chill and dismal feeling in the room), Redlaw "fell-a-musing in his chair alone," and "the healthy holly withered on the wall and dropped — dead branches" (263). The green of the memory is not only representative of memory itself, but memory as a regenerative force. The active memory is, as Régine Robin described earlier on, that which stimulates ongoing open-ended debate. The act of remembering which keeps Philip youthful is, for Redlaw, haunting and painful. With the discussion between Redlaw and his "double" that follows the departure of his visitors, the reason for this pain is explained by the Ghost. Redlaw, we learn, was poor and neglected in his youth, and he only found refuge and strength in knowledge hewed out of the "mine" of the mind, "where it was buried." The only companions he had in his youth were an unnamed male "friend" and, more importantly, a sister who died in her youth.

Such glimpses of the light of home as I had ever known had streamed from her. How young she was, how fair, how loving! I took her to the first poor roof that I was master of, and made it rich. She came into the darkness of my life, and made it bright. (267)

Unable to gain strength from the memory of her, Redlaw is haunted by her image which "comes back... in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years" (267). The Phantom explains this phenomenon when he states that, in its ideal form, memory stretches back through time in a kind of Lacanian chain of linguistic and pictorial associations:

"...pictures of our sobered age and mellowed happiness, and of the golden links, extending back so far, that should bind us, and our children, in a radiant garland," said the Phantom. (267-8)

Redlaw begs his double to "let me forget it... Let me blot it from my memory!" The phantom torments him to follow through on this wish, and Redlaw, like the Faust in search of greater knowledge at the expense of common experience, is tempted:

These revolutions of years, which we commemorate," proceeded Redlaw, "what do they recall! Are there any minds in which they do not re-awaken some sorrow, or some trouble? What is the remembrance of the old man who was here tonight? A tissue of sorrow and trouble."

"But common natures," said the Phantom, with its evil smile upon its glassy face, "unenlightened minds, and ordinary spirits, do not feel or reason on these like men of higher cultivation and profounder thought." (269)

The Phantom offers another memory to remove part of the memory, the area containing the "sorrow, wrong and trouble you have known," so that he will only be left with a sort of "savoir historien" (Robin 59) gone awack; he will lose "no knowledge, no result of study" (270), but the "sorrow, wrong, and trouble you have known" will go along with "the intertwined chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections" (269-270).

Here, *The Haunted Man* becomes illuminated by the Vitalists inasmuch as it becomes the disruption of the locus where life and language are linked, that of 'life writing,' described by Holquist as "a kind of master narrative that imposes itself on any attempt to arrange chronologically instanced phenomenon into a sequence that has memory above and beyond the brute seriality of their appearance" (19). Redlaw has not listened carefully to the importance of this link, previously described by the Phantom as the "golden links... that should bind us... as in a garland." He is risking the consequences of tampering with the master narrative, and thereby throwing the carefully connected construction into disarray.

There is a further twist in this story which, according to Dickens, “makes the thing wilder and stranger” (236), and which demonstrates the effects of upsetting the “master narrative.” In granting the ‘gift,’ the spectre explains that (like Midas) Redlaw is doomed to proliferate the memory loss amongst all the persons whom he encounters (an odd form of Christmas gift-giving which suggests the ways in which traditions, like Christmas traditions, adhere a community by virtue each member’s adherence to a kind of pact whereby individuals give meaning to the event by virtue of their participation therein):

Without recovering yourself the power that you have yielded up, you shall henceforth destroy its like in all whom you approach. Your wisdom has discovered that the memory of sorrow, wrong and trouble is the lot of all mankind, and that mankind would be the happier, in its other memories, without it. (271)

That this affliction is repeated in those with whom Redlaw interacts is interesting from a Bakhtinian standpoint since it confirms that the dialogue, in order to function, must be an interactive interchange. The other’s discourse shapes, directs and modifies the discourse of the speaker, and if the speaker or the other has emotive amnesia like Redlaw does, then the whole project of authoring selfhood becomes impossible. Redlaw himself cannot ascertain the source of his power, for it is in the verbal interaction itself (and not in the Midas-like touch, for example) that the curse of forgetting is transmitted. The fear that this plants within the breast of Redlaw is manifest each time he engages in any sort of interpersonal interaction. In the following example, Redlaw is engaged in a brief conversation with a newsman named Mr. Tetterby, and suddenly, as if to confirm his own sincerity, Redlaw reaches out to make physical contact with his addressee:

Withdrawing his hand hastily, almost as though he had wounded him by accident (for he did not know in what part of himself his new power resided, or how it was communicated, or how the manner of its reception varied in different person), he turned and ascended the stair (299).

That the twisted chain of signifiers leading to these banished recollections are destroyed implies that Freud and Lacan might also be consulted as means of approaching the condensation, displacements, and substitutions that have distorted the passageways of the (forgotten) signifiers. The unexpected result of Redlaw’s “gift” is that whole webs of social and material (grey) matter are destroyed, and with the dissolution of these memory-dependent ties, social units (families, friends, communities) become untied. The images associated with this process are, like the first images of the text, morbid and frigid and desolate. Immediately following this self-imposed amnesia, Redlaw goes to the amphitheatre which he would have normally “associated with youth and animation,” and there he finds “a ghostly place when all this life was faded out of it” (272). In this abandoned amphitheatre resides an abandoned child, a “baby savage” which “not many minutes since,” would have “wrung the chemist’s heart.” Now he looked upon it coldly, dispassionately, as he will all other objects and persons that he encounters after his transformation. Later on, in a visit to a sick and suffering student, Redlaw looks upon the signs of the room’s occupation — out-of-door attire, the little miniatures upon the chimney piece, the framed engraving — and he sees mere objects, disconnected with everyday life and vitality.

The time had been, only yesterday, when not one of these objects, in its remotest association of interest with the living figure before him, would have been lost on Redlaw. Now, they were but objects; or, if any gleam of such connexion shot upon him, it perplexed, and not enlightened him, as he stood looking round with dull wonder. (295)

He realizes that not only is he “turning to stone,” but that he is transforming everyone around him into similarly detestable wretches. In a horrifying and poignant vision of a world without interaction, Dickens describes a street scene viewed from the perspective of the chemist:

Whither he went, he neither knew nor cared, so that he avoided company. The change he felt within him made the busy streets a desert, and himself a desert, and the multitude around him, in their manifold endurance and ways of life, a mighty waste of sand, which the winds tossed into unintelligible heaps and made a minor confusion of. (305)

As the Phantom promised, Redlaw becomes an outlet for Dickens’ scorn for those who seek knowledge for its own sake. Interaction without the sorrow, wrong and trouble imbedded in the memory renders Redlaw cold and apathetic, “more like a marble image on the tomb of a man” than “the breathing man himself.” Here the mind and the world are shown to intersect dialogically, and this interaction (like the mind-body, body-environment, individual-social, dan - zadan , (See Michael Holquist’s “Answering as Authoring”) is a powerful critique of all systems which attempt to posit an unbridgeable gap between the individual mind and the world.

5. The Animated Text

We return here to a form of Vitalism, alluded to earlier on, a material basis for the metaphysics of language-life combinations. For Dickens, the source of this connection may have been Antoine Lavoisier who, in the preface to *Elements of Chemistry* cites Condillac:

The sciences have made progress, because philosophers have applied themselves with more attention to observe and have communicated to their language that precision and accuracy which they have employed in their observation: in correcting their language they reason better.(6)

The connection to Lavoisier runs deeper, however, as Redlaw begins to measure the consequences of obliterating this life-force that is situated in (or connected to) the memory.

“...In the material world, as I have long taught, nothing can be spared; no step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe. I know, now, that it is the same with good and evil, happiness and sorrow, in the memories of men. Pity me! Relieve me! (322)

The law of thermodynamics, which supposes an exact equality between the elements of the body examined and those of the product of its analysis, is herein being adapted to work on the social consequences of obliterating individual memory. As though he was in search of “empirical” evidence for the life language connection, Bakhtin turned to contemporary scientific studies of Vitalism, just as Dickens had turned to contemporary scientific studies of the conservation of matter to justify his moral insights.

The third section of *The Haunted Man* contains elaborations of the political consequences of forgetting, anaesthetizing, or of creating gaps between word and body or material and idea. Here, the Phantom returns to Redlaw to instruct him of the social consequences of his choice. The abandoned child, who has by now become Redlaw’s sole companion, turns out to be “the last, completest illustration of a human creature, utterly bereft of such remembrances as you have yielded up” (327).

“There is not,” said the Phantom, “one of these — not one — but sows a harvest that mankind MUST reap. From every seed of evil in this boy, a field of ruin is grown that shall be gathered in, and garnered up, and sown again in many places of the world, until regions are overspread with wickedness enough to raise the waters of another Deluge. Open and unpunished murder in a city’s streets would be less guilty in its daily toleration, than one such spectacle as this.” (327)

To turn one’s back on the sorrows and injustices of the past or the present, to exchange compassion and pain for empirical knowledge, is to write the social out of the society. Dostoevsky’s insistence on detail in the *Brothers Karamazov* is an attempt to record history as though he had a responsibility to those about whom he wrote because as an author, he is a delegate of those persons who have no voice. The best way to ensure this, according to Bakhtin, is through dialogism, open-endedness, continued interaction.

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic contexts (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, meaning born in the dialogue of past ages, can never be stable (finalised, ended once and for all) — they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future developments of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue, there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in a renewed form (in a new context). (“Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences,” in *Speech Genres* 170)

Dialogism described thus is not, however, a criteria which establishes the merits of a text; textbooks, legal documents, treatises, etc. also play critical roles in the compendium of social discourse. But it is a measure of the texts continued vitality. Michael Andre Bernstein’s claim, that dialogism is at once a part of “the solution to the crisis of reminiscence, iteration, and hysteria” (223) and also a part of the problem, is undoubtedly true. Reminiscence-as-suffering (which he equates with Nietzsche’s “resentment” and Freud’s notion that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (2:7) is certainly an important theme in the dialogic novel, and it is worth tentatively considering that “forgetting” could be a form of liberation for a character such as Dostoevsky’s *The Underground Man*. In light of my reading of *The Haunted Man*, however, such an inability to forget, or even such disproportional suffering, does not undermine the value of the reminiscence. Attempts to suppress or close off memory leads to the gaps of propaganda, to the monology of legal discourse, to the death of interaction. Are we to search, as Redlaw did, for complete obliteration of unhappy memories? Or are we to repress them, and await their manifestation in other behaviour (as Freud discovered with his studies of, for example, family myths)? What Dickens seems to suggest is a balance, whereby memory ties us into the social and spiritual collective; memory of the good allows for continued hope and charity, memory of the bad teaches us the virtue of forgiveness. Too much forgetting and too much remembering are both forms of repression; but to opt for one side or the other is to threaten the vitality of the memory.

For Bakhtin, this question of volatile boundaries is tied in with questions of dialogism, where dialogism is not the goody-goody liberal notion that everybody should have their ‘voice’ in a friendly open interaction. The point of dialogism is to allow continued re-entry, on-going struggle, and perpetual open-endedness, to ensure that the past is not forgotten, obliterated, or assassinated. Will the novel act to protect us from the process of forgetting? Bakhtin’s work seems to provide some measure of hope in his theory of open-ended dialogism. As Angenot writes, however, “le roman est fictivement réaliste parce qu’il n’y a pas, dans le réel, place pour la mémoire durable des individus”

(Fiction 148). The text takes on flesh, it has a material presence within social space; but we the living are left with this final tension between the moral, social, political imperative of memory, and the pathetic untranslatability of flesh into narrative.

Notes

1. This force acts as a binding force between mind and things, and it is linked to memory inasmuch as the memory of the individual is a material container and purveyor of experience. For recent work in this area, see Michael Holquist's "From Body-Talk to Biography: The Chronobiological bases of Narrative," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3 (1989): 1-35.
2. Philippe Hamon, "Le Discours contraint," *Poétique* 16 (1973) p. 422.
3. "Une Écriture de la socialité," *Poétique* 16 (1973) pp. 446-454.
4. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, eds. Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew, (New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers UP, 1989, Letter 122, p. 449).
5. *Matière et Mémoire* 225-6. See also Joyce N. Megay's *Bergson et Proust : Essai de mise au point de la question de l'influence de Bergson sur Proust* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1976) p. 75 ff.
6. Cited in *Elements of Chemistry* (Chicago, U of Chicago P) p. 7. For further theoretical information concerning Lavoisier's work, see Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Architecture of Matter* (NY: Harper & Row, 1962) pp. 222 ff., and Levine *Darwin and the Novelists* 61 ff.

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