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Conversation in the novel

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ABSTRACT: Conversation in the Novel
by Kris Davis-Brown

Among types of books, novels allow readers the most conversational possibilities: readers may "overhear" conversations among characters, among narrators and characters, among other voices, narrators and characters; readers may even find themselves participating in the conversation which novels demand. Because much of a novelist's style depends upon her/ his conversational choices, literary critics discussing the function of conversation in novels frequently describe the ways in which dialogue serves to characterize characters. While such criticism reveals a remarkable range of novelistic conversation, it raises questions which too often it fails to answer. For example, our response to Mrs. Elton differs from our listening to Emma, to Mr. Knightley and to their narrator, and, realizing the extent to which Mrs. Elton's talk contains her, we begin to wonder why Mrs. Elton is in Emma's story. Wondering about Mrs. Elton involves recognizing a curious disequilibrium underlying conversation in Emma and in the novel. Placing Austen in conversation with James, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad and Faulkner -- all novelists to whom conversation is of central importance, both stylistically and thematically -- allows my study to
discuss the reach of this disequilibrium, a reach which defines the novel itself.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyphony provides my "disequilibrium" with a theoretical context. The novels which this dissertation reads fail to achieve sustained polyphony; that is, the effects of and the opportunities for the various voices inhabiting these novels are not equal. While one might respond that the concept "sustained polyphony" fails and not the novels, identifying the disparities which handicap the relationship between a novel's speaking selves and speaking others places one at the heart of the novel. Polyphony serves as a kind of asymptote; it is a conversation whose necessity and unattainability define the novel. A particular novel's failure, then, suggests that the novel works to make its reader aware of distance, disequilibrium . . . and of the pain caused by distance, disequilibrium . . ., pain which surfaces even in the most serene comic novels. The particular failure defining the novel allows the novel to extend its conversation, to succeed precisely at its point of failure.
I am grateful for the careful attention which Wesley Morris, Jack Ward, Robert Patten, and Jane Gallop have given to this project. I appreciate very much the opportunity I have had to work with/learn from each of them.

And I thank Wesley Morris for demonstrating the kind of thinking Bakhtin describes (indeed, for introducing me to Bakhtin), for being an ideal dissertation director. I also thank my friends and family, especially Vicki Sapp, Madeline Fleming, Bill Piper, and, of course, David and Harry, for their encouragement and support.
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Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations."

When it comes to books, I tend to agree with Alice — at least regarding conversation. Among types of books, novels allow their readers the most conversational possibilities: the reader may "overhear" conversations among characters, among narrators and characters, among other voices, narrators and characters; the reader may even find herself participating in the conversation which her novel demands. Because much of a novelist's style depends upon her/his conversational choices, literary critics discussing the function of conversation in novels frequently describe the ways in which dialogue serves to characterize characters. While such criticism reveals a remarkable range of novelistic conversation, it raises questions which too often it fails to answer. For example, our response to Mrs. Elton's chatter differs from our listening to Emma, to Mr.
Knightley and to their narrator, and once we realize the extent to which Mrs. Elton's talk contains her, we begin to wonder why Mrs. Elton is in Emma's story. Wondering about Mrs. Elton involves recognizing a curious disequilibrium underlying conversation in *Emma* and in the novel. Such a recognition began the process of this dissertation.

That process involved me in placing *Emma* in conversation with other novels, in reconsidering not only Mrs. Elton but also the general function of conversation in the novel. *Emma*'s peculiar disequilibrium repeats itself in novelists as seemingly far from Austen as Faulkner; however, its effect, perhaps even its intent, shifts among novelists: if the particular conversational resonance occurring only in novels defines the novel, makes the novel, in Alice's terms, of "use," a novelist's use of conversation immediately suggests questions of method and motive. Answering such questions first requires recognizing that novelists respond differently to the problems inherent in conversation; and, in part, this study identifies crucial differences in the ways in which conversation functions in the works of six novelists to whom conversation is of central importance, not only stylistically, but also thematically.

Such discrimination among novelists returns me to Alice's adventures. On the other side of the looking glass, Alice meets a series of talking creatures (very like a
series of novels) whose conversation demands that Alice adjust and re-adjust her interpretive strategies in order to participate in or even simply to listen to all their talk. My experience of reading for this dissertation more than a little resembled Alice's looking glass encounters; that is, focusing my re-readings of Austen, James, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad and Faulkner upon the ways in which conversation functions in their work placed me in a puzzled and unexpectedly alienated position in relation to the novels which reminded me more than once of Alice's story. The "unexpectedly" resulted from my then recent introduction to Bakhtin and my being thoroughly convinced by his arguments. The "unexpectedly" also determined the form which my study assumed. For a curious split began to develop in my reading: I realized simultaneously that Bakhtin's polyphony describes a potential acknowledged by each of the novels included in this study and that none of the novels fulfill this potential. Examining and attempting to explain this split, which more and more asserted itself as I read, led me to decide that conversation's function in the novel was more complicated (and more ominous) than I had thought; talk in the novels too often expressed the self at the expense of the other. My reading revealed and reveals that the self-discovery and self-reflection defining conversation in the novel implicitly rejects the other as a self. This rejection
is a central problem in and of the novel. Such rejection makes difficult even a comedy like Emma and defines the tragedy informing the modern novels which this dissertation reads.

Alice too experiences this rejection, both as a "reader" -- she sees the self-reflexive structure of the talk around her continually isolate and objectify the other (to the extent that, in Tweedledee's song, these others become literal prey, dinner) -- and as a conversant; when Alice talks, no one listens. The talk which Alice attempts to enter frequently seeks to deny Alice her self, to make Alice "a fabulous monster" or "exactly like other people," an object of curiousity rather than a curious subject. Alice most often responds by walking away, by seeking out another conversation. And perhaps examining conversations in other novels whose use of conversation is less self-conscious would demonstrate that my discoveries about conversation's function apply only to the novels which this dissertation studies (I believe such an examination would prove otherwise; after all, Alice's conversations repeat themselves indefinitely). I choose to compare conversation in Austen, James, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad, and Faulkner because conversation in their novels involves this dissertation in a larger conversation concerning the value of conversation itself.
My readings of *Emma* and *Persuasion* introduce Bakhtin's usefulness to this larger conversation. Bakhtin locates, among the voices in monologic novels, a fundamental imbalance in which one voice subsumes the others. Reading Austen while listening to Bakhtin ends in hearing a revised version of this imbalance in Austen. *Emma* and *Persuasion* are both monologic and dialogic; within each novel, the conversation between the two Bakhtinian principles explains Austen's force, makes vital the stories she tells. Novels by James, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad, and Faulkner suggest Bakhtin's reach; they describe indispensable and inescapable conversational relationships between two (or among more than two) speaking subjects. However, having acknowledged the novel's dialogic potential, these novels retreat from that potential. In *The Ambassadors*, *The Awkward Age*, and *The Golden Bowl*, contact with the other promotes self-development, the emergence of the self; and yet, as essential dialogue reveals the character of the other to James's protagonists and to his reader, talk in James's novels begins to reflect a profound suspicion of the other, a suspicion which undermines the relationships which conversation has established. If James's psychological studies of the self and the other are finally skeptical regarding the value of conversation because the other is potentially (or, as the plots of the novels confirm,
probably) corrupt, novels by Forster and Lawrence also
assert the necessity of conversation only to deprecate its
results. Although the ideologies of Forster and Lawrence
oppose one another, the ideological arguments of *Howards
End, A Passage to India, Women in Love* and *The Plumed
Serpent* belittle the position of the other and, in so doing,
belittle conversation itself. Conrad and Faulkner, again
writing novels in which talk among characters places the
self in necessary relationship to the other, describe the
compulsion implied by such necessity. In both *Lord Jim* and
*Absalom, Absalom*, compelled conversation forces the
protagonist to consider the substantial claims which the
other makes upon him, but in these novels the other
overwhelms; conversation in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!*
undoes not the other but the self.

The summary comprising the previous paragraph indicates
the direction which my work has taken over time. While the
comparisons implicit in the following chapters may suggest a
sketchy progression (or perhaps a decline) in historical
time in which novels increasingly reflect both a self-
conscious awareness of the centrality of conversation to the
enterprise of the novel and a suspicion regarding the power
of talk, the focus of my argument is generic rather than
historical; an historical argument would require more and
different kinds of evidence. Conversation in the novels
included in this study registers an increasing distance between the self and the other. Perhaps the disequilibrium characterizing a novel's/ the novel's conversation results from this distance; perhaps such disequilibrium produces and reproduces this distance. However, attributing cause and effect to the two metaphors "distance" and "disequilibrium" obscures the fact that they are largely interchangeable. Distance, disequilibrium, decline, all suggest failure. And two related questions emerge from my reading, questions which are problems for my reading: am I accusing the novel of failing, and, if I am doing something so patently ridiculous, what is the value of my work?

In defending the novel as well as myself, I first must admit that I believe in a sense novels do fail. The novels which I read in this dissertation fail to achieve sustained polyphony; that is, the effects of and the opportunities for the various voices inhabiting these novels are not equal. While one simply might respond that the concept "sustained polyphony" fails and not the novels, identifying the disparities which handicap the relationship between a novel's speaking selves and speaking others places one at the heart of the novel. Polyphony serves as a kind of asymptote; it is a conversation whose necessity and unattainability define the novel. A particular novel's failure, then, suggests that the novel works to make its
reader aware of distance, disequilibrium . . . and of the
pain caused by distance, disequilibrium . . . , pain which
surfaces even in the most serene comic novels. The
particular failure defining the novel allows the novel to
extend its conversation. And because failed polyphony
encourages the reader to add her voice to that conversation,
the novel succeeds precisely at its point of failure.

The following chapters trace the trajectory of this
point from Austen to Faulkner. Whatever the scale of
measurement, the distance between Absalom, Absalom! and Emma
is considerable. If the novel depends upon conversation,
depends upon its selves talking to necessary others, the
necessary others in Emma and Persuasion, by the end of their
novels, have begun to look very much like our selves. If
Austen and her readers fall down a rabbit hole which is
later well travelled, they/ we do not seem to experiment
with any curiously marked foodstuffs. And yet, when we re-
think both Austen's novels and Alice's story, we begin to
notice more than a little resemblance between Austen's
shifting of the essence of the other in order to establish
her heroines and Alice's adventures in perspectives. Because
the discovery of such shiftiness (in James, Forster,
Lawrence, Conrad, and Faulkner as well as in Austen) rests
not upon what we see but upon what (and how) they, the
speaking narrators, protagonists and others who inhabit our
reading, say, conversation in the novel invites the study which constitutes this dissertation.
Introduction: Conversation in *Emma* and *Persuasion*

Jane Austen's readers long have recognized Austen's ability to use conversation in order to define her characters. Agnes Repplier writes in 1892: "[Austen] has scant need to describe her characters, and she seldom takes that trouble. They betray themselves at every word, and stand convicted on their own evidence."¹ Critics since Repplier have evaluated and re-evaluated the ways in which Austen's characters "stand convicted on their own evidence."² In his recent book, Tony Tanner asks a series of questions with the intention of suggesting conversational categories able to contain Austen's characters:

Do they indulge in ostentatiously self-advertising figurative language, or do they reveal a suspicion of its latent tendency to theatricalisation and factitious self-dramatisation? Do they deploy abstract concepts and value terms scrupulously and reliably, or do they exploit them to give a facade of rationality and morality to purely egotistical intentions and desires? Does a character speak too much or say too little given
the tacit requirements of the situation? Is a character mindlessly loquacious or gracelessly taciturn? Are characters given to facile agitations and exaggerated emotionalism or are they capable of tactful adequacy of utterance and an appropriate reserve? Are their generalisations reliably founded in experience and reflection or do they emerge as inert and inappropriate cliches, mere repetitions of the accepted terminological currency of their social tribe? Do they merely echo the sociolect or do they employ it in such a way as to give it renewed force and relevance? Are they given to a true propriety of speech or are they only capable of fumbling approximations to it, lapsing into more or less subtle failures of propriety -- or out-and-out parodies of it? Do they 'speak' or are they 'spoken'? 3

If Repplier's description of Austen's use of conversation is one of the earliest, Tanner's discussion demonstrates that critics still are interested in the ways in which Austen uses conversation to define character; indeed, Tanner's exhaustive list best represents standard critical thinking regarding conversation in Austen. Yet, while Tanner's questions do establish Austenian criteria for moral judgment, they do not exactly work for some important Austenian characters. When one runs Emma, Frank Churchill,
Jane Fairfax, Wentworth, Anne Elliot, William Walter Elliot (not to mention Elizabeth Bennett, Darcy, Catherine Moreland . . .) through Tanner's list, one immediately recognizes that, in Austen, a character's language, especially that of a major character, is flexible, even changes during the course of its novel; indeed, Austen centers her work upon the possibility of this flexibility. Conversation in her novels not only fixes certain, usually minor, characters in the reader's mind, but also provides Emma, Anne, Wentworth and others the space (albeit a restricted space) to discover and to develop their own distinct voices.

In his *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster establishes his critical distinction between "flat" and "round" characters by emphasizing the fluidity rather than the fixity of Austen's characters: "[Jane Austen] is a miniaturist, but never two-dimensional. All her characters are round, or capable of rotundity." While Mrs. Elton's static chatter and Mary Musgrove's incessant whining demonstrate that Austen's work contains its share of "flat" characters, Forster's discrimination suggests both that some characters, the "round" ones, may develop their voices during the course of their novels and that their conversation will reflect this development. Yet, Forster's approach, like that of Tanner, tends to isolate the
individual character by separating his or her conversation from the conversational world of the novel. Bakhtin, developing his own version of "flat" and "round" characters, places the lone character back into his or her context, back into the novelistic world which includes the other:

To think about [the consciousness of other people] means to talk with them; otherwise they immediately turn to us their objectivized side: they fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivized images. An enormous and intense dialogic activity is demanded of the author of a polyphonic novel; as soon as this activity slackens, the characters begin to congeal, they become mere things, and monologically formed chunks of life appear in the novel. 6

I will hold Bakhtin's concepts "polyphonous" and "monologic" in suspension for a moment. What Bakhtin offers to any discussion of conversation and character is the recognition that characters converse, are in a kind of dialogue with other characters, the narrator, the reader ... and that discussing the function of conversation in the novel requires paying close attention to these multiple conversations whenever they present themselves. At first glance, Jane Austen, with her carefully controlled characters, plots and endings, seems to typify Bakhtin's
"objectivized side." A proper Bakhtinian might consider Austen's characters too many "monologic chunks" to allow for any "dialogic activity"; however, Bakhtin's description of the polyphonic novel touches both *Emma* and *Persuasion*:

Everywhere there is an intersection, consonance, or interruption of rejoinders in the open dialogue by rejoinders in the heroes' internal dialogue. Everywhere a specific sum total of ideas, thoughts and words is passed through several unmerged voices, sounding differently in each. The object of authorial aspirations is certainly not the sum total of ideas in itself, as something neutral and identical with itself. No, the object is precisely the passing of a theme through many and various voices, its rigorous and so to speak, irrevocable multi- and vari-voicedness. (Problems 265)

If Jane Austen's novels contain their share of "monologic chunks," they also contain "polyphonic" moments. Bakhtin's terms allow one to distinguish critically a variety of ways in which Jane Austen uses conversation and to determine the value of conversation in each of Austen's novels. In *Emma* and *Persuasion*, within the play of dialogue, or, in a larger sense, within the play of conversation in the novels -- not only the talk among characters, but all of the novel's juxtaposed voices themselves (including the
narrators' voices, Emma's silent misunderstanding, Anne's painful considerations . . .) -- monologic and polyphonous impulses meet.

Emma's first sentence gives the impression of a coming monologia:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. 7

Emma, "handsome, clever and rich," although she may meet, as the novel progresses, problems which will "vex" her, seems set; Austen's opening description works to make Emma attractively firm. However, my "seems" reflects Austen's "seemed," and this "seemed" undermines Emma's firmness.8

The opening sentence of Emma moves in two directions: at the same time that it indicates a monologically static character, it also suggests the potential for Bakhtinian "intersection," for the "interruption or rejoinders in the open dialogue by rejoinders in the heroes' internal dialogue." Both Emma and Emma need other voices to accomplish this intersection. Emma's narrator has Emma herself as an "other" voice. Emma's task in the novel is to develop her own dialogic ability, to accomplish the escape
which the narrator's "seemed" allows, the escape from her apparent "flatness" which opens the novel.

The Emma whose "handsome, clever and rich" contains her is the Emma who does not attempt such an escape. This Emma shares Mrs. Elton's company. In his *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method*, J. F. Burrows uses a computer generated analysis of Austen's characters' speech to show Emma's remarkably high degree of resemblance to Mrs. Elton. Austen underscores this resemblance. Mrs. Elton's first words connect the two women: "The very first subject after being seated was Maple Grove, 'My brother Mr. Suckling's seat' -- a comparison of Hartfield to Maple Grove" (Emma 184). And Mrs. Elton's snobbery, the content of much of her conversation, is no worse than Emma's. Mrs. Elton, trying to establish her own set of "flat" characters, displays her notion of Hartfield society:

"[Mrs. Weston] appears so truly good -- there is something so motherly and kind-hearted about her, that it wins upon one directly. She was your governess, I think? [...] Having understood as much, I was rather astonished to find her so very lady-like! But she is really quite the gentlewoman. [...] And who do you think came in while we were there? [...] Knightley himself! -- was not it lucky? --" (Emma 188-189)
Mrs. Elton, quick to place herself among those whom she perceives to form the social elite, belittles Mrs. Weston and claims Mr. Knightley as her own peer. At the same time that it abuses the richness of relationship in Hartfield, Mrs. Elton's chatter reflects her own limitations; however, Mrs. Elton has lived in Hartfield less than a month. Emma, having lived in Hartfield all her life, is ignorant enough to argue with Mr. Knightley:

"[. . .] Mr. Martin is a very respectable young man, but I cannot admit him to be Harriet's equal; and am rather surprised indeed that he should have ventured to address her. By your account, he does seem to have some scruples. It was a pity that they were ever got over."

(Emma 40)

Or worse, she is able to malign Martin, whom she admits never to have met, to Harriet:

"Dear affectionate creature! -- You banished to Abbey Mill Farm! -- You confined to the society of the illiterate and vulgar all your life! I wonder how the young man could have the assurance to ask it. He must have a pretty good opinion of himself." (Emma 35)

"Dear affectionate creature" places Emma in something of the same relation to Harriet that Mrs. Elton wishes her "so motherly and kind-hearted" will place her in relation to
Mrs. Weston. Emma's "illiterate and vulgar" exceeds anything that Mrs. Elton says. Marvin Mudrick writes: "Mrs. Elton -- for all of Emma's heartfelt aversion to her -- is Emma's true companion in motive. Both must dominate every situation. Both must have admirers to confirm their position. Both are profoundly wanting in altruism and sympathy." Emma, "handsome, clever and rich," is the Emma who attracts Mr. Elton and who most resembles Mrs. Elton. Mrs. Elton first appears at the height of Emma's mischief, after Emma's disastrous campaign to marry Harriet to Mr. Elton and during her extended snubbing of Jane Fairfax and scheming with Frank Churchill. Emma's initial judgment of Mrs. Elton can only reverberate back upon herself:

[Emma] had a quarter hour of the lady's conversation to herself, [..] and the quarter of an hour quite convinced her that Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; that she meant to shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; that all her notions were drawn from one set of people, and one style of living; that if not foolish she was ignorant, and that her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no
good. (Emma 184)  
Mrs. Elton's conversation defines her both for Emma and Emma's reader. That this judgment sticks to Emma herself (if one re-reads it with Emma in mind, one only has to supply Emma's Box Hill manners to see its uncanny relevance) suggests Mrs. Elton's function in the novel. Mrs. Elton represents a potential for Emma as well as a parody of her. Emma's foolishness literally creates a space for Mrs. Elton: if Emma had not involved herself in Mr. Elton and Harriet's business, perhaps Mr. Elton never would have found his Augusta. Yet, Augusta, not Emma, becomes Mrs. Elton. And Emma's rejecting Mr. Elton's proposal suggests, upon retrospect, that, although Mrs. Elton represents a possibility for Emma, Emma "will make no lasting blunders." Burrows qualifies his comparison of Emma's to Mrs. Elton's conversation: "Mrs Elton's resemblance is to the earlier Emma; but, while Emma changes, Mrs Elton has one of the most static idiolects of all."11 Conversation in Emma not only defines Mrs. Elton, but it also forces Emma's reader to juxtapose Mrs. Elton's static voice to Emma's changing voice. Mrs. Elton intersects with Emma, and yet Emma outgrows her. Mrs. Elton, then, functions as a comment, and not the last one, upon Emma.

Emma's world is double-voiced. Even Miss Bates'
undifferentiated stream of words, when re-read, demonstrates the novel's multi-dimensional interaction:

"Jane, Jane, my dear Jane, where are you? Here is your tippet. Mrs. Weston begs you to put on your tippet. [...] My dear Jane, you must. Mr. Churchill, oh, you are too obliging! How well you put it on! -- so gratified! Excellent dancing indeed -- yes, my dear, I ran home [...] " (Emma 223)

In this slice of conversation (the preamble to a much longer passage), Miss Bates both responds and creates a response; Austen's reader sees that Jane Fairfax has probably been talking with Frank Churchill, then watches a "too obliging" Churchill put on Jane's tippet (with some skill) while simultaneously changing the focus of Miss Bates' attention to the dancing (Jane assists him by asking about her grandmother). Miss Bates' conversations are opportunities for the reader to piece out another view of Highbury: her monologues are not quite monologous; like Mrs. Elton's, they reflect and refract. In Emma, Jane Austen uses those characters who approach the monologous -- whose talk "betrays them" -- as catalysts for the novel's larger conversations.

Emma neither contains nor represents the "truth" in or of her novel. Whatever that "truth" is -- if Emma involves anything so grand -- emerges from the interplay comprising
these larger conversations. Early in the novel, when Emma conducts her courtship of Mr. Elton on Harriet's behalf, Austen's narrative voice combines with Emma's to present to Emma's reader a double view:

Emma could not feel a doubt of having given Harriet's fancy a proper direction and raised the gratitude of her young vanity to a very good purpose, for she found her decidedly more sensible than before of Mr. Elton's being a remarkable handsome man, with most agreeable manners; and as she had no hesitation in following up the assurance of her admiration, by agreeable hints, she was soon pretty confident of creating as much liking on Harriet's side, as there could be any occasion for. She was quite convinced of Mr. Elton's being in the fairest way of falling in love, if not in love already. She had no scruple with regard to him. [...] His perception of the striking improvement of Harriet's manner, since her introduction at Hartfield, was not one of the least agreeable proofs of his growing attachment. (Emma 26)

"[C]ould not feel a doubt," "her young vanity" (which touches Emma herself), "as there could be any occasion for," "[s]he had no scruple with regard to him," and "since her introduction at Hartfield" along with other elements in
this passage interpret Emma's interpretation. Here, as elsewhere in the novel, Austen creates not ambiguity but two voices, and, if in retrospect the interpretation of Emma seems more penetrating than Emma's interpretation, Emma's observations, as we read them, are valid.\textsuperscript{12} Emma's reader, also Emma's reader, listening to the narrative voice as well as Emma's hears the novel's larger conversation.\textsuperscript{13}

And this larger conversation encourages the reader to consider carefully all of the talk she hears. Although Emma fails to understand Frank and Jane at Box Hill, their conversation involves the reader in a crucial discussion of courtship and engagement:

"How many a man [said Frank Churchill] has committed himself on a short acquaintance and rued it all the rest of his life!"

Miss Fairfax, who had seldom spoken before, except among her own confederates, spoke now.

"Such things do occur, undoubtedly." --she was stopped by a cough. [. . .]

"You were speaking," said he, gravely. [. . .]

"I was only going to observe, that though such things do sometimes occur both to men and women, I cannot imagine them to be very frequent. A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise -- but there is
generally time to recover from it afterwards. I would be understood to mean, that it can only be weak, irresolute characters who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression forever."

He made no answer; merely looked, and bowed in submission; (Emma 255-256)

This conversation's abstracted content confirms the novel's ending: Mr. Knightley and Emma commit themselves to one another after an acquaintance which has lasted Emma's whole life. Yet, of course, such a reading of Frank and Jane's conversation misses the point; indeed the principle which Frank and Jane establish together, that a hastily-made commitment does not obligate a man like Frank Churchill, would be ruinous applied to their own situation. The strained style of their talk begins to undermine this principle. The censure infoming Jane's "weak, irresolute characters" touches precisely the hypothetical man Jane claims to praise (the man who would break his engagement), and, whether or not the reader entirely understands the personal significance of their conversation, Jane's releasing the young man from his commitment, given her own precarious social position, displays a certain courage but does not convince completely. If comparing the engagement of Frank and Jane's hypothetical couple to their own (or, in
retrospect, to Emma and Mr. Knightley's) proves only that principles require adjusting, this conversation demonstrates the insistence of the individual voice as well as the slipperiness of principles. Jane, silent for so much of the novel, speaks here perhaps to release Frank, perhaps to criticize his behavior, but, in her curious retreat which is also an attack, her voice becomes something Frank must consider rather than attempt to manipulate. Concluding their conversation, Frank's question to Emma, "I have so little confidence in my own judgment, that whenever I marry, I hope somebody will choose my wife for me. Will you?", punishes Jane for resisting and criticizing him, but his question also represents his own hurt, and, in so doing, indicates the profound effect of Jane's voice. Austen's reader, most likely reading this passage more than once, adds her own voice to Frank and Jane's highly public and highly personal debate: as the reader begins to understand both lovers' positions, she must qualify her own. The force of this passage, then, lies in its juxtaposition of voices more than in the abstracted content of its argument.

Bakhtin, describing the polyphonous novel, writes:

What is realized in the novel is 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
belief system in someone else's system. There takes place within the novel an ideological translation of another's language, and an overcoming of its otherness -- an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory. (Dialogic 365)

Frank and Jane's infrequent talk begins to involve them in such a process. Emma's more fully represented conversations save Emma from becoming Mrs. Elton when they demonstrate that Emma is able to hear Mr. Knightley. While so much of the novel depends upon Emma's misinterpreting the independent voices of those who surround her, Emma very seldom misinterprets Mr. Knightley. She realizes that she does not need to defend Frank Churchill's trip, presumably for a hair cut, to London:

The circumstance was told [Mr. Knightley] at Hartfield; for the moment, he was silent, but Emma heard him almost immediately afterwards say to himself, over a newspaper he held in his hand, "Hum! just the trifling, silly fellow I took him for." She had half a mind to resent, but an instant's observation convinced her that it was really said only to relieve his own feelings, and not meant to provoke; and therefore she let it pass. (Emma 139)

Emma here (as well as throughout the novel) correctly identifies Mr. Knightley's motives and true opinions. Mary
Renrith writes: "[s]tructurally Emma's linguistic and moral likenesses to the residents of Highbury are most heavily weighted at the beginning of the novel, diminishing as her affinity to Mr. Knightley increases." Burrows' computer analysis confirms Renrith's observation; Emma's conversation bears the highest statistical degree of resemblance to Mr. Knightley's, and this resemblance increases as the novel progresses. The plot of *Emma* requires Emma to "come to know" Mr. Knightley's language, or, more precisely, to hear that language as it already exists in herself. Emma's discovery of the identity of the other, both her ability finally to hear rather than recreate Mr. Knightley and her "overcoming of [his] otherness" guarantee that Emma's blunders will not be lasting.

And yet Emma's blunders in some part constitute her independent self. If Emma finds her best match in Mr. Knightley, his proposal and her acceptance marks the union of two voices as well as characters. Mr. Knightley concludes: "God knows, I have been a very indifferent lover. -- But you understand me. -- Yes, you see, you understand my feelings -- and will return them if you can. At present, I ask only to hear your voice" (*Emma* 296). Given Emma's state of mind, the reader most likely believes that once again Knightley and Emma do intuitively, or at least silently, connect: certainly Mr. Knightley's proposal results in the
eventual "perfect happiness of the union." But we do not "hear her voice"; instead, Austen assures us "What did she say? -- Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" (Emma 297). Janis Stout suggests several reasons for Emma's, actually Austen's silence, among them, novelistic tact, a "demand for an intelligent participating audience," thematic focus, and the "inadequacy of language for the expression of strong feeling." Yet Emma's silence is troubling. Whatever reason best explains Austen's curious interruption, its effect (perhaps yet another reason) is perfect closure, or, more negatively, the end of dialogue. Once Mr. Knightly has proposed he and Emma completely agree; so what more is there to say?

In the novel's last movement, the narrative voice, previously in dialogue with Emma, loses its independence (or perhaps Emma loses hers). When Harriet's father is discovered to be only a tradesman, the novel's narrative voice merges with Emma's own:

It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connexion had she [Emma] been preparing for Mr. Knightley -- or for the Churchills -- or even for Mr. Elton! -- The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed. [. . .]
Harriet necessarily drawn away by her engagements with the Martins, was less and less at Hartfield; which was not to be regretted. — The intimacy between her and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of good will; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner. (Emma 333)

While Emma's separation from Harriet Smith is hardly a tragedy, the end of real dialogue in the novel marks the encroachment of Charlotte Bronte's famous "carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers." Emma's growing up requires her giving up polyphony. In Emma, union means one voice, and one voice means clear social discriminations, means Mr. Knightley and Emma's silent superiority, as much as it means "perfect happiness." Austen's reader may hope that Emma will continue to encounter others who will engage her powers of interpretation and misinterpretation with the result that she continue to experience the independent presence (and pleasure) of the other; however Emma promises no such future; instead the novel retreats from the complicated array of voices which it expresses and contains.

Sir Walter Elliot speaks in the single voice which ends Emma. The opening sentence of Persuasion places Elliot squarely in Bronte's garden:
Sir Walter Elliot, of KELLYNCH-HALL, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century—and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed—this was the page at which the favorite volume always opened:

ELLIOt OF KELLYNCH-HALL. 20

Austen's relentless description of Sir Walter does not contain **Emma's** qualifying "seemed." The passage's repeated "there" is Sir Walter's answer to any of his problems; Sir Walter's re-readings of the same Baronetage entry indicate his own limited range. Sir Walter's sentence, like his perpetual re-readings, doubles back upon itself. Beginning and ending with "Elliot," its form enacts the complete neglect of any "other" which its content suggests. Each time he speaks in the novel, Sir Walter fulfills this sentence. The extremity of his self-enclosed and self-
reflexive understanding makes him a parody of monologia. When he is separated out from the rest of the novel's characters, his function is to suggest such a parody.

But Sir Walter is not alone in the novel (although, in another way, being unable to enter into any dialogic relationship, he is completely alone). *Persuasion* is full of characters whose conversational inabilities approach Sir Walter's, whose talk is self-directed and self-contained. Austen's "monologic chunks," the product of her obviously conscious choice (after all, she begins the novel with Sir Walter) not of her "slackening activity," work together in *Persuasion* 21: their function is to isolate Anne. For example, Austen introduces Anne after she has presented Sir Walter: "Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; she was only Anne" (*Persuasion* 37). Anne's "word" has "no weight" with most of her family and friends. Among her sisters or the Musgroves, Anne again is "only Anne":

She played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little
thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others, as she was well aware. (Persuasion 73)

"[H]aving no voice" is an apt, if also painful, pun. Anne's situation at the beginning of the novel, her living in the aftermath of having been forced to give up Wentworth eight years previously, results from her "having no voice."22 Anne's experience, her being "well-aware" of the limitations of those who surround her, requires that she maintain whatever self she has in silent opposition.

This silent opposition defines and shapes Anne. Unlike Emma, who has too much voice both in her family and her society, Anne does not speak what she thinks or knows. Yet what she thinks (and knows) generally remains constant (again unlike Emma, Anne does not vacillate). For example, although she maintains her silence, Anne not only understands but judges her sister Mary and the Musgroves:23

Anne had always thought such a style of intercourse highly imprudent; but she had ceased to endeavor to check it, from believing that, though there were on each side continual subjects of offence, neither family could now do without it. To the Great House accordingly they went, to sit the full half hour in the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor to which the present daughters of the
house were gradually giving the proper air of confusion by a grand piano forte and a harp, flowerstands and little tables placed in every direction. Oh! could the originals of the portraits against the wainscot, could the gentlemen in brown velvet and the ladies in blue satin have seen what was going on, have been conscious of such an overthrow of all order and neatness! The portraits themselves seemed to be staring in astonishment. (Persuasion 67)

Anne's judgments are, as usual, correct. What is curious about this passage is the extent to which Anne's consciousness blends into the narrator's voice. Anne's position in opposition is, in Persuasion, the correct position (the portraits on the wall, presumably of greater men and women than any of the Musgroves, certainly agree with Anne). Emma confirms the voice of her society (given her high social position, at times she determines this voice), but, Emma's narrator, before the novel's end, often disagrees with Emma. Persuasion's narrator confirms Anne's judgment, not her society's; paradoxically, the one character who cannot express herself represents Persuasion's standard of both behavior and opinion.

That Persuasion has such an unmistakable standard places it as a monologic novel. Bakhtin writes:

In an environment of philosophical monologism the
genuine interaction of consciousness is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and pupil, which, it follows, can be only a pedagogical dialogue. (Problems 81)

While her circumstances prevent Anne from effectively teaching anyone but Wentworth, the tension in Persuasion, that Anne's correct judgment may not prevail, suggests Bakhtin's "environment of philosophical monologism." D. H. Lawrence, reacting against Austen, writes: "this old maid typifies 'personality' instead of character, the sharp knowing in apartness instead of knowing in togetherness, and she is, to my feeling, thoroughly unpleasant, English in the bad, mean, snobbish sense of the word."24 In Persuasion, Anne experiences Lawrence's "sharp knowing in apartness"; her resistance, her maintenance of a separate, completely consistent (and therefore perhaps simply monologic) self is the novel's opening intention and triumph.

Yet one can defend Persuasion against Lawrence. As the novel progresses, Anne converses more and more (this is no small point). In an important discussion with her cousin, she defines her conversational ideal:
'My idea of good company, Mr Elliot, is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation; that is what I call good company.'

'You are mistaken,' said he gently, 'that is not good company, that is the best. Good company requires only birth, education and manners, and with regard to education it is not very nice. Birth and good manners are essential; but a little learning is by no means a dangerous thing in good company, on the contrary, it will do very well [. . .].' (Persuasion 162)

While her "idea of good company" is exclusive (Anne's "snobbishness" excludes foolish, poorly-informed people), Anne's principle suggests that conversation is extremely important to her. Her cousin's reply, although Mr. Elliot speaks it "gently" and expresses himself well (he is another Austen character difficult to "type" by his manner of speaking), indicates the reason why Anne, throughout most of the novel, does not encounter her "good company." As a member of the Elliot family with the formidable Lady Russell as her mother-figure, Anne is surrounded by Mr. Elliot's "good company." And this "good company" prevents Anne from knowing any "clever, well-informed people." Anne's "sharp knowing in apartness" results from her stifling connections,
connections which her "sharp knowing" force her to criticize, even, for moments, force her to regret.

Anne rarely is able to enter into her "great deal of conversation." Instead of being able to explain or defend her past behavior to Wentworth, she unavoidably overhears, and because she overhears is unable to respond to, Wentworth's courtship of Louisa and indirect criticism of herself. Wentworth ends his long discussion, almost a sermon, on the merits of strong-mindedness:

"My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind."

He had done -- and was unanswered. *(Persuasion 110)*

Anne has no recourse; given her situation, both her immediate physical location and the history of her relationship with Wentworth, she cannot speak to defend herself. "He had done -- and was unanswered" emphasizes Anne's forced silence. Wentworth badly needs some answer, some real conversation as opposed to Louisa's self-directed chatter, but Austen prevents Anne from being able to speak with him. Denying her characters conversation, she demonstrates its importance.26

Wentworth and Anne's renewed engagement depends upon
each of them listening carefully to interrupted moments of the other's talk. After Wentworth has expressed his surprise at Benwick's marrying Louisa Musgrove, Anne gives him her "impressions" of their experience at Lyme:

'So much novelty and beauty! I have travelled so little, that every fresh place would be interesting to me -- but there is real beauty at Lyme: and in short' (with a faint blush at some recollections) 'altogether my impressions of the place are very agreeable!' (Persuasion 193)

Each uses the other's small revelations to move a step closer to admitting his/her own feelings. Having expressed her own satisfaction with her experiences in Lyme (surely including Louisa's fall and subsequent exchange of Benwick for Wentworth), Anne responds to Wentworth's talk: "Their interesting, almost too interesting conversation must be broken up for a time; but slight was the penance compared with the happiness which brought it on! She had learnt, in the last ten minutes, more of his feelings towards Louisa, more of all his feelings, than she dared to think of!" (Persuasion 194). Austen gives Anne and Wentworth only "ten minutes"; she constantly breaks up their conversations. This interruption may reinforce Persuasion's realism, or more cynically, it may stretch out its plot; however, it also marks Anne's gradual integration into her "good
company." In the presence of Wentworth and in that of *Persuasion*'s naval company generally, listening, even conversing, becomes for Anne a pleasure and not a burden. Wentworth's small revelations result in Anne's straining to hear and understand him, and her hearing encourages her own talk. *Persuasion*'s present resolution, occupying chapters 22 and 23, originally occurred in one very different chapter. Austen's revisions, her cancelling the original resolution of *Persuasion* and replacing it with chapters 22 and 23, indicate the novel's move toward something like Bakhtinian dialogue. Austen's cancelled chapter opens with Admiral Croft forcing Anne, very much against her will, into his house ostensibly to visit his wife: "Anne felt so little disposed at this time to be in company of any sort, that it vexed her to be thus constrained, but she was obliged to stop" (*Persuasion* 255). Anne, once again "constrained" and "obliged," listens to Wentworth, also literally forced to speak, inform her of her anticipated marriage to her cousin in order to express the Admiral's willingness to release (given the series of constraints in this chapter, any release seems highly ironic) the Elliots from their landlord obligations. Once Anne has disavowed her engagement to Sir Walter, Wentworth and she carry on a quick "silent dialogue" which ends simply: "'Anne, my own dear Anne'" (*Persuasion* 260).
Persuasion's revised resolution allows Anne to speak, perhaps for the first time, without interruption. Instead of being unhappily rushed into a pre-arranged situation, Anne is a comfortable part of a group composed mostly of those connected with the navy -- this group very much resembles Anne's "idea of good company." Displaying an uncharacteristic lack of reserve, she discusses, with Captain Harville, Benwick's engagement, and this conversation allows her to express some of her most heartfelt sentiments about men and women:

'I believe you capable of every thing great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forebearance, so long as -- if I may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.' (Persuasion 238)

Anne's conversation with Benwick, Austen's extreme revision of Persuasion's conclusion, allows Anne the space to speak freely in her own voice. In the revised version of Persuasion, Wentworth proposes to Anne because she finally is able to speak, because he listens to her talk, not
because circumstances force a plot resolution. Once Anne's voice prompts Wentworth to respond, conversation itself becomes their happiness:

soon words enough had passed between them to decide their direction towards the comparatively quiet and retired gravel walk, where the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed; and prepare it for all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow.

Persuasion 243

Anne's speaking, then, resolves her isolation as it makes herself known to Wentworth. Yet, although Anne's argument concerning the relative faithfulness of women and men convinces Benwick, Wentworth's response to that argument, his proposal to Anne, proves that Anne is not altogether correct. Wentworth has loved as long as Anne, even when "hope [was] gone." Almost at the moment Anne is able to speak in her own voice, she is no longer monologically correct (her judgment becomes fallible); she needs Wentworth's response. Persuasion's ending, following Anne and Wentworth's engagement, promises that Anne will continue to experience such necessary responses. In the midst of a large family gathering (significantly Anne is now able to escape oppressive relations even when they are present), Anne defends to Wentworth her past rejection of
him:

'I have been thinking over the past, and trying to impartially judge of the right and the wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of the parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. [...] But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as it is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion.'

He looked at her, looked at Lady Russell, and, looking again at her, replied, as if in cool deliberation,

'Not yet. But there are hopes of her being forgiven in time.' (Persuasion 248)

While critics often accept Anne's arguments at face value, the narrative voice, which generally echoes Anne's sentiments, here makes no comment. Certainly, at least
Wentworth does not agree with Anne.\textsuperscript{30} And, though the reader is glad for Anne's happiness, her appraisal of Lady Russell, and more particularly of Anne's family, cannot exactly confirm Anne's own; therefore the reader cannot accept Anne's past "submission," especially considering the pain which it has caused, as readily as a defensive and fully satisfied Anne does. Anne may believe she has, "as far as it is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach [herself] with," but her position is only one among several, and the other positions, the narrative voice's, Wentworth's, the reader's, do not exactly agree with her.

*Persuasion*’s last lines separate Anne from any consideration of her family:

Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarms for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance. ("Persuasion" 253-254)

In marrying Wentworth, Anne joins the navy; "she must pay the tax [. . .] for belonging to that profession," and, in joining her "good company," Anne begins a new life, one with
"quick alarms" and "domestic virtues," beyond the reach of *Persuasion*. That such a life exists for Anne pushes *Persuasion* further away from its monologic opening. Critics argue that *Persuasion* is a romantic novel, but "romance" suggests larger than life heroes, mysteries followed by firm resolution. *Persuasion* offers only Anne and Wentworth's careful working out of their differences (never wholly resolved) and an open ending. *Persuasion* is not so much a romance as it is something like a monologic novel becoming something like a polyphonous novel.

Bakhtin's terms allow a critical re-evaluation of both *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Conversation in these novels does more than characterize Austen's characters. Recognizing Austen's conflicting monologic and polyphonous impulses means hearing the resonance in her novels' conversations, means placing Emma and Anne back into the other-filled contexts of each of their novels. Both Emma and Anne struggle to establish their proper voices, and Jane Nardin argues that Austenian propriety itself contains an unresolved dialogue: "The general term propriety may refer to a set of socially acceptable rules of behavior, or it may refer to a morally acceptable code of behavior." In *Persuasion*, morally acceptable code of behavior pulls away from "socially acceptable rules of behavior"; in *Emma*, the two finally combine to become one. In each novel, Austen qualifies: in
*Persuasion*, she works away at Anne's isolated but (apparently) sufficiently integral self; in *Emma*, she undermines then supports Emma's developing monologic consciousness. Whatever one chooses as Austen's most important category or central theme, *Emma's* dialogic possibilities fuse into its monologic conclusion; *Persuasion's* monologic tendencies give way to its open-endedness. *Emma* and *Persuasion* prove that Bakhtinian extremes can meet. The interplay of static and fluid voices which emerges from the intersection of these extremes creates the unique and richly texture worlds of Austen's novels. That this interplay itself invites conversation is yet another reason for Austen's persistent popularity.
Notes


3 Tanner, 41-42.


5 Forster writes, "the test of a round character is whether
or not it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round." Aspects of the Novel 78.


6 Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, Mn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 68.

7 1; all quotations of Emma from Jane Austen, Emma (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972).

8 Professor Robert Patten's reading of this "seemed" informs my own.


10 Mudrick 194.

11 Burrows 106.

12 For a related discussion, see A. Walton Litz, Jane Austen: A Study of her Artistic Development (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965) 149.
13 What Bakhtin writes about Pushkin may be applied to Austen: "the author represents the language, carries on a conversation with it, and this conversation penetrates into the interior of this language-image and dialogizes it from within." Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tx.: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) 46.

14 Emma, when she is not in the act of match-making, generally shares Mr. Knightley's opinions. For example, see Emma 98.


16 Burrows 92 and chapter 10.


18 In her letter to Lewes, Bronte describes Jane Austen's work: "a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant houses." Charlotte Bronte, "Letter to G. H. Lewes, 12 January 1848, Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, Vol. I 126.
19 For a related discussion, see Harding 170.
21 According to Bakhtin, "an enormous and intense dialogic activity is demanded of the author of a polyphonic novel; as soon as this activity slackens, the characters begin to congeal, they become mere things, and monologically formed chunks of life appear in the novel" (Problems 68). Austen's beginning *Persuasion* without this "intense dialogic activity" suggests that *Persuasion* will be a monologic novel.
22 See Litz 153; Murdock 239.
25 It is interesting to note that Emma's notion of "good company" strongly resembles Mr. Elliot's, not Anne's.
26 See Brown 169.
27 Disclaiming Louisa's power of attraction (Wentworth had practically engaged himself to her), Wentworth subtly encourages Anne: "I regard Louisa Musgrove as a very amiable, sweet-tempered girl, and not deficient in understanding; but Benwick is something more" (192).
Wentworth implies that, if Benwick is "something more," whoever (Wentworth himself) understands Benwick's character is also "something more" than Louisa.

28 For another example, see *Persuasion* 229ff.


30 In contrast to Anne, Wentworth, also involved in self-appraisal, admits to his own past folly (*Persuasion* 248-49).


32 Nardin, 14-15.

33 For the importance of consciousness in Jane Austen, see Nardin, 9; Tony Tanner, introduction, *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen (New York: Penguin Classics, 1972) 35.
The Dialogic Imagination in James: Conversation in The Ambassadors, The Awkward Age and The Golden Bowl

Ezra Pound, describing the powerful presence in James's novels of James's "own so beautiful talk," writes: "I find it often [...] difficult to 'hear' his characters speaking. I have observed various places where the character notably stops speaking and the author interpolates words of his own; sentences that no one but Henry James could in any circumstance have used."¹ James's readers rarely are able to identify Jamesian characters, particularly the characters in James's late novels, on the sole basis of the style of their talk. The reader's confusion and its source, the considerable blurring between James's "own so beautiful talk" and that of his characters, resembles the plots of three late novels, resembles Strether's relationship to the Parisian other, as well as the relationships among the social sets inhabiting The Awkward Age and The Golden Bowl. The protagonist(s), the other(s) and the reader of these three novels all are involved in the central Jamesian activity of distinguishing the self from the other. The peculiar conversation in The Ambassadors, The Awkward Age, and The Golden Bowl enacts the problem of the self's
relationship to the other which these novels explore.

While critics have identified a variety of functions for Jamesian dialogues, Mikhail Bakhtin's description of Raskolnikov's "tasks" in *Crime and Punishment* is remarkably appropriate to a discussion of conversation in James:  

To find one's own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some and to oppose it to others, to separate one's voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged -- these are the tasks that the heroes solve in the course of the novel. And this determines the hero's discourse. It must find itself, reveal itself, among other words, within an intense field of inter-orientations.

The heroes of *The Ambassadors*, *The Awkward Age*, and *The Golden Bowl* all find themselves in worlds which demand that they attempt to perform the tasks Bakhtin describes. The necessary separation which Strether must achieve involves both his establishing an independent voice and his recognizing the independent voice of the other. Each of these tasks informs *The Awkward Age*; however Nanda and Van are submerged in the social voice comprising their novel's "field of inter-orientations" to a greater degree than Strether is in *The Ambassadors*. As a result, they encounter a more formidable intensity, one that possesses the power to overcome their emerging voices. Like Strether, Maggie must
"find her own voice and [...] orient it among other voices," and *The Golden Bowl*'s "field of inter-orientations" entangles Maggie to an even greater degree than the social voice of *The Awkward Age* entangles Nanda and Van. Given the heightening of the intensity of her circumstance, Maggie's developing dialogic capabilities which allow her to perform successfully the tasks which Bakhtin describes seems heroic indeed; however Maggie's triumph undoes her "intense field of inter-orientations." James's extensive consideration, in *The Ambassadors*, *The Awkward Age*, and *The Golden Bowl*, of the problematic nature of "other words" and other "voices," of the other itself, suggests that finding one's own voice both by and in relationship to the voice of the other is potentially a more tragic enterprise than the "dialogic struggle" envisioned by Bakhtin. Conversation in these three novels demonstrates not only that the developing self must recognize and enter into a relationship with the other, but also that this relationship ultimately may isolate or dissipate rather than integrate the self.

Strether epitomizes the developing self in James. And Bakhtinian principles describe Strether's role in *The Ambassadors*. Strether might be the Dostoevsky hero whom Bakhtin discusses: 5

the hero interests Dostoevsky as a particular point of
view on the world and on oneself, as the position enabling a person to interpret his own self and his surrounding reality. What is important to Dostoevsky is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself. (47)

Strether's assuming and testing of different perspectives is the novel's story: Strether's forming a perspective (actually, forming perspectives) allows both his interpretation of himself and of Paris; his "particular point[s] of view on the world and on [himself]" define both the plot and the theme of The Ambassadors. Yet this equation conceals a vital opposition in the novel. My "perspective" and my use of Bakhtin's "appears" suggest that the world in which Strether finds and defines himself is a surface upon which Strether looks. In fact, the world of which Strether becomes the hero consists of people, of Chad, Madame de Vionnet and their various connections. If Strether's shifting "point of view" dominates The Ambassadors, the problem in the novel is the problem which "view" creates: during the course of the novel, Strether must learn not only how to interpret surfaces but also how to know other human subjects (how to know other humans as being like he is, as being perceiving subjects). Strether arrives in Paris with only a point of view, and his habit of mind fosters
perspectives rather than relationships. In order for Strether to experience knowing the others that make up his world rather than simply interpreting the surface of that world, Strether must find his "own voice and [. . .] orient it among other voices." Accomplishing this task in *The Ambassadors* requires conversation. The plot of *The Ambassadors* demonstrates the difficulty of entering into and sustaining a necessary conversational state of mind.

Curiously, developing one's own "point of view" is a precursor to this necessary conversational state of mind. And conversation in the novel first allows Strether to begin "find[ing] his own voice" by "separat[ing it . . .] from another voice with which it has merged," from Mrs. Newsome's voice. Strether accomplishes this separation by recognizing it in talk; he discusses Mrs. Newsome with Miss Gostrey:

"[Mrs. Newsome] had, to her own mind, worked the whole thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for herself. Whenever she has done that, you see, there's no room left; no margin, as it were, for any alteration. She's filled as full, packed as tight, as she'll hold, and if you wish to get anything more or different either out or in --"

"You've got to make over altogether the woman herself?"

"What it comes to," said Strether, "is that you've
got morally and intellectually to get rid of her."

"Which would appear," Marie returned, "to be practically what you've done."

[... ] "I have n't touched her. She won' t be touched. [... ] [S]he hangs together with a perfection of her own."

Mrs. Newsome, "filled as full, packed as tight, as she' ll hold," filters the world through her "worked ... out" ideas. The fact that she never speaks, that Strether is able to speak for her (the attitude of the Pococks upon their arrival in Paris suggests that Strether's analysis of Mrs. Newsome is correct) indicates the nature of those ideas.

Mrs. Newsome, Woollett itself, insofar as Woollett has a voice in the novel, is a known quantity, a monologic chunk. Because she is such a chunk, Strether must break free from her. When Strether acknowledges both that Mrs. Newsome possesses "a perfection of her own" and that he can no more negate her perspective than she can his, he begins to define his own voice against another rather than being absorbed by that other. This process of definition initiates dialogic movement in the novel.

Most important, Strether finds and defines his "own voice" in conversation. Talking with Miss Costrey, Strether places (and re-places) himself in relationship (or, at least for a time, out of relationship) with Woollett. Placing
himself in relation to Paris requires even more talk. Miss Gostrey, who describes herself as "a general guide -- to 'Europe'" (I, 18),8 introduces Strether to Paris, forcing him to juxtapose Woollett's with another perspective:

"You've accepted the mission of separating [Chad] from the wicked woman. Are you quite sure she's very bad for him?"

Something in [Strether's] manner showed it as quite pulling him up. "Of course we are. Would n't you be?"

"Oh I don't know. One never does -- does one? -- beforehand. One can only judge on the facts. [...] If you're satisfied, that's all that's required. I mean if you're sure you are sure: sure it won't do."

"That he should lead such a life? Rather!"

"Oh but I don't know, you see, about his life; you've not told me about his life. She may be charming -- his life!" (I, 54-55)

Not only does Miss Gostrey suggest that there may be more than one way of seeing Chad and his mysterious woman friend, but she also encourages Strether to "possess the facts" for himself and therefore to speak for himself. Miss Gostrey introduces Strether to "'real' talk, to play of mind, to an explicit interest in life."9 Her early conversations with
Strether prompt him to re-assess the others whom he, as Mrs. Newsome's surrogate, had fixed in place before he arrived in Paris. Entering into the "real talk" which Miss Gostrey offers, Strether attempts to form a new perspective (his own). The act of changing his point of view begins to change Strether himself: his conversations with Miss Gostrey continue the process of self-analysis which allows Strether to develop his own voice.\(^1\)

The self-analysis (or perhaps the pleasure of self-analysis) which results from Strether's exposure to "real talk" proves to be a mixed blessing. While Strether's conversations with Miss Gostrey and with others in Chad's circle of Parisian acquaintances promotes self-definition by juxtaposition (Strether continually compares his life with the lives of those he encounters), the terms of Strether's ambassadorship to Paris require that Strether also consider Chad and his Parisian friends. Gloriani's Sunday afternoon collection of the Parisian circle which includes Chad provides Strether with his first opportunity to meet Madame de Vionnet as well as extends Strether an invitation to interact with Chad's Parisian friends on their own social ground (at Gloriani's garden as a guest and not at some Parisian "site" as a tourist). Strether responds to the opportunity and invitation which Gloriani's gathering represents by withdrawing to observe the "assault of images"
(I, 196) ("assault" to Strether's mind, social discourse to those participating). While he does engage in some polite conversation, most of the afternoon Strether watches the others; by choice, he stands at a distance or sits alone on a bench. Indeed, his famous instructions to little Bilham, "[l]ive all you can; it's a mistake not to," spoken because little Bilham will not allow Strether to sit alone, are predicated upon Strether's "want[ing] [. . .] to talk with none of them [those present]; having nothing at all to say [. . .] because what it was -- well, was just simply too late" (I, 216). Of course the plot of The Ambassadors to some degree proves Strether wrong; his involvement in Chad's affair(s) forces Strether to "live all [he] can."

Nevertheless, Strether's separation from the others allows him the space for (and the pleasure of) his imaginative reconstruction of those around him and heightened attention to the workings of his own mind. Strether reconsiders himself only to place himself as an observer, or, more precisely, because Strether defines his life by his "too late," Strether chooses for himself the role of observer. The position of observer enables Strether's self-analysis -- Strether continues to "find his [own] voice" -- but, watching the "real talk" around him, Strether forfeits the benefits of such talk to connect him to other people.

Strether's afternoon in Gloriani's garden marks, for
James's reader, the ironic beginning of Strether's
"[l]iv[ing] all [he] can," the ironic beginning because
Strether accomplishes such living through private vision,
not through vital connection, through conversation. After
Gloriani's garden party, Miss Gostrey "declares" to
Strether: "to see you work it out will be one of the
sensations of my life. It is clear you can toddle alone"
(II, 42-43). Her "declaration," indeed her later
conversations with Strether, suggest the inward turn of
Strether's talk. His perspective begins to overwhelm what he
hears. "[T]oddle[ing] alone" describes the position and
condition which Strether assumes as he attempts to
understand Chad's situation. "[T]oddle[ing] alone" also
describes Strether's conversations themselves. For example,
talking to little Bilham, Strether remains contained by his
own versions of Chad and Madame de Vionnet:

"It's a friendship, of a beautiful sort; and that's what
makes them so strong. They're straight, they feel; and
they keep each other up. It's doubtless she, however,
who, as you yourself have hinted, feels it most."

Little Bilham appeared to wonder what he had
hinted. "Feels most that they're straight?"

"Well, feels that she is, and the strength that
comes from it. She keeps him up -- she keeps the whole
thing up. [...] She's wonderful, wonderful, as Miss
Barrace says; and he is, in his way, too; however, as a mere man, he may sometimes rebel and not feel that he finds his account in it. She has simply given him an immense moral lift, and what that can explain is prodigious." [...] And Strether, with his head back and his eyes on the ceiling, seemed to lose himself in the vision of it.

His companion attended deeply. "You state it much better than I could." (I, 283-284)

Strether's grand re-creation of Madame de Vionnet and Chad is a response to little Bilham's immediately previous claim that Madame de Vionnet cares for Chad more than Chad cares for her. Strether ignores all but the surface of little Bilham's confused "[f]eels most that they're straight?" and, with hardly any effort, transforms little Bilham's potentially tragic (and certainly pitiful) account of the lovers into his own highly romantic "story" of their love. Strether's talk turns in upon itself; he "lose[s] himself in the vision" which he creates. "[L]ose himself" in its context means losing not only little Bilham's immediate comprehension, but also it means losing Chad and Madame de Vionnet as separate human beings with their own voices and intentions. Strether's "eyes on the ceiling," his insistent romantic vision making, drowns out the other voices which occupy (and to some extent determine) the world which he
inhabits.

Of course, "lose himself" also suggests that Strether loses his self. Losing little Bilham, Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether undermines the self which his position among them has allowed him to discover. Sensing Strether's need for his fictions, Chad takes advantage of this need, and, his manipulation, the result of Strether's strangely solipsistic conversation, isolates Strether. While the two men stand together on Chad's balcony, Chad, careful to encourage Strether's story-making, listens to Strether's talk:

It was as if their high place really represented some moral elevation from which they could look down on their recent past. "There never was the smallest chance, do you know, that they [the Newsome-Pococks] would have it for a moment."

"Of course not -- no real chance. But if they were willing to think that there was --!"

"They were n't willing." Strether had worked it all out. "It was n't for you they came out, but for me. It was n't to see for themselves what you're doing, but what I'm doing." (II, 216)

This scene depicting Strether's "moral elevation" occurs almost immediately before Strether's trip to the countryside
and his finally understanding the nature of the relationship between Chad and Marie. The extent to which Strether is right (or wrong) about the Pococks does not matter. The extent to which he is self-deluded, his conversation serving to maintain his delusion, does. The irony informing "Strether had worked it all out" isolates Strether. Such "work[ing] it all out," a result in this passage of Strether's literal and metaphoric "look[ing] down," produces conversation which confirms the kind of ideal personal relations that Strether imagines, conversation without dialogic exchange.

Earlier in the novel, Strether defines "personal relations":

A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, did n't care if they did n't. From the moment they cared if they did n't it was living by the sweat of one's brow; and the sweat of one's brow was just what one might buy oneself off from by keeping the ground free of the wild weed of delusion. (I, 141)

That Strether talks himself into an idealized version of Madame de Vionnet, of her relationship with Chad, and, to some extent, of himself, of his own importance, that he deludes himself, suggests that Strether has not entered fully into the world of "personal relations," that Strether
has not yet learned to live by the sweat of [his] brow."
Because Strether's imaginary versions of Chad and Madame de
Vionnet are intertwined with his developing sense of self,
the more Strether talks, the more Strether "cares" to
understand Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet, the
more deluded he becomes. In order for Strether to avoid
being manipulated or isolated, he must discover the other.

Such discovery requires real dialogue to supplement,
even to replace, observation. When Strether sees Madame de
Vionnet and Chad together on the lake, he begins to
understand the nature of the relationship between them.
However, in order to understand his own relationship to each
of them and to know them, to recognize the otherness of each
lover, Strether must listen and talk. In his final
conversations with Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether
encounters independent voices, not products of his mind.
Strether's conversation with Chad forces Strether to become
painfully aware of Chad's otherness. Strether informs Chad
that, because of Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet,
his "value has quintupled." Chad's series of replies
demonstrates James's subtle shifting of the dialogic angle,
the shifting which allows Strether and James's reader to
recognize fully the existence of Chad's distinct voice:

"Well then, wouldn't that be enough --?"
Chad had risked it jocosely, but Strether remained blank. "Enough?"

"If one should wish to live on one's accumulations?" After which, however, as his friend appeared cold to the joke, the young man easily dropped it. (II, 312)
The first of Chad's replies to Strether's 'your value has quintupled' reveals Chad's lack of committment to his mistress. The narrative intrusions into Chad's "joke" heighten both Strether's and the reader's uneasiness about Chad for these intrusions represent Chad's perspective, and that perspective, "jocose," "easily drop[ping]" what, given the intensity of Madame de Vionnet's feelings for Chad, has been too easily said, surprise Chad's listener(s) with Chad's insensitivity. In order to please Strether, Chad changes the tone of his reply:

"Of course I really never forget, night or day, what I owe her. I owe her everything. I give you my word of honour [...] that I'm not a bit tired of her."

Strether at this only gave him a stare: the way youth could express itself was again and again a wonder. He meant no harm, though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being "tired" of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner. (312-313)
James changes the angle from which his reader hears this conversation. The reader re-enters Strether's mind to learn not what Strether imagines but what he wonders. Strether listens to Chad and, for the first time, does not transform Chad into a version of the ideal lover. Chad continues speaking; each word he utters further asserts his independent existence:

"She has never for a moment yet bored me -- never been wanting, as the cleverest women sometimes are, in tact. She has never talked about her tact -- as even they too sometimes talk; but she has always had it. She has never had it more" -- he handsomely made the point -- "than just lately." And he scrupulously went further; "She has never been anything I could call a burden."

(II, 312-313)

Chad's "defense" of Madame de Vionnet reveals Chad's own inadequacy. That Chad fails to recognize the limitation of his catalogue of Madame de Vionnet (of any mistress who is "good" because she is compliant and quiet), that Chad believes in his surface "handsomely" and "scrupulously," doubles the meaning of his talk. Strether encounters a Chad who does not understand the implications of his own voice. This Chad escapes Strether's imagination and becomes a flesh and blood other. Perhaps Strether feels only the misery of
Madame de Vionnet's position given Chad's pronouncements while James's reader understands the ironic force of "[s]he had never been anything I could call a burden." However, whatever Strether's final judgment of Chad is, his seeing Chad and Madame de Vionnet on the lake forces Strether to abandon or, at least, to re-consider his vision-making, and Strether's re-viewing requires him (finally) to pay close attention to Chad's conversation. Talking with Chad, Strether begins to work out his "personal relations" by "the sweat of his brow."

Conversation also reveals Madame de Vionnet's limitations. Having seen Madame de Vionnet with Chad, Strether can no longer envision her: his new sight results in his more adequate (if also more painful) listening. Madame de Vionnet tries to explain herself to Strether:

"I've upset everything in your mind as well; in your sense of -- what shall I call it? -- all the decencies and possibilities. It gives me a kind of detestation--" She pulled up short.

Oh but he wanted to hear. "Detestation of what?"

"Of everything -- of life."

"Ah that's too much," he laughed -- "or too little!" (11, 282)

Not allowing Madame de Vionnet's grand "detestation of everything," Strether separates Madame de Vionnet from his
chaste version of her; thus he is able to recognize the intensity and the pathos of Madame de Vionnet's love for Chad:

She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man.

(II, 286)

Here Strether at last takes into account both the substance and the subtext of Madame de Vionnet's talk; he hears the weaknesses her conversation reveals. As Strether talks with Madame de Vionnet, her voice, like Chad's, emerges as another, an other whom Strether can neither contain nor control.

Having heard Madame de Vionnet's voice and recognized the weakness which it speaks, Strether neither judges nor attempts to "formulate" Madame de Vionnet. "Oh but he wanted to hear," and "[s]he was much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet," as well as Strether's final uncertainty about Chad's next action despite Chad's talk, indicate that Strether understands that the others
comprising his "personal relations" are multi-dimensional and fluid, not fixed. His hearing the other which at first complements and ultimately supercedes his seeing the other produces and confirms his own voice. His choice to return to Woollett represents, among other things, Strether's rejection of any fixed life. Miss Gostrey and Strether discuss his decision:

"To what do you go home?"

"I don't know. There will always be something."

"To a great difference," she said as she kept his hand.

"A great difference -- no doubt. Yet I shall see what I can make of it."

"Shall you make anything so good --?" But, as if remembering what Mrs. Newsome had done, it was as far as she went. (II, 325)

"[A]s if remembering what Mrs. Newsome had done" sets the tone of Miss Gostrey's and Strether's friendship: Miss Gostrey insists on keeping that friendship open. Because she chooses not to assume Mrs. Newsome's role and/or because Strether will not allow her controlling power over him, Miss Gostrey cannot impose her voice upon Strether: he is free to speak whatever he wishes and to speak in his own voice. This freedom holds the possible consequence of loneliness, but, in rejecting Miss Gostrey's tacit offer of marriage (or, at
least, of some enmeshed living arrangement), Strether believes he is rejecting the kind of static, if also comfortable, life which he senses that Mrs. Newsome had planned for him:

He took a moment to [answer Miss Gostrey], for, really and truly, what stood about him there in her offer—which was as the offer of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days—might well have tempted. It built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things, yet, none the less, so far as they made his opportunity they made it only for a moment. (II, 325-326)

That this rejection is Strether's third—he has already refused Madame de Vionnet's request that he stay in Paris (II, 282-283) and realized that his previous relationship with Mrs. Newsome including his implied engagement to her is "over" (II, 323)—indicates the high value Strether places on the independent voice which he has discovered in Paris. For the Strether ending the novel, firm "beauty and knowledge" are inadequate. The Ambassador's traces Strether's development into its own dialogic hero who will,
beyond the novel's end, continue to "find [and defend] his
own voice."

Strether "finds [his] own voice" when he places it
"among other words," when he discovers and enters into
dialogue with the other. The Ambassadors focuses upon
Strether's gradual progress; Strether's grappling with the
other is its subject. The Awkward Age, unlike The
Ambassadors, immediately presents a cacophony of other
voices. The other dominates The Awkward Age almost to the
degree that Strether dominates The Ambassadors. While
opposing positions in The Ambassadors reveal themselves
slowly and with constant qualification, in The Awkward Age
opposing positions are quickly and completely stated. By the
second book of The Awkward Age, its reader not only
understands the English-Continental tension underlying Mrs.
Brook's conversation with the Duchess, but also recognizes
the significant differences between Van and Mr. Longdon,
between an older and more contemporary perspective. Early in
the novel, Van tries to explain to Mr. Longdon the
propensity of Mrs. Brook's circle for small social
betrayals:

"[. . .] What's London life after all? It's tit for
tat!"

"Ah but what becomes of friendship?" Mr. Longdon
earnestly and pleadingly asked, while he still held
Vanderbank's arm as if under the spell of vivid explanation supplied him.

The young man met his eyes only the more sociably. "Friendship?"

"Friendship." Mr. Longdon maintained the full value of the word.

"Well," his companion risked, "I dare say it is n't in London by any means what it is at Beccles. [...] It's a plant that takes time and space and air; and London society is a huge 'squash', as we elegantly call it -- an elbowing pushing perspiring chattering mob."

"Ah, I don't say that of you!" [...] "Do say it then -- for God's sake; let some one say it, so that something or other, whatever it may be, may come of it! It's impossible to say too much -- it's impossible to say enough. There is n't anything one can say that I won't agree to." (19-20)

Mr. Longdon and Van's conversation demonstrates the play of conversation in the novel. Most obviously, their talk indicates the distance between Mr. Longdon and Van. Mr. Longdon argues for the "older" values of friendship, social responsibility and individual integrity; Van, for the contemporary delight in movement and in freedom from personal commitment either to people or to ideas.12 However, narrative intrusions into the talk between the two men such
as "Mr. Longdon earnestly and pleadingly asked" and "Mr. Longdon maintained the full value of the word" as well as "[t]he young man met his eyes only the more sociably" not only reinforce the differences in the abstract opinions of Mr. Longdon and Van but also stress the differences (the otherness) of each of their voices. Mr. Longdon's sincere attempts at making sense of Vanderbank's sophisticated chatter and Vanderbank's smooth shifting from subject to subject which promises an almost limitless range of talk provide the novel with its dialogic force: to the extent that Mr. Longdon's and Van's emerging voices matter as much as their representative opinions, _The Awkward Age_ presents a dialogic struggle.

"Sophisticated chatter," while it seems descriptively apt, is not an altogether just rendering of Van's talk. In his preface, James praises the "liberal firesides" that, to a large extent, give Vanderbank's conversation its tone:

The wide glow was bright, was favourable to "real" talk, to play of mind, to an explicit interest in life, a due demonstration of the interest by persons qualified to feel it: all of which meant frankness and ease, the perfection, almost, as it were, of intercourse, and a tone as far as possible removed from that of the nursery and the schoolroom -- as far as possible removed even, no doubt, in its appealing
"modernity," from that of supposedly privileged scenes of conversation twenty years ago. The charm was, with a hundred other things, in the freedom [. . .] (ix) Samuels writes that "The Awkward Age is unmatched among [James's novels] for its dispassionate scrutiny of rival claims,"

and Van, echoing James, revels in the freedom resulting from Mrs. Brook's, from her whole "salon's" "dispassionate scrutiny": "What is splendid . . . is this extraordinary freedom and good humour of our intercourse and the fact that we do care -- so independently of our personal interests, with so little selfishness or other vulgarity -- to get at the idea of things" (301). "To get at the idea of things" requires long and intense conversation. And this conversation, at its best, produces a kind of voice of its own, the voice which Eliot describes: "[t]he real hero, in any of James's stories, is a social entity of which men and women are constituents." 

While critics may admire the "social entity" which emerges as the center of The Awkward Age, the problem in the novel is that this "social entity" cannot maintain itself without or against the independent voices which form it. When they discuss Mrs. Brook's revelation that Mr. Longdon, making Van a potential rival to Mitchy, has offered Van money if he will marry Nanda, Van, Mrs. Brook and Mitchy talk about the "social entity" which they have created and
which connects them to one another:

"We see ourselves reflected -- we're conscious of the charming whole. I thank you," [Van] pursued after an instant to Mrs. Brook -- "I thank you for your sincerity."

It was a business sometimes really to hold her eyes, but they had, it must be said for her, their steady moments. She exchanged with Vanderbank a somewhat remarkable look, then, with an art of her own, broke short without appearing to drop him. "The thing is, don't you think?" she appealed to Mitchy -- "for us not to be so awfully clever as to make it believed that we can never be simple. We mustn't see too tremendous things -- even in each other." She quite lost patience with the danger she glanced at. "We can be simple!"

(303)

The "tremendous things" that Mitchy might see in Van and Mrs. Brook or that Van might see in Mrs. Brook are the acts of manipulation which produce Mr. Longdon's offer and the subsequent concealment of that offer from Mitchy and Nanda. In fact, as the narrative intrusions concerning Mrs. Brook's pose of innocence, her "hold[ing] her eyes" and possessing "an art of her own," suggest, Mrs. Brook is anything but "simple." She may want Mitchy to realize that Vanderbank has
the advantage in the pursuit of Nanda because she believes Vanderbank to be the better match or she may speak in order to insure Vanderbank's embarrassment, to prevent him, because he is honorable, from accepting Mr. Longdon's bribe. The ambiguity of Mrs. Brook's motive (she either may be husband-hunting for her daughter or competing with her daughter for Vanderbank) heightens the sense of plottedness which informs her contributions to the conversation. The more she insists upon her simplicity, the more her listeners (including the reader) recognize her considerable manipulative abilities. The presence of her directed power undercuts the "dispassionate scrutiny of rival claims" which the three of them seem to attempt.

Mitchy's and Van's separate responses to her manipulation, the end of the conversation among the three of them, indicate the difficulties inherent in their joint attempt to maintain "the charming whole" of Mrs. Brook's salon:

Mrs. Brook had turned to Mitchy. "I just wanted you to know. So I spoke. It's not more complicated than that. As for why I wanted you to know --"

"What better reason could there be," Mitchy interrupted, "than your being filled to the finger-tips with the sense of how I would want it myself, and of the misery, the absolute pathos, of my being left out?
Fancy, my dear chap" -- he had only to put it to Van -- "my not knowing!"

Vanderbank evidently could n't fancy it, but he said quietly enough: "I should have told you myself."

"Well, what's the difference?"

"Oh, there is a difference," Mrs. Brook loyally said. [...] Of course, [...] it remains absolutely with us three alone, and don't you already feel from it the fresh charm -- with it here between us -- of our being together?"

It was as if each of the men had waited for the other to assent better than he himself could and Mitchy then, as Vanderbank failed, had gracefully, to cover him, changed the subject. (303-304)

In writing about this scene, Dorothea Krook praises "the depths of self-knowledge" of Mrs. Brook's circle: "There is nothing too delicate, too intimate or too painful to be legitimate matter for analysis and appraisal by these three of the inner circle at Buckingham Crescent." As they discuss their own reactions to Mrs. Brook's telling Mitchy of Mr. Longdon's offer, each of the circle's members does perform a remarkable bit of analysis, but their conversation does more than once again demonstrate "the inner circle's" power of "dispassionate scrutiny"; it also reveals a considerable tension among them. The "self-knowledge" making
its presence known as they speak undermines their claims of simplicity and friendly empathy. Mrs. Brook's assertion that her manipulations produce for each of them "the fresh charm" "of [their] being together" receives confirmation from neither Mitchy nor Van. When Mitchy politely changes the subject, he admits, both for himself and for Van, that Van's secret now shared by the three of them makes precarious their "charming whole." Further, James's reader, while she is aware that unspoken conflicting motives inform the "inner circle's" conversation, cannot identify with complete confidence the specific boundaries separating the three, the specific "self-knowledge" which promotes their separate talk. Perhaps Mitchy's politeness allows the three of them to hold together the "salon" for the length of this conversation, yet the unspoken concerns of each coupled with Van's, Mitchy's, and Mrs. Brook's distinct awarenesses that each of the others possesses his/her own unspoken, even harmful intentions, weakens their individual voices at the same time it dilutes the "social entity" which their combined voices have created. Their "dispassionate scrutiny" begins to ennervate their connection as well as their "selves."

What Van and Mrs. Brooks each know about him/herself remains ambiguous. The novel frequently suggests powerful personal interests underlying their conversation and action,
then undoes the force of these interests; Mrs. Brooks's
circle too easily returns to the patterns of social chatter.
For example, after each has acknowledged her/ his
responsibility for Nanda's "modernity," Mrs. Brook, Van and
Mitchy once again discuss their conversation:

"And yet to think that after all it has been mere
talk!"

Something in her tone [. . . ] made her hearers
laugh out; so it was still with the air of good humour
that Vanderbank answered: "Mere, mere, mere. But
perhaps it's exactly the 'mere' that has made us range
so wide."

Mrs. Brook's intelligence abounded. "You mean that
we have n't the excuse of passion?"

Her companions once more gave way to mirth, but
"There you are!" Vanderbank said after an instant less
sociably. (313)

So much of their talk is about their "mere talk," and their
exhausting analysis leaves them without "the excuse of
passion." Bersani writes "in James, the absorption of
character into language can [. . . ] be the dehumanization of
desire."16 In The Awkward Age, the conversation of Mrs.
Brook's circle "dehumanizes" not only its member's desires,
but also its members. Van's lack of passion, in particular,
makes him seem hardly real, and, if this passage momentarily reassures James's reader that Van is uncomfortable with his and their group's lack, Van does little in the novel to act upon his discomfort.

After Van has explained to Mr. Longdon, "[t]here isn't anything one can say that I won't agree to," the conversation between the two men continues:

"That shows you really don't care," the old man returned with acuteness.

"Oh, we're past saving, if that's what you mean." Vanderbank laughed.

"You don't care, you don't care!" his guest repeated, [. . .] "May I say all I think?"

"I assure you I shall! You're awfully interesting."

"So are you, if you come to that. It's just what I've had in my head. There's something I seem to make out in you --!" He abruptly dropped this, however, going on in another way. (20-21)

Here, in the novel's first book, Mr. Longdon sees in Van some unnamed quantity or quality. James places the novel's reader in the same position as Mr. Longdon; the reader first distinguishes, from the others in Mrs. Brook's circle, Van to be the novel's probable hero, and, second, believes, or at least, hopes that Van will develop some definite voice.
But Mr. Longdon never says exactly what he "makes out" in Van. And Van, during the rest of the novel, seems content to remain "past saving." I use the word "seems" not to imply that Van actually is discontented, but to suggest Van's elusiveness. James provides his reader with a variety of possible motives for Van's central act (which, from the reader's perspective, is simply his inaction) of failing to propose to Nanda: the money which Mr. Longdon offers may repulse Van; Nanda's "modernity" may offend Van's sense of decorum; Van may feel he is too corrupt for Nanda or may believe he is too much affected by his participation in Mrs. Brook's "salon" ever to be satisfied with the kind of life Mr. Longdon's offer represents; Van may love, be physically attracted to, or have had an affair with Mrs. Brook, or he simply may not love Nanda. Van himself speaks or thinks none of these possibilities. Others, Mrs. Brook, Mitchy, the Duchess, Mr. Longdon and Nanda, speak them for him.

Throughout The Awkward Age, Van avoids asserting or possessing any voice; indeed, his importance lies in his not speaking, in his not proposing to Nanda. Van never quite fulfills Mr. Longdon's mysterious "[t]here's something I seem to make out in you." Instead, he becomes a more and more ambiguous (not ambivalent) character, one who seems to fade as the novel progresses.

Van's final conversation with Nanda which is also Van's
final appearance in the novel demonstrates the dissipation of Van's self. Directing their talk to the subject of Mr. Longdon, Van avoids either discussing his feeling for Nanda or acknowledging hers for him:

"Look after my good name. I mean for common decency to him. [. . .] I've odiously neglected him -- by a complication of accidents. There are things I ought to have done that I have n't. There's one in particular -- but it does n't matter. And I have n't even explained about that. I've been a brute and I did n't mean it and I could n't help it. But there it is. Say a good word for me. Make out somehow or other that I'm not a beast. In short [. . .] let us have it that you may quite trust me if you'll let me a little -- just for my character as a gentleman -- trust you."

(512)

Van's preoccupation with Mr. Longdon's opinion, his thoughtless "[t]here's one in particular -- but that doesn't matter" indicate that he altogether neglects Nanda as an independent person with feelings. Worse, because he cannot speak to Mr. Longdon himself, he chooses to use Nanda; he asks her to speak for him. Bakhtin describes the dialogic activity: "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [. . .] but rather it exists in other
people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own." Instead of "taking the word," Van relinquishes all responsibility. Van's final conversation defines him in terms of his extreme limitations. Remaining silent, Van refuses to struggle, and, in so doing, he fails Nanda, Mr. Longdon and himself. The hole he leaves at the center of the novel seriously weakens The Awkward Age. Van's failure as a dialogic hero creates a vacuum which is difficult for the novel to overcome. If the ambiguity surrounding Van coupled with his extreme passivity threaten the novel, Nanda's acceptance of Van, whether or not her estimation of him is correct, in part rescues The Awkward Age from disintegrating as Van does. The novel ends with Nanda's and Mr. Longdon's perfectly balanced conversation:

Nanda: "Everything's different from what it used to be."

"Yes, everything. [...] That's what he [Van] ought to have recognised."

"As you have?" Nanda was once more -- and completely now -- enthroned in high justice. "Oh, he's more old fashioned than you."

"Much more," said Mr. Longdon with a queer face.

"He tried," the girl went on -- "he did his best.
But he could n't. And he's so right -- for himself."

[. . .] "He ought to have married --!"

"Little Aggie? Yes," said Nanda. [. . .]

So again, before he went they were for a minute confronted. "Are you anxious about Mitchy?"

She faltered, but at last brought it out. "Yes. Do you see? There I am."

"I see. There we are. Well," said Mr. Longdon -- "to-morrow." (544-545)

In this last conversation, Mr. Longdon and Nanda, unlike the members of Mrs. Brook's circle, try to speak frankly to one another;19 if Mr. Longdon opens the novel not quite comprehending Van's chatter, he closes the novel understanding Nanda, and, while she may "falter," "at last" Nanda is able to admit her "anxiety" about Mitchy. More important, Van may or may not be "so right . . . for himself" -- the novel is ambiguous on this point -- but Nanda is "so right for [herself]." Although Van's rejection of her has caused her much pain, she finally simply respects his otherness, what he is "for himself."

Yet, Nanda's dialogic abilities, her maintenance of her own voice and acceptance of the independent voices of others, do not completely save The Awkward Age. Nanda and Mr. Longdon's last conversation places Van and Mitchy in order that "[t]here I am" and "I see. There we are" may
dispense (too easily) with them. Further, Mr. Longdon's "to-
morrow" is ominous; Nanda's tragedy is not that she loses
Van, but that her departure from Buckingham Crescent,
whatever her mother's faults, too much resembles a
banishment, a rejection of life.20 When it is compared to
Nanda's impending retreat, Strether's choice, at the end of
The Ambassadors, to leave Paris seems a remarkably happy
one. Strether, although he has lost much, has a more open
future; Beccles looms in front of Nanda promising only
stasis and closure. The talk Van avoids does not quite allow
Nanda her own voice. If The Ambassadors depicts the
necessity of developing a dialogic (rather than a romantic)
imagination, The Awkward Age, with all of its conversation
about conversation, enacts the failure of dialogue.

While Maggie Verver's struggle to understand the
relationships of those around her may recall Strether's, and
while certain of the characters in The Golden Bowl do
indulge, like Mrs. Brook's circle, in conversation about
conversation, The Golden Bowl explores, to a greater extent
than does either The Ambassadors or The Awkward Age,
problems which a voice attempting to "find itself, reveal
itself, among other words, within an intense field of inter-
orientations" might encounter. James describes the structure
of The Golden Bowl: "[i]t is the Prince who opens the door
to half our light upon Maggie, just as it is she who opens
it to half our light upon himself."\(^{21}\) The two parts of the
novel, reflecting back and forth between the Prince and
Princess, expose conversation which is lacking dialogic
imagination and dialogic imagination which is lacking
conversation. That "at the expense of" might easily replace
"lacking" indicates the novel's pressure: its characters, to
varying degrees, attempt to "find their own voices" in a
competitive (which implies losing as well as winning)
world.\(^{22}\) Their challenge -- which Maggie, more than any of
the others, makes her own -- is to transform this
competition, to re-define it in dialogic terms and therefore
overcome it.

In an essay discussing Daudet, James writes:\(^{23}\)

The success of a work of art, to my mind, may be
measured by the degree to which it produces a certain
illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the
time that we have lived another life -- that we have
had a miraculous enlargement of experience. The greater
the art the greater the miracle, and the more certain
also the fact that we have been entertained -- in the
best meaning of that word, at least, which signifies
that we have been living at the expense of some one
else.

Through Jamesian sleight of hand, a reader's empathy and the
"miraculous enlargement of experience" which may result from it become "living at the expense of someone else." This slippery equation underlies many of The Golden Bowl's interpersonal relationships. Early in the novel, Fanny Assingham discusses with her husband Charlotte's attraction to the Prince; when Colonel Assingham suggests that Fanny's extreme interest in Charlotte's possible illicit intention is itself immoral, Fanny defends herself: "what is morality but high intelligence? [...] Besides, it's all, at the worst, great fun" (I, 88). Fanny's conversations with her husband are analogous to the work of art James describes; their conversations "produce a certain illusion," and Fanny's pleasure requires her imaginatively to live "at the expense of some one else."

Of course the Assinghams are not alone. Critics again and again have condemned Adam's buying Maggie a husband, and, when the Ververs consider acquiring Charlotte in something of the same manner, Adam explains to Maggie the implications of their actions: "[i]f we get her here to improve us don't we too then make use of her" (I, 181). Yet, expense relations in the novel implicate others besides the Assinghams and the Ververs. Charlotte and the Prince are equally in debt: their being bought allows them, from their own perspectives, the power to buy. The Prince, reflecting upon "Mr. Verver's services," demonstrates his own debt:
And as [Adam] performed the latter office [relieving the Prince "on the score of his bank-account"] by communicating with the bankers, so the former [relieving the Prince of any concern about the Prince's married life] sprang as directly from [Adam's] good understanding with his daughter. This understanding had, wonderfully [. . .] the same deep intimacy as the commercial, the financial association founded, far down, on a community of interests. (I, 292-293)

James locates this passage in Amerigo's consciousness, and its ending indicates Amerigo's own connecting of personal and "commercial" intimacy. Amerigo is satisfied to live at Adam's expense, not only financially but in his relations to Maggie as well. "The Prince" describes a series of intertwined, almost parasitical "expense" relationships, and, because this book of the novel represents Amerigo's consciousness, its atmosphere particularly sticks to the Prince.

That each of the marriages occurring in "The Prince" is so firmly based upon credit and debt reduces the power of the conversation to connect Amerigo to Maggie or Adam to Charlotte; if "The Prince" reflects Amerigo's and Charlotte's talents for debt, talk in "The Prince" between potential marriage partners demonstrates the extent to which Maggie and her father fail to take the other into account.
Early in the novel, Maggie misses an opportunity to better know her husband:

Amerigo: "I'm awfully humble; [...] that's the way I've been feeling to-day, with everything so finished and ready. And you won't take me for serious."

She continued to face him as if he really troubled her a little. "Oh you deep old Italians!"

(29-30)

And Adam misinterprets Charlotte's response to Maggie's telegram supporting Charlotte and Adam's proposed marriage:

As soon as he saw how emotion kept her soundless he knew himself deeply touched, since it proved that, little as she professed, she had been beautifully hoping. They stood there a minute while he took in from this sign that, yes then, certainly she liked him enough -- liked him enough to make him, old as he was ready to brand himself, flush for the pleasure of it.

(230)

Maggie's and her father's failed communication result both from their naivete and from their position as creditors (their position as creditors may explain their naivete: when the novel begins, the Verver's money has insulated them from the necessity of correctly interpreting other people for quite some time). Maggie and Adam, to the extent that they
purchase their spouses, make those spouses into objects. Talking with these objects, Maggie and Adam hear only themselves; they altogether miss Amerigo and Charlotte.

Charlotte and Amerigo, although they are intensely aware of one another, do not escape "The Prince's" market influence. When she refuses to leave Matcham with the Assingham's, Charlotte indirectly proposes to Amerigo an assignation:

[Charlotte] spoke all for [Fanny] while she answered their friend's question, but she none the less signalled to him as definitely as if she had fluttered a white handkerchief from a window. "It's awfully sweet of you, darling -- our going together would be charming. But [...] we've settled, Amerigo and I, to stay over till after luncheon."

Amerigo, with the chink of this gold in his ear, turned straight away, so as not to be instantly appealed to; (I, 345)

Amerigo's equating Charlotte's proposal with a "chink of this gold" resembles his earlier, more famous, comparison of Charlotte's waist to a "loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together" (I, 47). Amerigo's willingness here to comply with Charlotte's arrangements -- elsewhere,
to do what he believes others want him to do -- arises from his mercantile habit of mind. The Prince is most comfortable when he relinquishes his will to others, when he lives "at their expense." Charlotte, competent in her role as creditor, does not question her position. Again, the process of making the other into one's own object prevents real dialogue, dialogue which promotes a recognition of the other as an equal, speaking subject. With the exception of Charlotte's or Amerigo's telling the other of her/his desire, the two say very little to one another. So much of Amerigo's and Charlotte's communication, of their conversation, is silent precisely because each, although s/he seems intuitively to connect to the other, understands only that aspect of the other which fulfills his/her own expectations. In "The Prince," Charlotte, Amerigo, Adam and Maggie talk to one other, but their talk does not take the other into account. Conversation among "The Prince's" four lovers is without dialogic imagination.

In "The Princess," Maggie's task, which "The Prince's" creditor-debtor pattern complicates, is to discover the other. For Maggie, such a discovery means learning that what is at the expense of the other is also at one's own expense. Early in "The Princess," Maggie reacts to the silent communication which she perceives between Charlotte and Amerigo:
It was a worked-out scheme for their not wounding her, for their behaving to her quite nobly; to which each had in some winning way induced the other to contribute, and which therefore, so far as that went, proved she had become with them a subject of intimate study. [. . .] They had built her in with their purpose -- which was why, above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch; so that she sat there in the solid chamber of her helplessness as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her, over the brim of which she could but just manage to see by stretching her neck.

(II, 43-44)

In "The Princess," Maggie experiences, perhaps for the first time, what it means to live "at the expense" of other human beings who have their own motives; her earlier situation reverses itself too easily, and she finds Amerigo and Charlotte "intimate[ly]" studying her, maintaining their alliance at Maggie's expense. Believing conversation to be taking place all around her, Maggie begins to define herself in terms of her exclusion. Her new attitude of self-definition, while it is painful, forces her to reckon with Charlotte and Amerigo as distinct individuals; this reckoning shapes her into her own subject as opposed to being an object for Charlotte and/or for Amerigo.

Maggie's pensiveness in "The Princess" reflects both
her desire and inability to speak in her own voice. Having
surprised Amerigo by being at their home and not at her
father's upon his return from Matcham, she silently
addresses her husband:

"'Why, why' have I made this evening such a point
of our [the two families] not all dining together? Well,
because I've all day been so wanting you alone that I
finally could n't bear it and that there did n't seem any
great reason why I should try to. [...] After all
I've scarcely to explain that I'm as much in love with
you now as the first hour; except that there are some
hours -- which I know when they come, because they
almost frighten me -- that show me I'm even more so.
They come of themselves -- and ah they've been coming!
After all, after all --!"
Some such words as those were what did n't ring out, yet
it was as if even the unuttered sound had been quenched
here in its own quaver. (II, 18)

Maggie has come a long way from her earlier "Oh you deep old
Italians!" Here she is intensely aware of Amerigo and
capable of real talk, but, ironically, Amerigo now misses
her, and his failure to acknowledge her separate feelings,
her distinct self, prevents the expression of her voice.
Hardly considering Maggie at all, Amerigo declines her offer
to follow him upstairs (she has given him the excuse that she is willing to help him change for dinner). At the same time his refusal interrupts the conversation she attempts, it makes his separate force more apparent to Maggie.

"The Princess" catalogues Maggie's attempts to establish her own equal presence. Again and again, when she is alone with Amerigo she waits for some invitation to speak intimately with him, to have the conversation which she imagined the day he returned from Matcham, and, again and again, Amerigo avoids her, though he begins to use her physical attraction to him against her, stifling any possible conversation:

It was the turn of a hair because he had possession of her hands and was bending toward her, ever so kindly, as if to see, to understand more, or possibly to give more -- she did n't know which; and that had the effect of simply putting her [...] in his power. She gave up, let her idea go, let everything go; her one consciousness was that he was taking her again into his arms. It was not till afterwards that she discriminated as to this; felt how the act operated with him instead of the words he had n't uttered -- operated in his view as probably better than any words, as always better in fact at any time than anything. (II, 28-29)

Amerigo's substituting physical intimacy for necessary talk
corrupts that intimacy, making the act of intimacy at
Maggie's expense. Maggie, unlike Amerigo, Charlotte and even
Adam, struggles against being made into an object. Proposing
that Amerigo and Adam take a trip together and leave
Charlotte and her for a time, Maggie resists Amerigo's
physical advances. Her proposal provokes one of the few
conversations of any length which she has with Amerigo;
however, he closes their talk by referring Maggie to
Charlotte, leaving Maggie to consider and re-consider their
few spoken words:

The sense of life tremendously ordered and fixed rose
before her, and there was something in Amerigo's very
face, while his eyes again met her own through the
dusky lamplight, that was like a conscious reminder of
it. He had answered her distinctly just before, and it
appeared to leave her nothing to say. [...] It was
almost as if -- in the strangest way in the world -- he
were paying her back by the production of a small pang,
that of a new uneasiness, for the way she had slipped
from him during their drive. (II, 66-67)

In this and other passages in which Maggie attempts to make
a space for her own voice, James's prose reads almost like
Lawrence's. Yet, unlike any of Lawrence's heroes, Amerigo
wants "ordered and fixed" relationships, not dialogue. His
passivity, left to itself, produces these relationships.
Talking with Amerigo, Maggie experiences the power his evasiveness has to fix her in place.

Critics often discuss Maggie's silence in "The Princess"; however, as the book progresses, Maggie speaks both more frequently and more deliberately. Her struggle with Amerigo forms Maggie's independent voice. Not only is she able to express herself clearly to and resist Fanny, but she also explains herself, or, better, speaks herself to her father, separating herself from him by making him realize the intensity of her love for Amerigo. Most important, she speaks directly to Amerigo. During each successive encounter with her husband, Maggie challenges Amerigo's silence. At the novel's climax, Amerigo feebly tries to redirect Maggie's conversation, asking her what she would have done if he had not entered in time to see Fanny's breaking of the golden bowl, but Amerigo is unable to prevent or avoid Maggie's voice:

Amerigo: "You'd have spoken tomorrow?"

"I think I'd have waited."

"And for what?" he asked.

"To see what difference it would make for myself. My possession at last, I mean, of real knowledge."

"Oh!" said the Prince.

"My only point now, at any rate," she went on, "is
the difference, as I say, that it may make for you. Your knowing was -- from the moment you did come in -- all I had in view." And she sounded it again -- he should have it once more. "Your knowing that I've ceased --"

"That you've ceased --" With her pause she had fairly made him press her for it.

"Why to be as I was. Not to know." (II, 201-202)

Extracting Maggie and Amerigo's conversation from its context makes Maggie's "knowledge" seem more ambiguous than it is. Maggie "knows" "of your [Amerigo's] having, of your having for a long time had, two relations with Charlotte" (I, 190). -- she begins their conversation by naming her "real knowledge." "To see what difference it would make for myself" asserts that her presence is something apart from the others and is worthy of attention, yet her speaking her "real knowledge" makes the "difference for herself." Maggie's attempt to force Amerigo to recognize her, to hear her voice, requires concentrated conversation. Her famous "[f]ind out for yourself" which closes this round of talk is, among other things, a challenge to Amerigo to learn to know Maggie as an other, to learn to know Maggie as she has come to know him.

Developing her own more definite voice makes Maggie become acutely aware that those around her are, that
Charlotte in particular is, distinct from herself. Maggie and Charlotte watch from the garden as the others entertain themselves in the smoking room at Pawns:

Side by side for three minutes they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the positive charm of it and [. . .] the full significance -- which, as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more after all than a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter. (II, 243-244)

"[D]iffering always for a different interpreter" coupled with her own well defined perspective represents the dialogic potential of Maggie's imagination. At the same time that it indicates the difficulties inherent in developing or even maintaining such dialogic potential,27 Maggie's final conversation with Charlotte demonstrates Maggie's subtle registering of the other which finally saves Maggie from the threat to her marriage which Charlotte represents. Charlotte claims that she and Adam are returning to America because Charlotte wishes to improve their marriage:

"I want to really possess [Adam]," said Mrs. Verver. "I happen also to feel that he's worth it."

Maggie rose as if to receive her. "Oh -- worth it!" she wonderfully threw off.

The tone, she instantly saw, again had its effect:
[...] "You've thought you've known what he's worth?"

"Indeed then, my dear, I believe I have -- as I believe I still do."

She had given it, Maggie, straight back, and again it had n't missed. Charlotte for another moment only looked at her; then broke into the words -- Maggie had known they would come -- of which she had pressed the spring. "How I see that you loathed our marriage!"

(II, 316-317)

Maggie's responses to Charlotte allow Charlotte the necessary space to imagine and portray herself as "sinned against" rather than "sinning"; when she positions Maggie in an analogous role to that of the adulterer, Charlotte hides her own guilt. For most critics, Maggie here is supremely manipulative. Yet, if Maggie believes that she "press[es] the spring" to make Charlotte say what Maggie wishes her to say, what Maggie wishes Charlotte to say and what Charlotte does say allows Charlotte space to save face. In saving face, Charlotte, although she loses Amerigo, saves something of herself. Maggie "press[es] the spring" perhaps because she recognizes Charlotte to be a formidable opponent, but, more importantly, because she understands that defending herself from Charlotte's attack upon her marriage requires not that she attempt to ignore or subdue Charlotte but that she work to insure that neither she nor Charlotte is
overcome by the other. Answering Charlotte's accusation, "How I see that you loathed our marriage!" with a lie, Maggie talks so that each woman may maintain her distinct self not at the expense of the other but because each recognizes the other:

"Do you ask me?" Maggie after an instant demanded. Charlotte [...] was in the presence, visibly, of her last word. [...] "'Ask' you? Do I need? How I see [...] that you've worked against me!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" the Princess exclaimed.

[...] "You have n't worked against me?"

Maggie took it and for a moment kept it; held it, with closed eyes, [...] then she opened her eyes to speak. "What does it matter -- if I've failed?"

"You recognize then that you've failed?" asked Charlotte from the threshold.

Maggie waited [...] then she made up her mind. "I've failed!" she sounded out before Charlotte [...] walked away. She watched her, splendid and erect, float down the long vista; then she sank upon a seat. Yes, she had done all. (II, 317-318)

The "all" that Maggie has "done" includes not subjecting Charlotte to herself, not maintaining her voice at Charlotte's expense. Of course, the argument against Maggie is precisely that she sacrifices Charlotte to reconstruct
her marriage; however, Maggie talks to Charlotte (instead of silently avoiding her) in order to end the kind of cost calculating with which Maggie's marriage to Amerigo began. Charlotte may recognize that Maggie is lying, but, if she does, she must also understand that Maggie is lying for Charlotte.

To some degree, Maggie succeeds. Not only does she reject Fanny's simplistic version of Maggie as a triumphant game player, but, more important, she defends Charlotte from Amerigo, persuading him not to tell Charlotte that Maggie has certain knowledge of their affair:

Amerigo: "I shall tell her I lied to her."

"Ah no!" she returned.

"And I shall tell her you did."

She shook her head again. "Oh still less!"

With which therefore they stood at difference, he with his head erect and his happy idea perched in its eagerness on his crest. "And how then is she to know?"

"She isn't to know."

"She's only still to think you don't --?"

"And therefore that I'm always a fool? She may think," said Maggie, "what she likes." (II, 355-356)

"[S]he may think . . . what she likes" is Maggie's best moment in the novel. Refusing to humiliate Charlotte, she
silences Amerigo with "[a]re n't you rather forgetting who
[Charlotte] is?" Demonstrating her respect for Charlotte as
another woman (and not obsessed with Charlotte as the other
woman), Maggie comes into her full voice.

Yet, the conclusion of The Golden Bowl restricts the
potential of Maggie's full voice. At the end of the novel,
Maggie has only Amerigo to respond to that voice. The
paucity of his imagination limits the actual and possible
(the present and future) success of her own. Their
conversation closes The Golden Bowl:

"Is n't she [Charlotte] too splendid?" [Maggie]
simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

"Oh splendid!" With which he came over to her.

"That's our help, you see," she added -- to point
further to her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in -- or
trying to -- what she so wonderfully gave. He tried,
too clearly, to please her -- to meet her in her own
way; but with the result only that, close to her, her
face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders,
his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed:
"'See?' I see nothing but you." And the truth of it had
with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his
eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her
own in his breast. (II, 368-369)
Although critics discuss Maggie in terms of her artistry or manipulativeness, Maggie finishes the novel neither creating nor using, but simply seeing Amerigo. Amerigo, whose "happy idea" was to humiliate Charlotte; Amerigo, who now passively transfers his loyalties to Maggie without understanding her, who once again tries to use his physical presence to resolve the tension between Maggie and himself (his "enclosing" Maggie is suffocating), will be her life companion, and, if she loves him, she also feels his limitations. James's last turn of the screw is that these limitations, by their very nature, undermine the possibility of real dialogue. At the end of *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie, who has demonstrated her ability and desire for such dialogue, is without a person capable of entering into it.

Perhaps Maggie's over-valuing "the golden bowl -- as it was to have been" results in her final isolation. Like Strether before her, Maggie possesses both dialogic flexibility and a romantic imagination. The second quality, in giving her a notion of static perfection, opposes the first; their opposition produces *The Golden Bowl's* ending. In *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie struggles to develop her separate voice while simultaneously believing in the golden bowl of marriage, not in Amerigo's "ordered and fixed" life, but in a future vague form which will satisfy her platonic longings. At the novel's end, as this form approaches
nearer, Maggie's "marriage" too nearly resembles a new, but equally oppressive, "ordered and fixed" life. Bakhtin, discussing the relationship between the novelist and the object, writes:

For the novelist [...] the object is always entangled in someone else's discourse about it, it is already present with qualifications, an object of dispute that is conceptualized and evaluated variously, inseparable from the heteroglot social appreciation of it. [...] For the novelist, there is no world outside his socio-heteroglot perception -- and there is no language outside the heteroglot intentions of it.

(Dialogic, 330)

In choosing to try to establish "the golden bowl -- as it was to have been," Maggie is a perverse "novelist"; she tries to save "marriage" from the heteroglot world. Golden bowls (both the objet d'art and the novel) force Maggie to recognize that "marriage" is an abstraction, is nothing outside a given context. Facing Amerigo at the novel's end, Maggie faces her context: its restrictions silence her; the "pity and the dread" of them reduce her to "bury[ing]" her eyes.

Maggie may make the mistake of trying to separate her "object" from the heteroglot world, but does James? In his
preface to *The Awkward Age*, James reviews his career:

[...] the hypocrisy of modest beginnings, the audacity of misplaced middles, the triumph of intentions never entertained -- with these patches, as I look about, I see my experience [he has been discussing his experience as a writer] paved: an experience to which nothing is wanting save, I confess, some grasp of its final ending. (vii)

James's humility, whether it is false or not, reminds us of his novels' open endings. Conrad writes of James that "[h]appily, he will never be able to claim completeness; and were he to confess to it in a moment of self-ignorance, he would not be believed by the very minds for whom such a confession naturally would be meant."33 Yet, at the same time James's talent for the open ending places him in the midst of the "socio-heteroglot world,"34 Strether, Nanda and Maggie are tired at the end of their novels, worn out by disentangling the object "from someone else's discourse." Conversation closes all three novels, but each hero, at his/her novel's end, is talked out. Strether "finds [his] own voice" in dialogue but finally separates himself from each of the others with whom he might continue speaking. Nanda's capacity for dialogue results in her flight (from talk) to Beccles, and Maggie's, resurrects a marriage which precludes the real dialogue she has grown to need. If
conversation allows James's characters the space to "find [their] own voice[s]," the very space where conversation occurs in *The Ambassadors*, *The Awkward Age* and *The Golden Bowl* proves to be corrupted. Worse, this space opens up into a future whose scope promises to be insufficient, even claustrophobic. Predicting the restricted lives of Strether, Nanda and Maggie, James's novels enact the defeat of dialogic energy. This defeat, while it is tragic, suggests James's suspicion, and perhaps his ultimate rejection, of the socio-heteroglot world.
Notes


Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 239.

When he discusses the use of dialogue in the novel to characterize characters, Bakhtin describes the worlds in which Jamesian characters live:

the fact is that language differentiation and the clear-cut "speech characterizations" of characters have the greatest artistic significance precisely in the creation of objectified and finalized images of people. The more objectified a character, the more sharply his speech physiognomy stands out. To be sure, language diversity and speech characterizations remain important in a polyphonic novel, but this importance is diminished, and most important, the artistic functions of the phenomena change. For what matters here is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth, a presence established by purely linguistic criteria; what matters is the dialogic angle at which those styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work. (182)


8 Although James, in his preface, discusses Miss Gostrey as "the most unmitigated and abandoned of ficelles" (xxi), critics frequently discuss her relative freedom: even the ficelle in The Ambassador has a voice of her own. See F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1944) 39; Yeazell 71.

9 Preface to The Awkward Age ix. All quotations of The Awkward Age from Henry James, The Awkward Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).

10 For an excellent discussion of the value of talk in The Ambassador's Paris, see Yeazell 69-75.

11 For an example, see 61-62.

12 "Older" and "contemporary" are relative terms in The Awkward Age. Later in the novel, Van recognizes that he represents "older" values in relation to Harold's "contemporary" position (393-394).


18. The Awkward Age's narrator tells the reader that the novel's subject is "that directness of mutual relation" (364).

15 Krook 147.


18 Andre Gide's reaction to James in general resembles my response to Van. Gide writes:

"Never do I feel that James is "in" with any one of [his characters] -- and I am most grateful to him for being impartial: but Dostoevski, for example, finds a way of being impartial and committing himself at the same time to the most contrary, the most contradictory characters, who make him enter the heart of life, and us after him."


19 In discussing Mrs. Brook's circle, I have been unfair to Mitchy. Of all of the circle's members, Mitchy alone tries to speak in his own voice; however, Van's central position,
because Van does not develop his own voice, makes Mitchy's more definite "self" seem quaint and less significant.

20 For an opposing argument, see Samuels 170.


22 It is ironic that, in the midst of the Ververs' seemingly endless wealth, personal relationships in the novel are so often at the expense of one another.


24 For example, see Warren 134; Ward, The Imagination of Disaster 107.

25 For an example, see II, 118-120.


27 See Bradbury 188.

29 II, 302-305.
30 See Yeazell 110-111.
31 See Bradbury 196; Craig 140-44; Yeazell 98-99.
34 James's characters frequently seem to escape from their narratives, experiencing and telling stories of their own. See Bersani 149; Suzanne Ferguson, "The Face in the Mirror: Authorial Presence in the Multiple Vision of Third Person Impressionistic Narrative," Criticism 21 (1979): 232, 244; Ward, The Search for Form 41.
The Necessity and Impotence of Conversation
in Lawrence and Forster

Margaret Schlegel's conversation with her sister in *Howards End* touches the plots of novels as near to *Howards End* as *A Passage to India* and as seemingly far from Forster's novel as *Women in Love* and *The Plumed Serpent*:

"All over the world men and women are worrying because they cannot develop as they are supposed to develop. Here and there they have the matter out, and it comforts them. Don't fret yourself, Helen. Develop what you have."¹ Margaret's advice to Helen might as easily be Birkin's to Ursula (or Ursula's to Birkin) or the kind of advice Kate might wish Ramon would offer or that which Forster's narrator in *A Passage to India*² might give Adela, Aziz or Fielding. Both Lawrence and Forster require the protagonists of their novels to "develop what [they] have" in the context of their furiously working at and out inter-personal connections. In *Women in Love*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, conversation produces the friction necessary to the establishing of such connections. Yet Lawrence and Forster differ fundamentally in their visions and versions of the self which such conversation creates.
Lawrence's self which "has come through" recognizes its essential distinctness; in Forster, "develop[ing] what you have" produces a self which senses the extreme penetrability of its own boundaries. Curiously, although the emphasis of each novelist opposes that of the other, the effect of their two definitions of self upon the conversation necessary to the development of that self is the same. Lawrence's faith in intense individuality and Forster's skepticism regarding the value of the individual equally undermine the potency of conversation in their novels.

Paradoxically, Lawrence undermines conversation's dialogic potential by granting conversation a limited, but substantial power. To a greater extent than any other of Lawrence's novels, Women in Love uses conversation to struggle against monologia. In his "Study of Thomas Hardy," Lawrence argues that to be "really a work of art," a novel "must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres," and Women in Love accomplishes this "essential" self-criticism by establishing Birkin as its mouth-piece at the same time it allows the reader to question what Birkin says. Anais Nin describes this process:

[Lawrence] has created his Birkin [. . .] who carries the burden of Lawrence's earnestness, of his almost (to Ursula) ridiculous exaltations. And all the while
Lawrence has also created the characters who answer Birkin, who state the other side of the case, who make him ridiculous, and who put him in the wrong. Characters in *Women in Love* recognize and discuss Birkin's inadequacies. Ursula and Gudrun criticize Birkin:

Ursula: "[Birkin is] too much of a preacher. He is really a priest."

"Exactly! He can't hear what anybody else has to say [ . . . ] . His own voice is so loud."

"Yes. He cries you down."

"He cries you down," repeated Gudrun. "And by mere force of violence. And of course it is hopeless. Nobody is convinced by violence."

Although Ursula's subsequent marriage to Birkin suggests that she may modify the opinion she holds in this conversation, the substance of Ursula's and Gudrun's criticism sticks to Birkin: their talk qualifies the reader's response to his talk. The interplay between Birkin's prophetic monologues and the others' voiced criticism of those monologues creates the beginnings of a dialogic resonance in the novel.

Birkin and Ursula's conversations with one another develop this resonance. In "Mino," Birkin and Ursula discuss Birkin's notion of "star equilibrium," one of Birkin's
central ideological positions in the novel:

Birkin: "One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other -- forever. But it is not selfless -- it is a maintaining of the self in a mystic balance and integrity -- like a star balanced with another star."

"I don't quite trust you when you drag in the stars," she said. "If you were quite true, it wouldn't be necessary to be so far-fetched."

"Don't trust me then," he said angry. "It is enough that I trust myself."

"[.] You don't fully believe yourself what you are saying. You don't really want this conjunction otherwise you wouldn't talk so much about it, you'd get it."

He was suspended for a moment, arrested. (152-153)

Birkin and Ursula's conversation suggests that it is not "enough" for Birkin that he "trusts himself." He needs to test his ideas and his sense of himself by talking to (and listening to) Ursula. Birkin's "star balanced with another star" "conjunction" metaphorically represents a position which Lawrence himself defends again and again outside the novel, but, within the novel, Ursula's response to Birkin is convincing enough to "arrest" Birkin's talk; Ursula's opposition to Birkin's (and Lawrence's) argument holds a force equal to that of Birkin. In *Women in Love,*
Birkin and Ursula's conversations enact real dialogic interplay. Their "fine passion of opposition" retains its intensity throughout the novel; indeed, *Women in Love* ends in the middle of another perfectly balanced conversation between Ursula and Birkin. Their conversations demonstrate the potential power of conversation to create and support vital connection in the novel.

However, Birkin and Ursula are not the only conversants in *Women in Love*. Birkin and Gerald's conversations bring the two men together in a "perilous intimacy," an intimacy which ultimately fails because their conversation fails. Gerald tolerates Birkin's talk without listening to it:

> It was the quick-changing warmth and versatility and brilliant warm utterance [Gerald] loved in his friend. It was the rich play of words and quick interchange of feelings he enjoyed. The real content of the words he never really considered: he himself knew better.

Birkin knew this. [...] And this made him go hard and cold. (59)

Although he appreciates the form of Birkin's conversation, Gerald rejects the possibility that its content might implicate or include him, might have any value for him whatsoever. Gerald's choice to remain on the surface, to hold himself back from the exchange which conversation
allows, his choice to watch Birkin perform rather than converse with him, transforms Birkin from speaking subject to entertaining object. At the same time that Gerald's attitude isolates Birkin, it isolates Gerald. Gerald's habitual withdrawal from conversation because "he himself knew better" and his privileging the play and form of conversation over its content sap the life both out of his conversations and out of Gerald. Reducing Birkin, Gerald reduces himself.

Gudrun's conversations with Ursula produce a similar reduction. Early in the novel, Ursula discusses with her sister Gudrun's sudden return home. Gudrun's equivocal bantering intentionally confuses Ursula; in so doing, it allows Gudrun both to control their talk and to remain unaffected by it:

"I think my coming home was just reculer pour mieux sauter."

And she looked with a long, slow look of knowledge at Ursula.

"I know!" cried Ursula, looking slightly dazzled and falsified, and as if she did not know. "But where can one jump to?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Gudrun, somewhat superbly. "If one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere."
"But isn't it very risky?" asked Ursula.

A slow, mocking smile danced on Gudrun's face.

"Ah!" she said, laughing. "What is it all but words!"

And so again she closed the conversation. (10)

Although Gudrun's strategy is, in some ways, opposite to that of Gerald (Gudrun participates in their conversation enough to answer her sister), "superbly" and Gudrun's "slow, mocking smile" parallel Gerald's response to Birkin.9

Closing her conversation with Ursula by belittling conversation itself, Gudrun controls her sister by ending their talk. "Control" implies an object which is controlled; Gudrun's "clos[ing] the conversation" places her as subject to Ursula as object in the same way Gerald's rejection of conversation places himself as subject to Birkin as object. Yet Gudrun's talk reduces Gudrun to object status as well.

At the same time that it ends the sisters' conversation, Gudrun's "[w]hat is it all but words!" completes Gudrun, fixes her character in the reader's mind, very much as the ironic "he himself knew better" fixes Gerald. Birkin and Ursula's conversations guarantee the living connection between and the further development of each of the two lovers. Gudrun's and Gerald's abuses of conversation close the form of their characters.

Because the defining feature of the fixed forms of both Gerald and Gudrun is an obsessive assertion of control,
Gerald and Gudrun's conversational conjunction results in thinly veiled torture. Long before Gerald's attempted murder of Gudrun and his own suicide/murder, even before their relationship as lovers, Gudrun and Gerald talk in order to force the other into the role of object. The relatively mundane (though, admittedly, because of its context, also symbolic) activity of returning a rabbit to its hutch becomes, because Gudrun and Gerald perform it together, a scene charged with sado-masochistic tension:

"God be praised we aren't rabbits," she said, in a high, shrill voice.

The smile intensified a little, on his face.

"Not rabbits?" he said, looking at her fixedly. Slowly her face relaxed into a smile of obscene recognition.

"Ah Gerald," she said, in a strong, slow, almost man-like way. "All that and more." [ . . . ]

He felt again as if she had hit him across the face -- or rather, as if she has torn him across the breast, dully, finally. (243)

Gudrun's "obscene recognition" includes her understanding that both she and Gerald would like to draw blood the way the struggling rabbit has; her "[a]ll that and more" suggests that for each of them the other is an animal to be
caged, or further, that controlling, or more "obscene[ly]," conquering the other means fixing the other in place, means taking away the other's status as subject. While Gerald's "intensified" smile which provokes Gudrun's response indicates that he shares her recognition, the turn of their conversation predicts Gudrun's final triumph. Because Gerald and Gudrun, by their choice, and perhaps by their very natures, reject the possibility of a relationship between two equal subjects, reject Birkin's "star balanced with another star," one of them eventually must subdue the other. Gudrun's "man-like voice," the power of her words to "hit [Gerald] across the face," and, worse, to tear "across [his] breast, dully, finally" promise both that she will dominate Gerald and that her domination will be his end. Gerald and Gudrun's conversations indicate their fate rather than enact their development. Lawrence's reader senses this difference when she contrasts Gerald and Gudrun's conversations to those of Birkin and Ursula. Gerald and Gudrun remain predictable objects of study; Birkin and Ursula become living (and therefore unpredictable) subjects of and in their own world/s.

Balance is as important a concept to Lawrence as it is to Birkin. In discussing the importance of morality in the novel, Lawrence writes: "Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts
his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.\textsuperscript{11} Although Birkin and Ursula do achieve something very like Lawrence's "trembling instability" between them, Lawrence uses their relationship "to pull down the balance [of \textit{Women in Love}] to his own predilection." Lawrence's "immorality" is the central problem in \textit{Women in Love}. Lawrence acts upon his "predilection" by providing the reader with long narrative intrusions, such as the numerous descriptions of Gudrun's sado-masochistic tendencies or the chapter "Industrial Magnate," in order to force his reader to assess properly Gudrun and Gerald. Gerald particularly suffers from Lawrence's thumb. Lawrence gives his reader a fairly complete history of Gerald which includes the almost gratuitous fact that, as a child, Gerald has killed his brother and is "marked." Containing Gerald within this history, Lawrence sets rigid limits upon Gerald's possible development. The novel’s reader feels the rigidity of these limits more keenly when she compares them to the unrestricted space which Lawrence grants Birkin. In direct oppositon to Gerald (and also to Gudrun, and even to Ursula), Birkin has no mother, no father, no childhood and practically no past. The absence of familial definition and pressure, almost of any personal history, insures that Birkin is and will be free to develop as he pleases. Critics
have suggested that the four lovers in *Women in Love* are on a different plane from other characters in the novel (such as Hermione and Loerke); however, Birkin and Gerald themselves (and consequently Ursula and Gudrun themselves) occupy different kinds of narrative worlds.

Birkin recognizes this difference. In a conversation with Ursula, he outlines its theoretical basis:

"When the stream of synthetic creation lapses, we find ourselves part of the inverse process, the flood of destructive creation. Aphrodite is born in the first spasm of universal dissolution -- then the snakes and swans and lotus -- marshflowers -- and Gudrun and Gerald -- born in the process of destructive creation."

"And you and me --?" she asked.

"Probably," he replied. "In part, certainly. Whether we are that, in toto, I don't yet know." 172-73

Birkin reserves the possibility of an escape for himself and Ursula (which the end of the novel confirms), an escape which Gerald and Gudrun, by their very natures, cannot experience. Gerald and Gudrun, reduced by their kinship to snakes, swans and marshflowers (they are not even the first item in Birkin's list), because they are "products of the process of destructive creation," cannot develop. Birkin and Ursula, because of the reach of Birkin's "I don't know," can. Granting Birkin and Ursula the space to fulfill
Birkin's "I don't know," to be developing rather than fixed characters, *Women in Love* contrasts Ursula and Birkin with Gerald and Gudrun. The cumulative force of Birkin and Ursula's conversations, of Birkin's ideological positions and the narrator's intrusions into the story, suggest that the contrast between the two sets of lovers is closer to the center of the novel than the development of Birkin and Ursula. In *Women in Love*, conversation, which has the potential to enact a relationship based upon Birkin's notion of "a star balanced with another star," more often than not retreats to the relatively safe ground of demonstrating, both in its content and its implication, Gerald and Gudrun's failure. Lawrence bases his novel upon a largely unstated "dialogue" between the few (actually, the two, Birkin and Ursula) and the rest (Gerald, Gudrun, as well as Hermione, Loerke and others). That Lawrence fixes the results of this dialogue places *Women in Love* as a monologic novel.

Birkin's diatribe against equality explains the withdrawal in the novel from the real dialogic interaction occurring between Birkin and Ursula:

"what have I to do with equality -- with any other man or woman? In the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as different in quality and quantity. Establish a state on that. One man isn't
any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically other, that there is no term of comparison. The minute you begin to compare, one man is seen to be far better than another, all the inequality you can imagine, is there by nature. (103 - 104)

Two sentiments which are deadly to conversation inform Birkin's argument. According to Birkin, comparison between any two human beings, and by extension, interaction between them, will always end in something analogous to the predetermined "dialogue" which, in Women in Love, demonstrates the superiority of Birkin/Ursula over Gerald/Gudrun. Birkin's absolute "as different in quality and quantity" "as one star is from another" and his more comprehensible "no term of comparison" undermine the possibility of shared meaning, the kind of meaning essential to conversation. Women in Love does not push Birkin's positions to their logical conclusions. The novel permits Ursula's "arrest[ing]" resistance to Birkin's notion of unequal individuality. The Plumed Serpent, however, takes Birkin more seriously. In The Plumed Serpent, Ramon attempts to "establish a state" based upon exactly Birkin's principles.

Ramon's dominance in The Plumed Serpent is of a different order than Birkin's in Women in Love. Description
of the practices and effectiveness of Ramon's Quetzalcoatl religion along with several long transcriptions of its hymns (hymns composed by Ramon) occupy a major portion of over half the chapters in the novel. Besides allowing Ramon's religion all of this uncritical narrative space, the plot of *The Plumed Serpent* assures its reader that Ramon's ideas (the core of which Lawrence presents in Birkin's assessment of equality) are, without exception, correct; the Quetzalcoatl religion transforms not only the people, but the very environment of the regions of Mexico in which it replaces Catholicism: "the air had a softer, more velvety silence, it seemed alive. [...] It was as if, from Ramon [...] and the lake region, a new world was unfolding, unrolling, as softly and subtly as twilight falling and removing the clutter of day." Catholicism offers only a weak ideologic resistance to Ramon. Lawrence personifies Catholic resistance in Ramon's wife, Carlota, to whom he gives little of Ursula's intelligence or ability. Lawrence's manipulations involve Carlota, more puppet than character, in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Ramon which ends with her gruesome death during the opening of the Quetzalcoatl church (in what has been the main Catholic Church of Sayula); her death demonstrates her own and Catholicism's wretched inadequacy in comparison to the power of Ramon's Quetzalcoatl religion. As a series of horrible
convulsions kill her at the altar, Lawrence fixes his reader's attention (and attempts to fix his reader's empathy) upon Ramon instead of Carlota:

Kate could see that his heart had died in its connection with Carlota, his heart was quite, quite dead in him, out of a deathly vacancy he watched his wife. [...] His old connections were broken. She could hear him say: There is no star between me and Carlota. (342)

While this transference of focus resembles the ending of *Women in Love* which uses Birkin's response to Gerald's death in order to define the tragedy of that death in terms of the effect it has upon Birkin, Gerald's death is also tragic in itself; in *The Plumed Serpent*, Carlota, because she opposes Ramon, deserves to die. At the same time Ramon's religion triumphs over Carlota's, Ramon's judgment of his wife instructs those who are listening (as well as Lawrence's reader) to recognize Carlota's inconsequence. *The Plumed Serpent* not only confirms Ramon's voice, but it punishes those who do not conform to it.

The central tension in *The Plumed Serpent* surrounds not the testing of Ramon's teaching but Kate's wavering response to that teaching. Ramon's ideal of religious awakening implies a hierarchical relationship between the sexes:

"There is only one thing that a man really wants to do, all
his life; and that is, to find his way to his God, his Morning Star, and be alone there. Then afterwards, in the Morning Star, salute his fellow man, and enjoy the woman who has come the long way with him" (252). At the end of the man's religious quest, the woman "who has come the long way with him," or, less euphemistically, who has followed her man, receives not the salute from an equal but the "joy" of being enjoyed. Kate, assuming a modified version of Ursula's role in Women in Love, attempts to resist the tendency of Ramon's talk to reduce her to being an object which a man might enjoy or contain. She complains to Cipriano:

"You treat me as if I had no life of my own. [. . .]
But I have."

"A life of your own? Who gave it to you? Where did you get it?"

"I don't know. But I have got it. And I must live it. I can't be just swallowed up." (369-370)

That Kate answers rather than questions Cipriano's presumptive questions, worse, that she answers Cipriano with "I don't know," reveals another aspect of Lawrence's enervation, in The Plumed Serpent, of the character of Ursula. Birkin's principle, "[t]he minute you begin to compare, one man is seen to be far better than another," when applied, as Ramon applies it, to the differences
between the sexes, puts woman in her place. Because Kate can neither ignore the male assertion underlying the Quetzalcoatl religion nor defend adequately in conversation her right to maintain a separate identity equal to the identities of the men of Quetzalcoatl, she fails to escape from that place. Rather than undercutting Ramon's theories, Kate's wavering, her vague dissatisfaction undercuts Kate herself.

The end of The Plumed Serpent is almost a parody of Birkin and Ursula's final conversation in Women in Love. Although critics argue that Kate's pitiful "[y]ou won't let me go" closing the novel demonstrates Lawrence's redeeming quality of open-endedness, in fact, Kate speaks because she has decided her fate: she will stay in Mexico. She pleads with the men literally to limit her place. To prevent his reader from believing that Kate still wavers when she has her final say, Lawrence, in the novel's last chapter, forces Kate to imagine and reject the possibility of leaving Mexico in order to resume her life in London:

Another thing, she had observed, with a touch of horror. One after the other, her women "friends," the powerful love-women, at the age of forty, forty-five, fifty, they lost all their charm and allure and turned into real grimalkins, greyish, avid, and horrifying, prowling around looking for prey that was to become
scarcer and scarcer. [. . .]

Kate was a wise woman, wise enough to take a lesson. (438)
The "lesson" which Kate learns ("My ego and my individuality are not worth that ghastly price" (439)) produces the plea, "[y]ou won't let me go," which ends the novel. F. R. Leavis writes of The Plumed Serpent: "it is fair to say that [Lawrence] insists that the Ursula-Birkin problem is, not only essentially involved, but really dealt with in The Plumed Serpent."17 In his later novel, Lawrence "deals with" the problem of the relationship between the sexes by requiring Kate to choose between becoming a grimmalkin who has only "friends" (not real friends but "friends" in quotation marks) or becoming the woman whom a great man, having found "his way to his God," might enjoy. He "deals with" the problem of Ursula by taking away from Kate her right to be a speaking subject among other speaking subjects. In the terms of her novel, Kate makes the right choice. But the terms of her novel make her nothing in herself, make her an object.

The same process which saps the strength out of Ursula to produce Kate insures conversation's ultimate impotence in The Plumed Serpent. Kate loses herself to take her place in a hierarchy. Hierarchical levels of relationship stunt conversation's power to forge vital connection; Women in
Love's image of a "star balanced with another star" becomes
The Plumed Serpent's single "Morning Star" to which a man
might lead a woman, but to which a woman can never come on
her own. In The Plumed Serpent, lapping into "black
mindlessness"\(^{18}\) replaces in importance the "fine passion of
opposition" between Birkin and Ursula. Kate, for want of a
better word, prays to experience the Quetzalcoatl black
mindless state, "[l]et me close my prying, seeing eyes, and
sit in dark stillness along with these men. They have got
more than I, they have a richness that I haven't got.
[... ] Daughter of Eve [... ], why don't these men save
me" (183). Lawrence's description of Kate's "marriage by
Quetzalcoatl" suggests that something (Quetzalcoatl?
Lawrence?) grants her prayer:

She looked back at him, wordless. Language had
abandoned her, and she leaned silent and helpless in
the vast, unspoken twilight of the Pan world. Her self
had abandoned her, and all her day was gone. [... ]
Back to the twilight of the ancient Pan world, where
the soul of woman was dumb, to be forever unspoken.

(310)

The Plumed Serpent completes Birkin's "the minute you begin
to compare" with "a woman will show herself to have
everything to gain from, but little to give and nothing to
say to a man." In The Plumed Serpent, Lawrence explores Birkin's positions without permitting opposition to Birkin; Lawrence's exploration leads him to retreat to a place "where the soul of the woman was dumb, to be forever unspoken." That Lawrence does not recognize the novel's journey to be a retreat is The Plumed Serpent's major weakness; that this journey is an extreme but consistent sequel to Women in Love explains the underlying impotence of conversation in Lawrence's two novels.

Late in The Plumed Serpent, immediately following Kate's feeble attempt at rebellion quoted earlier in this discussion, Kate identifies, for the first time, her maiden name: "I am Kate Forrester, really. [...] I am sick of these men putting names over me" (370). As Kate Forrester, Kate sounds more like a Forster than a Lawrence heroine (perhaps Lawrence's pun is intentional). The "life of her own" which Kate insists she possesses (only to relinquish it at the end of her novel) is the life which Margaret and Helen Schlegel, even Adela Quested take for granted. Early in Howards End, Margaret defines two possible contexts for this life, the world of "personal relations" and that of "telegrams and anger" (27). While Margaret and Helen as well as their novel itself clearly privilege "personal relations" over "telegrams and anger," both worlds which Margaret describes promise a lot of talk.
Margaret, Forster's version of Birkin, provides Forster's reader with this talk. She speaks to her sister and brother, to Leonard Bast, and finally to her husband in order "to adjust the lopsidedness of the world" (331). Forster's "lopsidedness" refers both to Leonard Bast's social inequality and to the Wilcoxes' choosing "telegrams and anger" over "personal relations" which produces the Wilcoxes' psychological imbalance. Perhaps her finest moment in the novel is the moment in which Margaret speaks in order to force her husband to recognize his serious "lopsidedness":

"You have had a mistress -- I forgave you. My sister has a lover -- you drive her from the house. Do you see the connection? [...] No one has ever told you what you are -- muddled, criminally muddled. Men like you use repentance as a blind, so don't repent. Only say to yourself: 'What Helen has done, I've done.'" (308)

Margaret talks in order to encourage Henry to connect his situation with Helen's, or Leonard to connect his experience in the country to his urban life or to connect the Margaret and Helen whom he has trusted to the Margaret and Helen with whom he later speaks. In Howards End, Margaret's conversation specifies the necessary connections implied in the ellipsis of the novel's epigram, "Only connect...

(the narrator condenses the content of much of Margaret's
conversation: "Only connect! This was the whole of her sermon" (186-187)). If Margaret were challenged to do so, she would complete Birkin's "the minute you begin to compare" with "you will find that you have a great deal more in common with others than you suspected." Margaret's conversation is her attempt to establish this commonality. She talks to make connections and believes the process of conversation will enable others to make connections as well.

The problem in Howards End is that Margaret is the best conversant in the novel. Henry "stammers" his response to Margaret's attempt to make him connect his situation with Helen's: "The two cases are different" (308). Leonard Bast cannot quite hold his own in conversation with the Schlegel women:

He continued in a vein which mingled true imagination and false. What he said wasn't wrong, but it wasn't right, and a false note jarred. One little twist, they felt, and the instrument might be in tune. One little strain, and it might be silent for ever. (121)

Here the narrator interrupts in order to call the reader's attention to Leonard's inadequacy of expression and the Schlegels' careful registering of that inadequacy. In Howards End, Forster forces Margaret to deal with lopsided people, not merely with the lopsidedness of the world;
Leonard Bast and Henry, indeed all of the Wilcoxes, are lopsided almost genetically, lopsided for Forster's purposes.21 James McConkey suggests that Forster's narrator, assuming "the dimensions of an ever-present major character," instructs Forster's reader to become "aware of the incompleteness of his people and the completeness beyond them."22 Whether or not Forster's reader identifies the narrator as so powerful a character or even as a separate character at all in the novel, Forster, to establish thematic contrasts between inadequate and successful responses to the lopsided world, chooses to limit the capabilities of certain characters. His choice has the same results as Lawrence's choice in Women in Love to bind Gerald to a history in order to demonstrate Gerald's restricted and therefore dying self (in contrast to Birkin's developing, vital self). However, Forster's choice creates a serious difficulty for a novel which purports to value "[o]nly connect . . .": the epigram of the novel, when it is juxtaposed to Forster's manipulations of his characters, induces Forster's reader to ask how valuable are connections between Margarets and Leonards or Henrys, between developing, vital characters and rigidly controlled characters?23

Margaret's development itself may answer this question. For its resolution, Howards End depends upon
Margaret's replacing Mrs. Wilcox after the older woman dies, depends upon Margaret's developing into Mrs. Wilcox. Early in the novel, before this transformation occurs, Margaret discusses at great length her sense of herself with Mrs. Wilcox:

"Of course, I have everything to learn -- absolutely everything [...]. To be humble and kind, to go straight ahead, to love people rather than pity them, to remember the submerged -- well, one can't do all these things at once, worse luck, because they're so contradictory. It's then proportion comes in -- [...]. Let proportion come in as a last resource, when the better things have failed, and a deadlock -- Gracious me, I've started preaching!"

"Indeed, you put the difficulties of life splendidly," said Mrs. Wilcox, withdrawing her hand into the deeper shadows. (73)

Two things are more important in this passage than its content: the length of Margaret's speech (her self-analysis is longer in the text) and Mrs. Wilcox's "deeper shadows." Margaret's talkiness, when juxtaposed to Mrs. Wilcox's "deeper shadows" appears immature, even a little ridiculous. Mrs. Wilcox's withdrawing her hand into "the deeper shadows" belittles Margaret's slightly irritating catalogue of virtues; Margaret's talk becomes somehow superficial given
the "deeper" of the shadows. Margaret begins the novel seeking out conversation, testing her ideas, her self, by talking to others. Mrs. Wilcox, on the other hand, hardly speaks, and, when she does express her opinion, her opinion is decidedly against talk (she ends a conversation among Margaret and her friends by contributing to it, "I sometimes think that it is wiser to leave action and discussion to men" (77)). As the novel progresses, part of the "everything" which Margaret comes to "learn" is that Mrs. Wilcox's silence indicates a more profound response to the world and the people around her than does all of Margaret's talk. Margaret becomes Mrs. Wilcox by growing out of her own conversational abilities, by discovering for herself that Mrs. Wilcox's assessment of the value of talk is correct. Margaret's transformation into Mrs. Wilcox, marked, among other things, by Margaret's "growing less talkative" (336), functions in the novel to reveal Margaret's maturity. The Margaret at the end of the novel who quietly resolves her husband's and her sister's problems and cares for each better than either could care for himself/ herself proves the powerful superiority of "the deeper shadows," of Mrs. Wilcox's withdrawing silence.

In *Howards End*, connections between characters seem to have little to do with what characters say to each another. Although one of the novel's major crises involves Margaret
and Helen's inability to talk to one another because both women feel that Margaret has betrayed her sister, this crisis resolves itself not by Margaret's explaining herself to Helen, hardly by the two women speaking at all, but by Margaret and Helen's seeing their furniture and other personal items in the unfamiliar setting of Howards End:

And the triviality faded from their faces, though it left something behind -- the knowledge that they never could be parted because their love was rooted in common things. Explanations and appeals had failed; [. . .]

And all their salvation was lying round them -- the past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would after all be a future, (299)

"[C]ommon things" save the sisters: their connection to one another, even their presents and their futures, depend upon these "things." And Forster's narrator attributes Margaret's growth itself to her recognition of the importance of "things": "Yet the main cause lay deeper still; [Margaret] had outgrown stimulants, and was passing from words to things" (262).25 "[P]assing from words to things" describes the novel's movement as well as Margaret's growth (because Margaret is the protagonist of the novel, the two are related) and defines Forster's final conception of
connection in the novel. In *Howards End*, connection between people is finally a by-product of connection between people and things.

Mrs. Wilcox discriminates between her connection with other people and her connection to *Howards End*: "Mrs. Wilcox's voice, though sweet and compelling, had little range of expression. It suggested that pictures, concerts and people are all of small and equal value. Only once had it quickened — when speaking of *Howards End*" (70). Mrs. Wilcox's voice reduces "people" and human culture comprised of "pictures" and "concerts" ("pictures" refers to museum exhibitions not to personal possessions) to the same small value. Her radical notion of equality makes conversation (in the novel often about pictures and concerts) an ineffective means of establishing connection, makes conversation impotent in *Howards End*. Mrs. Wilcox's notion of equality determines the outcome of the plot of the novel (which revolves around Margaret's development) and its theme. Wilfred Stone argues that "the burden of [*Howards End*'] conclusion is that Forster does not really want connection at all but only the rewards of connection." 26 The novel rewards Margaret neither by giving her Henry (he ends the novel a worn, old man) nor by giving her back her sister but by giving her *Howards End*. The leveling equality which informs *Howards End* has a similar result to *The Plumed*
Serpent's extreme hierarchy. Putting Kate and Margaret in their proper places (Kate, in Mexico and in her assigned space in the Quetzalcoatl hierarchy; Margaret, at Howards End), Lawrence and Forster undermine the validity of interpersonal connections; in so doing, they undermine the value of conversation in their novels.

Just as The Plumed Serpent develops and extends some of the principles underlying Women in Love, Forster's extreme notion of equality in Howards End reverberates throughout, even picks up an echo in A Passage to India. Fielding, resembling the early Margaret of Howards End, considers a more garden variety of equality (which holds people as equals, not people, pictures and concerts as equals) to be of the utmost importance: "[Fielding] was happiest in the give-and-take of a private conversation. The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence" (62). Fielding defines equality in terms of men "trying to reach one another" (a more limited definition than that which informs Howards End). Fielding's belief in the possibility of a brotherhood of man/men assigns a high value to good will, culture and intelligence; three qualities which Fielding himself possesses and three qualities which identify the best conversants in Forster's novels. The problem in the novel is
that Fielding must exist among the novel's other characters and in the novel's world. In *A Passage to India*, Forster juxtaposes Fielding's "globe of men" equality which attributes to the "give-and-take of conversation" the power to establish connections against the globe containing men and women with conflicting motives and ideas and against the globe which does not recognize man's distinction as an individual or as a species at all. Each of Forster's juxtapositions, as it tests Fielding's sense of equality, tests the efficacy of conversation in the novel.

Adela and Aziz separately express a desire for something analogous to Fielding's "globe of men." Each of them possesses "the help of good will plus culture and intelligence"; however, once they come together in conversation, these qualities support neither speaker. Aziz criticizes Adela's admiration for Akbar, an Indian emperor who combined the Hindu and Moslem religions into one Indian religion, and an emperor whom Aziz, when he does not feel it necessary to assert his Indianness against Adela's Englishness, admires greatly:

"Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing, nothing, and that was Akbar's mistake."

"Oh, do you feel that, Dr. Aziz?" she said thoughtfully. "I hope you're not right. There will have to be something universal in this country [.. .] or
how else are barriers to be broken down?"

She was only recommending the universal brotherhood he sometimes dreamed of, but as soon as it was put into prose it became untrue. (145)

For Fielding, "put[ting] it into prose," talking about "the universal brotherhood," is the most likely way to create such a brotherhood. Yet, "put[ting] it into prose" requires that both Aziz and Adela subordinate their distinct selves (Adela's version of herself as the questing heroine who is too good to notice the inferior status of the native; Aziz's version of himself as the genial, knowledgeable host to whom the Englishwoman might entrust herself completely, might take the dependent status of a guest) to the content of their talk. The act of conversation between the two of them, however, encourages each to become more, rather than less, aware of himself/ herself. Talking, because it makes precise the rumblings of their consciousnesses, because it names their dreams, makes their boundaries more precise, makes their separate identities more apparent. Their conversation dissipates the feelings of good will which encouraged it and finally severs the connections which each had hoped their talk would establish. Their conversation ends with Adela's question to Aziz, just before she enters one of the Marabar caves, "[h]ave you one wife or more than one?" Although she asks her question "in her honest, decent,
inquisitive way," Adela speaks and shatters the feeble connection between them. Her question provokes Aziz's anger and his separation from her and results in whatever she experiences in the cave as well as the trial of Aziz. Adela's and Aziz's attempts to participate "in the give-and-take of conversation" assure that they will not "reach one another." In *A Passage to India*, conversation makes the equality necessary to a brotherhood of men more difficult, if not impossible, to realize.

Soon after she has arrived in India, before her trip to the Marabar caves, Mrs. Moore discusses with her son the prejudices, the absurd sense of racial superiority, which she perceives he has acquired during his stay in India:

[Ronny] thought, "She is certainly ageing, and I ought not to be vexed with anything she says."

"The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God. ...
The sincere if impotent desire wins His blessing. [...] Good will and more good will and more good will. Though I speak with the tongues of ..."

He waited until she had done, (52)

In order to combat racism, Mrs. Moore appeals to her son's sense of good will and to their shared cultural values. But, just as Adela and Aziz's conversations separate the two of them, Mrs. Moore's speech crystallizes her son's distance
from herself. Ronny listens to his mother as an old lady (Adela listens to Aziz as an Indian; Aziz listens to Adela as a white woman); he takes no notice of the content of his mother's talk. Further, at the same time that Mrs. Moore's conversation with her son demonstrates the weak reach of good will and shared cultural values, this conversation also includes the ellipses which interrupt Mrs. Moore's sentences. Forster's ellipses, suggesting that Mrs. Moore's ideas are so cliche-ridden that her conversation need not be given in full, ridicule Mrs. Moore's talk itself. Forster embeds Mrs. Moore's good will and keen sense of shared cultural values in her talk in order to undermine all three. In *A Passage to India*, Forster extends the leveling which equates, in *Howards End*, "people," "pictures" and "concerts" to comprehend people, the ideas upon which they base their culture (as well as their material culture) and their very desire for connection itself. In *A Passage to India*, all of these categories are equal, and they are all equally impotent.

The Marabar caves "in which [h]ope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot" all produce the echo "boum" enact Forster's radical leveling. The Marabar cave episode, occurring at the center of the novel, undoes the fragile connections which the "Mosque" section works to establish. Adela, Aziz and Mrs. Moore's trip to the caves
proves that talk can neither overcome the tension of personal difference nor can it withstand the pressure of extreme equality. In "Temple," the section of the novel following "Caves," Forster uses a Hindu ceremony which celebrates the rebirth of Krisna into the world to propose an anti-conversation escape from "Caves." At the climax of the ceremony, Godbole and perhaps others among the celebrants (Forster's reader sees into the minds of none of these others) experience, in a frenzy of unconscious dancing and singing, something analogous to a Lawrentian "lapsing out" in which they may (or may not) have "ravished," momentarily, "the unknown." For Godbole, this "ravishment" means loving equally images which "chance" brings into his mind: "an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days" (Mrs. Moore), a wasp and a stone. Godbole's "lapsing out" mind assumes for itself the role of a Marabar cave; it attempts a radical leveling. However, the equation which Godbole's mind makes connects Mrs. Moore, a wasp and a stone not in "boum," but in "love." Forster's reductionist equality becomes a positive force when no words are spoken and the mind is alone. Of course, a novel, depending on words and the interaction between those words and its reader, cannot express or even quite depict what a "lapsing out" mind might accomplish. The narrator of A Passage to India asks of Godbole's religious experience: "Did it succeed? Books
written afterwards say "Yes." But how, if there is such an event, can it be remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself?" (288). Godbole's escape, his transcendent knowledge or love which does not involve thought, cannot be expressed in anything but itself; Godbole's experience is, by definition, not sharable. Once it is spoken, it no longer replaces "boum," but becomes subject to "boum." Forster's narrator makes clear this progression:

Not only from the unbeliever are mysteries hid, but the adept himself cannot retain them. He may think, if he chooses, that he has been with God, but as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time. (288)

When the "adept" thinks, makes conscious, his experience, he loses that experience. His loss represents not simply a misremembering, a difficulty of expressing the inexpressible, but a not "retaining." Consciousness, expression, history take away from the adept his singular knowledge. A book (A Passage to India?) written afterwards might affirm that Godbole once possessed this knowledge, but books, thought, talk prove that the momentary escape from personal difference and from "boum" which Godbole's "love" allows (I use the narrator's word for want of a better one) is lost. Godbole's anti-conversation solution to the
absolute negation of the Marabar caves may solve something for Godbole but it can solve nothing in the novel.

The loss in *A Passage to India* of Godbole's "lapsed out" escape, the novel's one positive answer to the Marabar caves' equalizing "boum," makes inevitable the failure of the friendship between Aziz and Fielding. *A Passage to India* concludes not with Godbole, but with Aziz and Fielding; in choosing to return to expressing what can be expressed, Forster provides his reader with a final assessment of the value of such expression. The novel closes with Aziz's suggesting that he and Fielding will be able to be friends in the future when the English have left India. Fielding responds:

"Why can't we be friends now? [...] It's what I want. It's what you want."

But the horses didn't want it -- they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending rocks through which the riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House [...] they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there." (322)

Fielding cannot talk his way into connection in part because of the pressure which the English/Indian situation places
upon the two men, but, more conspicuously, because his voice is not strong enough to counteract the "hundred voices" which emerge from the world surrounding and containing the two men. If Godbole's "lapsing out" represents the possibility of a successful human response to these "hundred voices," Fielding does not want to equate or love or transcend (or whatever Godbole does) the earth and its objects; instead, Fielding wants a human friend with whom he can share and discuss experiences and ideas. The failure of his voice, of his talk, to establish such a friendship belittles Fielding's idea of friendship itself. In A Passage to India, the backdrop of India precludes conversation which might establish a vital connection between characters both by obstructing this conversation and by placing it in a larger context which makes its smaller content insignificant. The power of the "hundred voices," of the world containing Fielding and Aziz, reduces the two men to being two more items in Forster's series of equal objects which includes "people," "pictures," "concerts," "hope," "politeness," "the blowing of a nose," "an old woman," "a stone," "a wasp"... Given the radically equal status of these objects, talk among them must fail: talk between or among such objects (because they are objects and not subjects) can have no meaning. Forster's leveling finally produces the same silence which Lawrence's hierarchy
produces. Aziz, Fielding, Adela, Margaret, Mr. Wilcox, Helen, Kate, Ramon, Cipriano, Gerald and Gudrun all assume their proper places in the worlds of their novels; these places insure the impotence of their conversation.

David Garnett, more a friend of Forster than of Lawrence, describes a chance meeting between the two men at the home of the painter, Duncan Grant:33

Forster was, I think, interested to meet Lawrence again, but after one or two pictures had been set up on the easel Lawrence began a didactic harangue, and an expression of pain came into Morgan's face. [...] as Lawrence launched himself on a denunciation of the evil that he discovered in Duncan's painting the look of pain was replaced by one of pure misery, and very soon [Forster] murmured something about a train to Weybridge and disappeared.

Forster's not being able to bear Lawrence's extreme discriminations indicates the serious differences between the two writers. Perhaps, if Forster had spoken to Lawrence, he would have begun with good will, culture and intelligence, hoping to persuade Lawrence that the "evils" in Grant's painting mattered very little when placed in some other larger context. One can imagine the heightened pitch of Lawrence's "denunciations" turned upon Forster himself because Forster had suggested that Lawrence might question
or qualify some of his judgments. But, of course, Garnett's story depends upon Forster's not talking to Lawrence. Lawrence's "the minute you begin to compare, one man is seen to be far better than another" directly opposes Forster's leveling equality. Yet both positions finally enervate conversation perhaps because these positions prevent conversation from occurring between the writers who hold them; certainly because either position, when it controls a novel's development or theme, works to limit characters, to define and finally to fix them in place. Conversation, dialogic connection, holds the potential to make living subjects out of fixed objects. Lawrence and Forster deny their characters this potential in order to prove their ideological positions. If Women in Love, The Plumed Serpent, Howards End, and A Passage to India were essays and not novels, an opposing essay might claim that, by ignoring, avoiding or underestimating the power of conversation, Lawrence and Forster skew their arguments. Because these novels are novels, putting them into conversation demonstrates Lawrence's and Forster's profound mistrust of the other as a speaking subject.

2 The plots of *Howards End* (1910) and *Women in Love* (1921) (which each detail the love experience of two sisters, one sister losing her lover near the novel's conclusion) and of *A Passage to India* (1924) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) (which each place a woman in a foreign culture and gain by this placing the opportunity to explore religious responses supposedly inherent in that culture) are strangely similar.

3 I use the term "dialogic" (and later, "monologia") in a Bakhtinian sense. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination* inform my arguments throughout this essay.

4 D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985) 89.

7 For other examples, see Women in Love 127, 129-130. See also David J. Gordon, "Women in Love and the Lawrencean Aesthetic," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Women in Love, ed. Stephen J. Miko (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 54; Anne Wright Literature of Crisis, 1910-22 (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1984) 132. Gordon and Wright, as well as other critics, argue that Birkin ultimately triumphs over Ursula, that their conversation finally serves to ratify his opinions; however, the novel allows Ursula more power than these critics allow her. Ursula maintains some independence even in her conversation with Birkin which closes the novel.
8 The irresolution of Ursula and Birkin's final conversation opens up the ending of Women in Love:

"Why aren't I enough?" she said. "You are enough for me. [ .. . ] Why isn't it the same with you?"

"Having you, I can live all my life without anybody
else, any other sheer intimacy. But to make it complete, really happy, I wanted eternal union with a man too: another kind of love," he added.

"I don't believe it," she said. "It's an obstinancy, a theory, a perversity."

"Well --" he said.

"You can't have two kinds of love. Why should you!"

"It seems as if I can't," he said. "Yet I wanted it."

"You can't have it, because it's false, impossible," she said.

"I don't believe that," he answered. (481)

9 The narrator's description of Gudrun's conversations with Loerke recalls Birkin and Gerald's conversations. Gudrun revels in the surface and not the substance of her discussions with her fellow artist:

They talked in a mixture of languages. The groundwork was French, in either case. But he ended most of his sentences in a stumble of English and a conclusion of German, she skilfully wove herself to her end in whatever phrase came to her. She took particular delight in this conversation. It was full of odd, fantastic expression, of double meanings, of evasions, of suggestive vagueness. It was a real physical pleasure to her to make this thread of conversation out of the different-coloured strands of three languages.
Maria DiBattista describes the ways in which Gerald and Gudrun's conversations define them:

Their [Gerald and Gudrun's] love story represents [...] the dead life and the moribund forms of older (tragic) narratives whose formal integrity conformed to a deterministic notion of historical causality. This formalism appears in an early exchange between Gudrun and Gerald: "You have struck the first blow," Gerald reminds Gudrun, to which she responds with "confident assurance," "And I shall strike the last." That Gudrun's threat sounds like a prediction is a sign of her (and the reader's) confidence in the symmetry intrinsic to the resolutions of the classical novel.

DiBattista 85.

Whether one agrees or not that the tension between Lawrence's representation of Gerald and Gudrun and his representation of Birkin and Ursula involves an old way of writing confronting a new way, one must admit that Lawrence creates Gerald and Gudrun to defeat them, that the "deterministic notion" which defines them steals from them the possibility of self-defense.


12 For examples, see Baruch Hochman, "On the Shape the Self

13 Only the reader's uncomfortable giggling or perhaps yawning at the seemingly endless Quetzalcoatl hymns undercuts the privileging of Ramon's religion. The novel ignores these possible reader responses; indeed, the plot of the novel (including the deaths of Carlota and others) suggests that any reader who fails to acknowledge the superiority of the Quetzalcoatl religion is a reader who must be discounted.


15 Lawrence also grants Ramon the opportunity to discuss religion with a Catholic bishop. Ramon explains Catholicism to the bishop:

"A Catholic Church is a church of all religions, a home on earth for all the prophets and the Christs. A big tree under which every man who acknowledges the greater life of the soul can sit and be refreshed. Isn't that the Catholic Church, Father?"

"Alas, my son, I know the Apostolic Church of Christ
in Rome, of which I am a humble servant. I do not understand these clever things you are saying to me."

(262-263)

Lawrence's stupid bishop is Lawrence's straw man. Throughout The Plumed Serpent, religious conversation quickly degenerates into Ramon's "correct" monologue.

16 For example, James Cowan writes: "The novel ends irresolutely where Kate is concerned not because the two ways to integration are irreconcilable, but because Ramon wisely resists the temptation to make the decision which must be ultimately Kate's responsibility." James C. Cowan, D.H. Lawrence's American Journey: A Study in Literature and Myth (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1978) 119.

17 F.R. Leavis, Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976) 68.

18 Ramon's escape from the conversation around him suggests that The Plumed Serpent's epigram might be "only disconnect . . .":

He heard the low sound of women talking. Ah the strange woman! He had forgotten her. And Carlota! Carlota was here! He thought of her for a moment, and of her curious opposition. Then, before he could be angry, he lifted his breast again in the black, mindless prayer, his eyes went dark, and the sense of opposition left him. (169)
Lawrence's narrator emphasizes Kate's separate and lesser state by noting, when Kate enters to plead with Ramon and Cipriano at the end of the novel, "[t]hey made her feel like an intruder. She did not pause to realise that she was one." (443)

The similarities in plot between A Passage to India (1924) and The Plumed Serpent (1926) noted above (note 1) allow for the possibility of intentionality.

Charles Wilcox is perhaps the novel's most "lopsided" character. And, in conversation with others, he hardly can understand the significance of his own speech, much less the talk of others; for example, without recognizing his own culpability, he describes to his father the death of Leonard Bast:

"Sword?" cried his father, with anxiety in his voice.

"What sword? [. . .] What were you doing with it?"

"Well, didn't you see, Pater. I had to snatch up the first thing handy. I hadn't a riding-whip or stick. I caught him once or twice over the shoulders with the flat of their old German sword."

"Then what?"

"He pulled over the bookcase, as I said, and fell," said Charles, with a sigh. It was no fun doing errands for his father, who was never quite satisfied. (327-328)

James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster (Ithaca:

23 That Leonard Bast dies and Henry Wilcox lives suggests Margaret's connection to Leonard, her attempting to adjust social inequity, is less efficacious (and perhaps less important) than her connection to Henry, her attempting to force the world of "telegrams and anger" to take note of the world of "personal relations."


25 In its context, "stimulants" refers to Margaret's past discussions with her Chelsea friends. Margaret, by the end of the novel, avoids the opportunity to take part in such discussions; she no longer needs to talk.


27 E.M. Forster, A Passage to India 62. All quotations of A


29 Critics have often described the leveling effects of Forster's famous "boum": the caves literally reduce all human categories as well as humans themselves to a meaningless state of equality. The cave echo which Mrs. Moore hears "murmurs" to her, "[p]athos, pity, courage -- they exist, but they are identical and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." (148)

30 For a discussion of "lapsing out" in both Lawrence and Forster as a method of establishing a state of profound, nonverbal connection, see Stone, 331fn, 381.

31 John Colmer argues that, in A Passage to India, dialogue "serves to develop that pattern [of promise and withdrawal that dominates the novel]; John Colmer, "Promise and Withdrawal in A Passage to India, E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration" 125. John Beer also discusses the failure of language in A Passage to India; John Beer, "'The Last Englishman': Lawrence and Forster," E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration 143.

32 Frederick Crews argues that Forster's India provides the

Coversation in Lord Jim and Absalom, Absalom!:
Failed Coercion and Failed Resistance

Don Ihde, acknowledging the tinge of compulsion which begins conversation, writes: "[f]ace to face meeting without any words results in an awkward silence, because in the meeting there is issued a call to speak."¹ The problem inherent in such necessary conversation resides in Ihde's passive voiced construction, "is issued"; that is, does the self issue the "call to speak"; does the other; does something or someone else? Identifying the subject of "is issued" becomes particularly important in Lord Jim and Absalom, Absalom!, two novels outside the "great tradition" of English literature described by Fogel in which dialogue serves as a "model of human order, restoring life or coherence or legitimacy to fallen human and political relations."² Jim, Quentin, Marlow, Shreve, Rosa and Mr. Compson speak to compel and as a result of compulsion. Their conversational relationships accomplish stories which disrupt, project an other who disturbs. In Lord Jim, Conrad explores the coercive force and failure of conversation which attempts to construct an "us," an essential grouping of the self with the other. In Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner,
redefining the impetus of conversational compulsion, enacts the futility of resisting the coercion implicit in conversation.

Marlow's conversations in Lord Jim (and elsewhere) define him; indeed when Marlow begins to tell Jim's story, Marlow's body seems to disappear into the night (his lighted cigar indicates only its approximate position), and his talking voice alone persists. While Lord Jim includes Marlow's extended conversations with Brierly, the French lieutenant, Gentleman Brown and others, Jim, of course, is the primary object of Marlow's considerable conversational abilities. Fogel identifies "forms of forceful and problematic connection [. . .] rather than isolation and 'alienation'" as Conrad's major themes, and "forceful and problematic connection" best describes Marlow's attempts to know Jim. Their first confused meeting in which the two men stumble over Jim's mistaken assumption that Marlow has called him a "wretched cur" sets the tone for the rest of their "connection":

"I will allow no man,' . . . [Jim] mumbled, threateningly. [. . .] 'Good God!' I stammered, 'you don't think I . . .' 'But I am sure I've heard,' he persisted, raising his voice for the first time since the beginning of the deplorable scene. Then with
a shade of disdain he added, 'It wasn't you, then? Very well; I'll find the other.' 'Don't be a fool,' I cried in exasperation; 'it wasn't that at all.' 'I've heard,' he said again with an unshaken and sombre perseverance."

"There may be those who could have laughed at his pertinacity. I didn't. Oh, I didn't!" (73-74)

Jim's mumbling "threateningly," his "raising his voice" and his "shade of disdain" effectively entangle, even subdue Marlow; the intensity of Jim's talk forces Marlow's response. I will return later to the problem contained in "[t]here may be those who could have laughed"; the defining aspect of this scene is that Marlow pointedly does not laugh at its implicit irony that Jim, who has jumped off the Patna, considers Marlow to be a coward. Instead, Marlow connects himself to Jim and attempts to save Jim from "deplorable" embarrassment. For Marlow, entering into conversation is submitting to, then acting upon forced connection.

At the heart of *Lord Jim* are Jim's conversations with Marlow. The very pattern of Jim's talk appropriates Marlow as it requires more active responses than mere verbal answers. Jim characteristically does not finish important sentences. He describes the absurd and fatal heart attack of the Patna's third engineer: "May I be shot if he hadn't been
fooled into killing himself! Fooled -- neither more nor less. Fooled into it, by heavens! just as I . . . Ah! if he had only kept still" (107). The agitation which "by heavens" suggests resembles Jim's earlier persistence which demands attention, yet "by heavens" functions not only as an interjection, but also as a possible passive voiced subject for "was fooled"; Jim's "interjection" asserts that Jim "was fooled" "by heavens." The ellipsis following "just as I . . ." strengthens the coerciveness of Jim's talk. "[J]ust as I . . ." involves Marlow, his listeners, and Conrad's reader in making Jim's sentence, and that sentence, "just as I was fooled," exculpates Jim. The presence and style of Jim's conversation forces Marlow and those who hear Jim through Marlow literally to share in Jim's conviction.5 That Jim's listeners most likely make Jim's meaning without realizing their own contribution strengthens rather than undercuts their compelled connection to Jim. Jim's speech allows its hearers to complete Jim's meaning and then trusts that each hearer will be "gentleman" enough to be responsible for the meaning s/he has made.

If Jim's talk works to establish Marlow or whoever hears it as a "gentleman" (to be specific, as a British "gentleman"), as the kind of person whose convictions once formed withstand opposition (and as the kind of person not given to abandoning ship), the ellipses in Jim's
conversation force Jim's way into the company his speech requires. After he claims that he was not trying to save his life when he jumped from the Patna, Jim challenges Marlow:

"'Don't you believe me?' he cried. 'I swear! . . .
Confound it! You got me here to talk, and . . . you must! . . . You said you would believe.' 'Of course I do,' I protested [. . .]. 'Forgive me,' he said. 'Of course I wouldn't have talked to you about all this if you had not been a gentleman. I ought to have known . . . I am -- I am -- a gentleman, too . . .'. 'Yes, yes,' I said, hastily." (130-131)

Without the ellipses, Jim here simply would be bullying Marlow. With the hesitation which ellipses add to Jim's speech, Jim's talk subtly seduces Marlow's sympathy and compels Marlow to "protest" and agree "hastily" that Jim is a "gentleman too." Other ellipses define less abstractly the company Jim claims. Jim discusses Marlow's response to their conversation:

"'You've been -- er -- uncommonly -- really there's no word to . . . Uncommonly! I don't know why, I am sure. I am afraid I don't feel as grateful as I would if the whole thing hadn't been so brutally sprung on me. Because at bottom . . . you, yourself . . .' He stuttered.
'Possibly,' I struck in." (180)

Once Marlow has admitted the possibility that Jim is a gentleman, is "one of us," Jim's conversation personally implicates Marlow. Although his stammerings contain words enough, Jim does not need to find the "word to..." because Marlow will discover it, some equivalent of "express how I feel," for Jim. Marlow will (and he does) finish Jim's "you, yourself..." with "are like me," and Marlow's filling in Jim's ellipsis places Jim as Marlow's equal. Their conversation forces upon Marlow the relationship implied by the gaps in Jim's speech.6

Marlow's "yes, yes" and "possibly" reach beyond his personal relationship with Jim. Marlow explains himself to his listeners:

"The occasion was obscure, insignificant -- what you will: a lost youngster, one in a million -- but then he was one of us; an incident as completely devoid of importance as the flooding of an ant-heap, and yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself..." (93)

Marlow here claims that Jim's case has universal significance. The ellipsis ending this passage, representing one of the few pauses in Marlow's tale, attempts to elicit
the hearer's/reader's nod. Once Marlow's listeners, once we, have given the nod, have accepted that Jim is indeed "one of us," our response to Jim's jump changes substantially. Marlow's own response to Jim indicates the direction of change which his ellipsis and "one of us" encourage. He tells Jim: "I make myself unreservedly responsible for you. That's what I am doing. And really if you will only reflect a little what that means . . ." (183). Marlow returns Jim's ellipsis and asks that Jim act according to the elliptically implied bond between the two men. This bond includes us. Because Jim is "one of us," Marlow's "unreservedly responsible" encompasses Marlow's listeners and Conrad's reader as well as Jim.

"One of us" connects Conrad himself to Jim, Marlow, and to us. In his preface to the novel, Conrad defends Lord Jim from the charge of morbidity by attacking the nationality of the novel's accuser. Conrad's reader surely hears Marlow's voice in Conrad's shifting account of Jim:

no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. [...] perhaps, my Jim is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny
morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by -- appealing --
significant -- under a cloud -- perfectly silent. Which
is as it should be. It was for me, with all the
sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for
his meaning. He was 'one of us.' (xxxiii-xxxiv)

Insisting upon Jim's reality, Conrad places Jim in
opposition to the non-Latin temperament which fails to
understand Jim's "acute consciousness of lost honour."
Conrad denies Jim northern European pragmatic or mystical
roots; however, once we have concluded that Jim is not
European or British or one of us, Conrad's complicated
maneuvering takes Jim to an "eastern roadstead" in order to
prove that whatever else Jim is, he is "one of us." "We"
discover Jim through the process of elimination and through
surviving some daunting oxymoronic pairings, for example,
"the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead," only
if we are able to adjust our notion of "us" at each turn in
Conrad's prose. The eliminating which Conrad requires (Jim
is not this, nor is he that . . .) begins to define the "us"
of "one of us" as much as it defines Jim; that is, we prove
ourselves to be the appropriate company for Conrad (and for
Jim) when we reach his "form" "pass[ing] by -- appealing --
significant" and we, "with all the sympathy of which [we
are] capable," succumb to the task of "seek[ing] fit words
for Jim's meaning." Guerard's observation, "Marlow's human task is also the reader's: to achieve a right relationship with this questionable younger brother," indicates the centrality in the novel of our relationship to Jim, yet Guerard does not recognize that Conrad and Marlow shift the focus of "questionable" from Jim to us. Jim is not a "type of wide commonness," and neither are we, if we are able to join Conrad and Marlow.

The problem for Conrad and for Marlow is that we might refuse such company. After he has described his initial confused encounter with Jim, Marlow tells his listeners, "[t]here may be those who could have laughed at [Jim's] pertinacity. I didn't. Oh, I didn't" (74). In the same way that Jim's talk, particularly his repeated conversational ellipses, works to compel Marlow's giving Jim "all the sympathy of which [he] is capable in order to seek fit words for [Jim's] meaning," Marlow's talk, the telling of Jim's tale, attempts to compel his listeners to join the right us, the us who, unable to laugh at Jim, will become responsible for him. Yet the reaction of his audience makes Marlow uneasy. Promising that his "last words about Jim shall be few" (a promise he does not keep), he senses the resistance of those listening and begins to bully them:

"Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you
fellows have starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions -- and safe -- and profitable -- and dull." (225)

Marlow has been eloquent, but his eloquence has not convinced; here he is offensive: he tries to shock his listeners out of their complacency. Marlow's various coercive strategies fail. The mainstream us, the manly British us, the us which matters so much to Marlow that he sits with them for hours telling Jim's tale, cannot quite accept Jim. When Marlow finishes talking, "men [drift] off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark" (337). Their lack of response suggests that Marlow's conversational ellipses as well as his overt bullying fail. The "us" who listens to Jim's story removes itself from Marlow/ Jim, and the growing distance between this "us" and Marlow/ Jim causes the force of "one of us" to change. Losing his listeners, Marlow must reassess his "us" and his own position.

As a result, Marlow moves into the opposition. We read, actually "over-read," the final section of Jim's story in Marlow's letter, a letter whose addressee is someone who has heard the earlier portion of Jim's tale and has disagreed with Marlow's acceptance of Jim. The conversation figured in this letter represents a defeat. Marlow retreats to writing
perhaps in order to deny his letter's recipient a voice, but the urgency of Marlow's style indicates Marlow's acute registering of that critical voice. Marlow's writing (and perhaps Conrad's as well) substantiates the failure of Marlow's talk to compel. Experiencing this failure, Marlow separates Jim and, in so doing, separates himself from the "us" which the reader of the letter assumes:

"You said also -- I call to mind -- that 'giving your life up to them' (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute.' You contended that 'that kind of thing' was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. [...] The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress."  (339)

The question of Jim's motives is a question because Marlow's conversations with Jim have forced Marlow to recognize the existence of "a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress." Acknowledging this "faith" means opposing the "us" which includes the listeners of his tale and the reader
of his letter. Glassman argues that "[o]ut of the most meagre and fragmented resources and with the offered assistance of no one Marlow shapes himself as a man whom he can bear to be." Marlow does "shape himself," but he does not do so in a vacuum. The self Marlow discovers or creates results from his talking, both his talking to Jim and his talking to representatives of "us." As the novel progresses, the shiftings of Marlow's relationship to "us," resembling the shifting in Conrad's preface, leave Marlow with an "us" comprised of Jim, Marlow, and, hopefully, Conrad's reader.

Jim himself destabilizes this "us." Jim's response to Marlow's inclusive ellipsis, "I make myself unreservedly responsible for you [. . .] if you will only reflect what that means . . .," contains within it the problem inherent in Marlow's unreflective assessment, "yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind." Jim "gasp[s] out": "'Jove! You have helped me. Can't sit still. The very thing . . .' He looked at me with puzzled admiration. 'The very thing . . .'

" (184). The clause which the ellipsis indicates, some equivalent of "which I need to prove that I am my ideal self, not a coward," places pressure upon the "one of us" bond Marlow's conversation with Jim and his storytelling work to establish. Before Jim leaves Stein's for Patusan, he talks to Marlow; the ellipses in his speech separate him
both from "us" and from Marlow:

"'I'll show yet . . . I'll . . . I'm ready for any
confounded thing. . . . I've been dreaming of it . .
. Jove! [. . .] This is luck at last. . . . You wait.
I'll . . ."

"He tossed his head fearlessly, and I confess that
for the first and last time in our acquaintance I
perceived myself unexpectedly to be thoroughly sick of
him." (235)

The gaps in Jim's speech indicate a private, idiosyncratic
vision. Jim believes himself literally to be "in the
forefront of his kind," and this position necessarily
prevents his communion with those who follow, the rest of
his kind. What Jim "will show," what he has been "dreaming
of" makes Marlow "thoroughly sick" of Jim because Jim's
romantic version of himself opposes Marlow's "unreservedly
responsible." Jim's conversation reveals that he requires
something other than the connection, the community which his
earlier ellipses successfully compel.

Indeed, as Marlow more and more assumes responsibility
for Jim, Jim speaks less and less. Jim's last attempt to
talk to Marlow turns in upon itself, and the ellipsis ending
Marlow's final vision of Jim indicates that Jim's status as
part of Marlow's necessary us has become highly problematic:
"Tell them . . . ' he began. [ . . . ] 'No -- nothing,' he said, and with a slight wave of his hand motioned the boat away. [ . . . ] he himself appeared no bigger than a child -- then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world. . . . And suddenly, I lost him. . . . " (335, 336)

If Jim's "them" confirms Marlow as a part of us and not "them," the ellipsis following "them," Jim's "...[n]o -- nothing," buries Jim's self-explanation, begins to erase Jim. This ellipsis also generates Marlow's ellipses. Not only do Marlow's ellipses finish Marlow's tale and provoke those listening "to [drift] off the verandah [ . . . ] without loss of time, without offering a remark," but the gaps between "world" and "And" and after "him" suggest an unrecoverable distance opening up between Marlow and Jim. Jim's dying "with his hand over his lips" (416) confirms this distance. The "us" established through Marlow and Jim's conversations begins to break apart.

Losing Jim, Marlow loses his significant other, the other who has forced Marlow to define himself. This loss disrupts the sense of necessary relationship which Marlow constructs at great personal cost (he excludes himself from the large and comfortable "us" who listens to his story) during his conversations with Jim. By the time Marlow loses
Jim, he believes both that he must have Jim in order to save Jim, that being responsible for Jim somehow guarantees Marlow's place in the human community, and that he must have Jim in order to validate his notions of himself, to approve the personality and even the substantiality of his "self."

While critics frequently discuss the meaning Stein's famous "destructive element" speech holds for Jim's story, they overlook the fact that Stein speaks to Marlow, not to Jim:

'A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavor to do, he drowns -- nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me -- how to be? [. . .] In the destructive element immerse.' (214)

Marlow's attempts at rescuing Jim more than a little resemble the "endeavoring" inexperienced people "do" once they fall into the "dream," the "sea" which is life. After his conversation with Stein, Marlow places Jim not in yet another British port where Jim might reclaim his position in the "us" community of Marlow's listeners, but in Patusan where the "truth of ideas racially our own" matters little, where Jim has the opportunity he needs to prove himself to
be his romantic ideal. Following Stein's advice promotes Marlow from the ranks of the inexperienced. But Marlow's and Jim's escape from the drowning which results from climbing out into the realistic air only to "immerse themselves in the destructive element" must elicit at least an equivocal response from the reader. For Marlow as well as for Jim the romantic vision which is the basis for the novel's essential "us" promises immersion and danger. Marlow's insistent connection to Jim is his submitting to the destructive element; when Marlow loses Jim, he experiences its destructiveness.

What else does Marlow lose? Immediately before sacrificing himself/committing suicide, Jim attempts to explain himself in writing:

"'An awful thing has happened,' he wrote before he flung the pen down for the first time; [...] After a while he had tried again, [...] 'I must now at once ...' The pen had spluttered, and that time he gave it up. There's nothing more; he had seen a broad gulf that neither eye nor voice could span. I can understand this. He was overwhelmed by the inexplicable; he was overwhelmed by his own personality -- " (340-341)

Jim's final ellipsis, the splutterings of his pen, indicate that the "broad gulf" of his "personality" is finally
unknowable, inexplicable to himself, inexpressible to others. Marlow "understands this," understands the implications which Jim's ellipsis have for Marlow's connection to Jim and for Marlow's facing the "broad gulf" that is his own personality. Interpreting Jim's unfinished letter, Marlow loses the self which he has so painfully constructed throughout the novel. Worse, "[t]here's nothing more" extends Marlow's loss. If Jim's failed writing undermines Marlow's compelled connection to Jim, it also upsets Marlow's and ultimately Conrad's "us" relationship with the reader. Marlow, with Conrad's help,16 thus far has convinced or coerced one member of his audience, not any of those who listen to his initial tale of Jim, not the recipient of Marlow's letter describing the circumstances surrounding Jim's death, but only Conrad's reader (after all, that reader has read the novel to this point). Jim's being "overwhelmed by his own personality" contaminates Conrad's reader as well as Marlow. The force of the gap that Jim's ellipsis represents ends the possibility of achieving the essential "us" which Marlow's talking and Conrad's writing projects. Recounting Jim's death, unsure about Jim's life, Marlow loses Jim, himself, and Conrad's reader.

Lord Jim enacts the failure of conversation to establish a self or to achieve necessary community. In the novel's last two paragraphs, Marlow asks a series of
unanswerable questions. Their very unanswerability admits defeat, requires that the novel end. Wondering whether Jim "is satisfied" "quite now," Marlow turns again to "us": "We ought to know. He is one of us" (416). But all we know, all Marlow knows is that "[n]ow [Jim] is no more." Unable to answer Marlow's question, we find "us" linked to a quickly disappearing "he." Marlow does not attempt to rescue us. Instead, answering yet another of his own questions, "Was I so very wrong after all," Marlow finishes Conrad's novel at the same time he completes his letter, the letter whose positions its addressee most likely will neither accept nor understand:

"Who knows? [Jim] is gone, inscrutable at heart,
[... ] Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave ...' while he waves his hands sadly at his butterflies." (416-417)

Jim's inscrutability obfuscates the romantic certainties represented by Stein's butterflies. Stein's "preparing to leave ..." does not differ significantly from Jim's "I must now at once ..." The ellipsis Marlow uses to depict Stein's speech dismantles the romantic self, the essential "us," and the reader-text relationship as it foreshadows Stein's death. Conrad gives his reader Stein's prophetic
mumblings as a last image: the reader cannot "know" whether Marlow is wrong about Jim; she can only "know" Marlow's failure and the results of that failure. Because Stein, Marlow, Jim, Conrad and the novel's reader experience the "broad gulf that neither eye nor voice [can] span," "there's nothing more." The novel must end because Marlow's and Conrad's attempts to compel connection by constructing simultaneously a knowable and acceptable self and a knowable and acceptable "us" fail.

Discussing later works of Conrad, Fogel describes Conrad's use of conversation:

It is [the] feeling of a possibility -- that coercion to speak might be the repressed essence of all dialogue, and that dialogue becomes most "human" not when we let each other talk but when we make each other talk --

Fogel's observations, when applied backward to Lord Jim, accentuate the novel's tragedy: engaging in the "most human" dialogue, in the "most human" enterprise, Jim, Marlow, Conrad and perhaps even for a moment Conrad's reader lose more than one another; they lose themselves. In Lord Jim "coercion to speak" is failed coercion. At the same time that it clarifies issues in Conrad, Fogel's discussion identifies one of Conrad's major contributions to later novelists, particularly to Faulkner. Faulkner himself
claimed that Conrad was one of the writers whom he read every year, and, among Faulkner's novels, *Absalom, Absalom!* most shows the possible effects of Faulkner's reading; indeed, Guerard, in writing about Conrad in 1958, notes, "the culminating triumph of Conradian impressionism is *Absalom, Absalom!* This austere masterpiece, by complicating each of Conrad's complications, helps us define the earlier experiment." *Absalom, Absalom!*, like *Lord Jim*, explores compelled conversation and its results. However, if conversation in each novel occurs not because "we let each other talk" but because "we make each other talk," *Absalom, Absalom!*, unlike *Lord Jim*, examines the resistance to the force of the other's talk.

The reader's receiving the various versions of Sutpen's story which the novel contains depends upon Quentin's being made to listen. But, of course, Quentin does talk as well as listen. *Absalom, Absalom!*s celebrated "overpassing to love" passage which so many critics read as the novel's epigram and almost an allegory for what novels do in general, is a narrator's intrusion describing the effect of Shreve and Quentin's conversation which composes the Bon-Henry-Judith triangle:

"And now," Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love." But he didn't need to say that either, [...]

all that had gone before just so much that had to be
overpassed and none else present to overpass it but
them as someone always has to rake up the leaves before
you can have a bonfire. That was why it did not matter
to either of them which one did the talking, since it
was not the talking alone which did it, performed and
accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage
of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand,
the requirement, forgave and condoned and forgot the
faulting of the other -- faultings both in the creating
of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in)
and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false
and conserving what seemed true, or fit the
preconceived -- in order to overpass to love, where
there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing
fault nor false. 15

While the conclusion of this passage does give Shreve and
Quentin's conversation considerable power, the "happy
marriage" achieved by and in their conversation depends upon
"that was why." What precedes "that was why" implies that
"overpassing to love" is analogous to a bonfire which occurs
incidentally because someone raked up leaves. Because the
"bonfire" matters more than the "someone," Quentin and
Shreve's "happy marriage" begins to disturb. By definition,
Quentin and Shreve are incidental to the speaking and
hearing, to the story in which they "exist." Indeed, what this passage celebrates is the force of that story at least for a moment to swallow up both Quentin and Shreve. And what is that story? Shreve and Quentin's "happy marriage" produces Bon's consciousness, the tragedy of Sutpen's/Henry's rejection of Bon, and Bon's fatal self-definition, "I'm the nigger that's [not who's] going to sleep with your sister." "Overpassing to love," while it may suggest certain heroic elements in Bon's created character, does not comprehend adequately the content of the talk that it purports to describe (or, more precisely, that critics argue it describes). Bon's story, whatever else it represents, is Henry and Sutpen's failure to "overpass to love" and the resulting objectification of Bon, a brother/son, into a "nigger." Bon's story, up until his death, is also a complete fabrication. The failures which it contains are products, projections, reflections of its "speakers and hearers"; Shreve and Quentin themselves undermine their "happy marriage." Whether one allows "happy marriage" the scope to encompass the content of Shreve and Quentin's "talk about love" or chooses instead to limit "happy marriage" to describing a kind of transcendent moment of "speaking and hearing," that marriage must be uncomfortable for the reader who cares about Quentin, Shreve, and Bon. "Overpassing" means passing over their three independent voices because
some other, larger voice is more compelling, more powerful.

Yet "marriage of speaking and hearing" suggests to a number of critics an invitation to the reader to share in the construction of the story. Indeed, Matlock describes "the reader's experience in Absalom, Absalom!" as a "working partnership with its author and his co-creators, based on mutual respect and commitment, which enables one to penetrate the living core of the book and feel its beauty and power."\(^{16}\) And Mortimer, among others, argues that "gaps" occur in the story because "the reader is meant to fill or complete [them] in some actively creative way."\(^{17}\) Gaps, like the gap leading to Bon's death which Quentin and Shreve complete, do occur in Absalom, Absalom, but the gaps, Faulkner's ellipses, involve the reader in "overpassing to love" by propelling her towards an ineluctable conclusion. Even if the narrator asserts that it is neither "fault [nor] false," Bon's story requires that Shreve and Quentin experience the failure of "overpassing to love" not only because their story is their fabrication, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because their story is historically determined; their "happy marriage" can resist neither Bon's death nor the implications of that death. Bon's death, Sutpen's death, the defeat of the South, perhaps even Quentin's death in The Sound and the Fury determine the story, not any combination of any
participant's "speaking and hearing." Rather than including its reader in a "working partnership," Absalom, Absalom! subjects its reader and its characters to an irresistible force.

Rosa locates this force in Sutpen himself. She describes Sutpen's effect in terms of her inability to refuse his proposal of marriage:

I claim no brief, no pity, who did not answer 'I will' not because I was not asked, but because there was no place, no niche, no interval for reply. Because I could have made one. I could have forced that niche myself if I had willed to -- a niche not shaped to fit a mild 'Yes' but some blind desperate female weapon's frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried 'No! No!' and 'Help!' and 'Save me!' (205)

Rosa's response to her lack of will and not its motivation (it matters little whether Rosa's silence results from her imagining that she loves Sutpen or from Sutpen's simply overwhelming her) determines her character. The possible ellipsis following "a mild 'Yes' but" (Rosa may be saying "a niche not shaped to fit a mild 'Yes' but a niche shaped to fit some blind desperate female weapon's frenzied slash whose gaping wound . . .") and Rosa's ambiguous "whose" give her "female weapon's frenzied slash" two possible meanings. Either Rosa "could have forced" her "female weapon's
frenzied slash" upon Sutpen; she could have "slashed" in him the feminine "gaping wound" which cries out "[n]o, no..." or she "could have willed" herself a feminine niche, a space from which she could respond with her "female weapon's frenzied slash" to the "gaping wound" she has received from Sutpen. Immersed in uncovering these two meanings, in interpreting what follows "could have," Faulkner's reader, in attributing to Rosa the possibility of both masculine and feminine action, loses sight of the imaginary nature of Rosa's design. Rosa's ambiguous formulation obscures the inaction for which Rosa "claims no brief." Moreover, the difficulties involved in understanding Rosa's talk transform her inaction into a kind of action: the descriptive reach of "female weapon's frenzied slash" collapses Rosa's paralyzed moment, her inability to refuse Sutpen, with the obsessive energy which results from that moment. "[F]emale weapon's frenzied slash" describes not only what Rosa "could have done," but also what she has spent the rest of her life doing. Rosa's obsession with Sutpen, her telling his story, is her slash. In forcing Quentin to listen to her account of Sutpen, she renews her own "gaping wound" hoping to "slash" one into Sutpen. That Sutpen is dead, that Rosa cannot touch him, makes Rosa's slashing both futile and pitiful. If Rosa's talking arises out of a moment of failed resistance and attempts to remedy that failure, Rosa's talking, the
story she tells, itself is a failed resistance: Sutpen continues to dominate Rosa while forever escaping her reach.

Rosa compares Sutpen's proposal to:

a ukase, a decree, a serene and florid boast like a sentence (ay, and delivered in the same attitude) not to be spoken and heard but to be read and carved in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy. (205)

Although Rosa cannot "slash" Sutpen directly, her version of Sutpen contaminates Quentin and Shreve's version. Their Sutpen, uttering his "ukase[s], decree[s] . . .," once again escapes Rosa's kind of "slashing" by his power to silence resistance. He ends, and, with very little effort, wins the debate between himself and Henry which Quentin and Shreve create in order to fill in the gap between Henry's friendship with and murder of Bon:

Henry: I have decided. Brother or not, I have decided.
I will [allow Bon to marry Judith]. I will.

-- He must not marry her, Henry.

-- Yes. I said Yes at first, but I was not decided then. I didn't let him. But now I have had four years to decide in. I will. I am going to.

-- He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I
believed him; it was not until after he was born that I
found out his mother was part negro. (443)

Sutpen's "[h]e must not marry her" and three sentence
definition of Bon silence Henry. Quentin and Shreve's
Sutpen, like Rosa's, pronounces "sentences" more "to be read
and carved in the bland stone" than to be "spoken and
heard." These sentences turn in upon themselves and compel
Quentin and Shreve's (as well as Rosa's) talking. Indeed,
the story which possesses Quentin perhaps until his suicide
and Shreve throughout Absalom, Absalom! does so because it
is more "read and carved" into them than "spoken and heard."
And when the story is "read and carved" into Quentin and
Shreve, the story itself and not Sutpen assumes control of
those who hear it.

Quentin's first words in the novel, an interior
conversation between "the two separate Quentin's now talking
to one another," demonstrates the story's own "reading and
carving" of Quentin:

It seems that this demon -- his name was Sutpen --
(Colonel Sutpen) -- Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of
nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band
of strange niggers and built a plantation -- (Tore
violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) --
tore violently. And married her sister Ellen and begot
a son and daughter which -- (Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) -- without gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and shield and comfort of his old age, only -- (Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something. And died) -- Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says -- (Save by her) Yes, by her. (And by Quentin Compson)

Yes. And by Quentin Compson. (5-6)

Why should Quentin Compson regret the deaths of the Sutpens? (He should not.) Why does Quentin Compson regret the deaths of the Sutpens? He cannot resist the force of their story. In this passage, the parentheses speak into him; the assertions of the parentheses shape Quentin's talk. Quentin, by definition (after all, "his very body [is] an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names" (9)) does not "speak and hear"; instead, he is compelled to get it right, to conform his story to history.

His father's domination of Quentin works in the same way as Faulkner's parentheses work. When Quentin and his father discuss the tombstones at Sutpens Hundred, Mr. Compson presses Quentin to reach the correct conclusion:

"But that dont explain the other three [tombstones]," [Quentin] said. "They must have cost something too."

"Who paid for them?" Mr Compson said. Quentin could feel him looking at him. "Think." Quentin looked at the
three identical headstones with their faint identical lettering [. . .]. He could feel his father watching him.

"She did it," he said. "With the money she got when she sold the store."

"Yes," Mr Compson said. (238-239)

Matthews argues that Mr. Compson "encourages Quentin to reanimate [the] meaningless past with love and imagination," but Mr. Compson's "Think" commands Quentin to conform his imaginings to the facts, to discover the true (the historical) explanation for the tombstones. Irwin's identification of the oedipal mechanisms informing Quentin's relationship with his father (and Mr. Compson's relationship with his son) provide probable psychological motivation for Mr. Compson's bullying: in compelling his son to give himself up to the Sutpen story, Mr. Compson surely, at some level, does not have Quentin's best interest at heart. Their talk, like Quentin's conversations with Miss Rosa and with himself, depends upon such compulsion. Conversation in Absalom, Absalom! posits a dominator and a dominated; or, more specifically, a dominator and Quentin.

Irwin argues that Quentin's telling of the Sutpen story provides Quentin with the opportunity to resist such domination:
For Quentin, the act of narrating Sutpen's story, of bringing that story under authorial control, becomes a struggle in which he tries to best his father, a struggle to seize "authority" by achieving temporal priority to his father in the narrative act. 20

In a sense Quentin does "best" his father; Quentin alone knows both that Bon is black and that Bon is a Sutpen. Yet Quentin connects the novel's versions of the Sutpen story because he literally is forced to connect them. The impetus for Shreve and Quentin's conversations, the questions/commands, "Tell about the South. What's it like there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (218), place Quentin as a Southerner, as one of the defeated, and Quentin talks to Shreve because he is one of the defeated; he can resist neither the story nor Shreve.21 Quentin's talking itself demonstrates his defeat. Answering Shreve's insistent suppositions about Sutpen and Bon, Quentin considers the implications of their conversation:

"Wait, I tell you!" Quentin said [. . .]: "I am telling" Am I going to have to hear it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do: (345-346) Quentin's "father" encompasses more than Mr. Compson. "That
a man will never outlive his father" transforms historical progression into historical determination. For Quentin "telling" is "hear[ing] it all over again"; talking is repeating again and again the Sutpen story. That story dominates and possesses: most simply, that story wins.

The Sutpen story wins because Quentin is compelled to hear and tell it and because Quentin cannot bring the story under "authorial control." If Quentin's conversations with himself, Rosa, his father and Shreve demonstrate Quentin's failed resistance to compulsion, Quentin's conversation with Henry, perhaps the novel's most important conversation, reveals the force which prevents Quentin from controlling his story. Critics frequently discuss the epistemological problems this conversation raises; indeed, the fact that Henry does not tell Quentin that Bon was both black and a Sutpen provokes some critics to decide that the novel gives the reader only part of what Henry and Quentin say to one another. However, the content of their conversation, Henry's not mentioning Bon at all, requires the reader to ignore for a moment the problem of Bon's identity:

And you are --?

Henry Sutpen.

And you have been here --?

Four years.
And you have come home --?
To die. Yes.
To die?
Yes. To die.
And you have been here --?
Four years.
And you are --?
Henry Sutpen. (464-465)

The repetition and short sentences of this conversation encourage the kind of scrutiny a poem demands. Its riddling structure centers upon the unequivocal "To die. Yes."
Besides the name "Henry Sutpen," Quentin encounters "the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if [Henry] were already a corpse": in the barely living Henry, Quentin faces the already dead past. His conversation with Henry is a conversation with history, with inevitability, with death. This conversation turns the screws more than any Jamesian psychological twist for the Sutpen story has so possessed Quentin that he cannot resist speaking to Henry, yet Henry's being "Henry Sutpen" proves that the story happened; the story is over. Quentin has no creative part in it, no "authorial control." Speaking to Henry forces Quentin to recognize that his story, is history, is not his story. Yet, once the reader understands Quentin's predicament, she makes *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin's story as well. Henry and
Quentin's conversation traps Quentin because the Sutpen story has intractably entangled him. Forced to repeat the Sutpen story, to repeat history, Quentin cannot escape the dead past which he cannot control.

Of course the tragedy of Thomas Sutpen rests upon Sutpen's failed resistance to the same kind of trap. All of Sutpen's maneuverings are Sutpen's attempts to shape his story. In the novel's most sympathetic account of Sutpen's motivation, Quentin relates the conversation between his grandfather and Sutpen in which Sutpen characterizes his design as a creative response to the "insult" he experienced as a child rejected at the plantation door:

now he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it: [...] so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known, and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants who might not even hear his (the boy's) name, waited to be born without even having to know that they had once been riven free from brutehood just as his own (Sutpen's) children were --" (326)

Identifying Bon as the flaw in the design, the reader may criticize Sutpen's acceptance of a system of privilege (because the door should not be closed to anyone, Sutpen's
death is a just consequence of Sutpen's insistence that his
descendants be able to live on plantations). However, the
obvious irony perhaps foreshadowed (or, given the novel's
convoluted plot, simply confirmed) in the door's whiteness,
that the boy to whom Sutpen closes the door is his own son,
marks the larger problem suggested in this version of
Sutpen's design. Sutpen wants more than a privileged
position for his descendants. He designs to create a future
in which his descendants will not know "that they had once
been riven free from brutehood." Sutpen wants to re-write
his past and write the future. When Wash slashes Sutpen, he
not only accomplishes a revenge similar to the revenge
Sutpen's design intends (after all, Sutpen closes the door
on Wash as well as on Bon), but he also demonstrates the
futility of any resistance to history. Sutpen, like Quentin,
can neither escape nor control his story.

_Absalom, Absalom!_ contains Judith's response to the
trap of history as well as her father's and Quentin's.²⁵
Handing Bon's letter to Quentin's grandmother, she
interprets her own act:

maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the
better, and give them something -- a scrap of paper --
something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself
and them not even to read it or keep it, [. . .] at
least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, (158)

Judith's moment of non-compulsory exchange allows one to write a story, to transmit history, and to avoid the trap of history, to avoid its coercive force. To "go to someone, the stranger the better" and hand that person the letter which explains your own story, which is central to that story, and not to care about the stranger's immediate response or the response of the future (future strangers or future descendants) establishes your presence (for a moment you have made history instead of history's making you) without threatening the presence of the other, without compelling, dominating or coercing the other. With her "scrap of paper," Judith bypasses the doom inherent in attempting to control or submitting to the control of history. Her "scratch" makes a place for her story within history. Of course, the novel itself is a "scrap of paper" given "to someone, the stranger the better" in order for it to be "remembered." Judith's giving away her letter makes a space for Faulkner's "scratch." And passing the material novel "from one hand to another," we, free from compulsion, acknowledge that
scratches.

Yet once we open the novel, our relationship to it changes. Perhaps Judith succeeds at the moment she speaks to Quentin's grandmother because her strategy is, given the predominant values and structures in the novel, radically other; female compared to Quentin's and her father's male responses, generative compared to Rosa's androgynous revenge (Judith's "scratch" opposes Rosa's "slash"). Judith's resistance depends upon a completely impersonal connection between two people and upon the acceptance than this connection might amount to nothing, that it might "die." If all conversation could meet these two conditions, history as we, Faulkner, Quentin and Sutpen experience it, would come to an end. Of course, Judith's act, placed in the larger context of the novel, meets neither of these conditions. "Passing from hand to hand" "a scrap of paper," a letter, or a novel compels reading. When Quentin reads Bon's letter, that letter tells Quentin a story; in Absalom, Absalom!, reading requires listening, requires an even more surrendered listening than Rosa's and Mr. Compson's talking require, because Bon's letter, in its telling, by definition will not respond to resistance. If Jim's final letter to Marlow materially represents and fixes for the novel's reader conversation's failure to coerce, Bon's letter, once Quentin hears its story, immobilizes Quentin. The act of
reading codifies Quentin's failed resistance to conversation. In _Absalom, Absalom!,_ reading, even the reading of a future stranger like Quentin (or like the novel's reader) represents a hearing which perpetuates the coercive force of history.

A reader who reads "a scrap of paper," a letter, a novel to establish meaning, to empathize, and/or to escape invalidates Judith's version of writing as resistance to history and to death. Mr. Compson's conversations with and letter to his son describe the futility of such resistance. Mr. Compson uses the scene of Rosa's funeral to close his letter informing Quentin of Rosa's death:

The weather was beautiful though cold and they had to use picks to break the earth for the grave yet in one of the deeper clods I saw a redworm doubtless alive when the clod was thrown up though by afternoon it was frozen again. (470)

No amount of designing, empathizing, talking, or writing will save the redworm. Alive and warm, the worm succumbs to the accidents of history. But Mr. Compson's letter does not simply describe the worm's death. It instigates all of Quentin and Shreve's speculations, their "happy marriage" (the open letter provokes Shreve's "[t]ell about the South"); it entangles Quentin and Shreve in the past. Worse, Mr. Compson's letter assumes and asserts that its
observations upon death are relevant to Quentin. After
Quentin has faced Henry, has experienced the terror of being
overwhelmed by his story, Mr. Compson's letter encourages
Quentin to remain trapped in the echoes of the Sutpen story
and therefore to share the redworm's fate. Perhaps Mr.
Compson does not intend these results; however, his letter,
like Bon's, demonstrates that writing not only fails to
resist the forces of history and death, but, when it compels
reading, as it inevitably does, writing becomes an agent of
those forces.

But must hearing/reading entrap? Juxtaposed to the end
of Mr. Compson's letter is Shreve and Quentin's final
conversation. That conversation contains Shreve's historical
arithmetic which ends in the summary, "[s]o it takes two
niggers to get rid of one Sutpen, dont it?" (478). At the
same time that it indicates the menace of history, Shreve's
parody closes Shreve's character. Shreve cavalierly extends
his arithmetic to predict a future in which white and black
Jim Bonds conquer the world and then, without pause, asks
the obviously suffering Quentin why he hates the system
which produces Jim Bond. Shreve dissociates himself from the
South, Quentin, and their story. Resembling Judith's
hypothetical recipient of Bon's letter (the stranger the
better), Shreve avoids the problem of history by deciding
that reading and not reading the "scrap of paper" matter
equally to him; he accepts that his and Quentin's conversation might (given his Jim Bond prediction, will) come to nothing. However, Shreve's neutrality is not neutral. Because he has participated in his and Quentin's conversation to establish meaning, to create the Sutpen story, his retreat from that conversation dissolves absolutely their "marriage" and aligns Shreve with the very forces their designing attempted to resist. Shreve becomes a bully. He forces Quentin to listen and to respond:

"And so do you know what I think?" Now [Shreve] did expect an answer, and now he got one:

"No," Quentin said.

"Do you want to know what I think?"

"No," Quentin said.

"Then I'll tell you. I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere [. . .]. (471)

Compelling Quentin's attention and answers, Shreve's talk acts like Mr. Compson's letter, the Sutpen story, and history. In Absalom, Absalom!, the central conversation between Quentin and Shreve finally collapses into yet another instance of alienating compulsion.

Of course Quentin fails to resist Shreve. His "I dont hate [the South]. [ . . . ] I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I
donder hate it" (471) places him as forever (Quentin ends the novel) trapped in and by history. Because Shreve's question "why do you hate the South" forces Quentin to acknowledge and re-experience this entrapment, Shreve himself becomes for the reader a less acceptable character. Porter argues "Shreve's summing up parodies the attempt on the part of the reader to stand off and assemble a final interpretation, to detach himself from the talking, the telling." And Porter's description of the novel's end situates its readers in opposition to Shreve: "our endeavor to assemble events into an ordered and completed whole has drawn us into the role of participants in [. . .] narrative construction."²⁸ Yet Porter's version of our role, while it is attractive, is a little misleading. We as readers most pointedly do not construct the novel's story. If the unresolved elements of that story cause us to speculate, we do so knowing that the novel will never confirm our speculations. When we are finished with our imaginative re-creations, we return to the novel and face it much as Quentin faces Henry: our conversation with Absalom, Absalom! proves only that its story compels us and that we have no control over this story. If Shreve's detachment tests our commitment to the story, rejecting Shreve's position, we identify ourselves with Quentin. Our final connection with Quentin occurs because Absalom, Absalom, in providing a weighted choice
between Quentin and Shreve, encourages, perhaps forces our identification with Quentin. When we position ourselves with Quentin, we involve ourselves in his entrapment. Like Quentin, we fail to resist Shreve, the novel's letters, the South, history... and the story, the novel itself. Absalom, Absalom! demonstrates to its readers their own failed resistance. However, if the novel's compelling power provides it with a kind of victory, the triumph of its writing over its reader forces the novel to end. Quentin's "I dont hate it" absorbs the reader in the losing side of a predetermined struggle. And there is nothing more to say.

When Faulkner's readers avoid the extreme which enfs Absalom, Absalom! by imagining a text which in some way empowers them as readers, they resemble Faulkner, the public figure, whose Nobel prize speech projects a victorious future for struggling humanity:

when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, [...] even then there will be still one more sound: that of [man's] puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. [...] I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. 29

The problem in Absalom, Absalom! is that the "puny, inexhaustible voice" closing the novel does not escape the "last ding-dong of doom." Quentin's sound signifies his
failed resistance. If Faulkner later retreats from the failed resistance contained in "I don't hate it," Conrad, in an essay on Henry James, faces the inevitable defeat which both Absalom, Absalom! and Lord Jim enact. Describing "the imaginative man [. . .] moved to speak" regardless of the predetermined end in and of history, Conrad writes:

I am inclined to think that the last utterance will formulate, strange as it may appear, some hope now to us utterly inconceivable. For mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity. It will sleep on the battlefield among its own dead, in the manner of an army having won a barren victory. It will not know when it is beaten. 30

The artist may be right to continue to speak; s/he may even "formulate [. . .] some hope now to us utterly inconceivable," but that hope, the artist's "last utterance" will fail, fail to coerce us to form an "us" able to beat our own isolation or to beat time, death, history, and therefore fail to resist these forces. Because the artist does not prevail, we do not. Marlow, Jim, Stein, Quentin, Sutpen, Henry, and, by extension, the best readers of their novels end "having won a barren victory." Their conversations produce stories which undermine the meaningfulness of all their talk, which undermine their very
selves. And these stories, as we read them, extend the reach of their conversation: *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* entertain designs upon our very selves, upon the reading us whom conversation in both novels attempts to coerce and compel.
Notes


Omitting *Lord Jim* from his discussion, Fogel places Conrad in a classical or oedipal tradition in which "speech [. . .] is 'force' [. . .] and 'truth' is what is produced not when we speak freely but when we are circumstantially forced to speak" 225-226.

3 These conversations demonstrate the compulsive nature of all Marlow's conversation. For example, when Brierly asks Marlow to arrange a bribe for Jim, Brierly's talk reveals his own character, and Marlow's attention fixes upon this revelation, not upon the details of Brierly's plan. Brierly explains that he has met Jim's father:

"If I am not mistaken, the old chap seemed rather to fancy his sailor son. Horrible. I can't do it myself -- but you . . .""

"Thus, apropos of Jim, I had a glimpse of the real Brierly a few days before he committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea." (68)

"[A]propos of Jim" indicates that Jim's situation functions
not as a problem whose solution in itself is the end of Marlow's conversation, but as a catalyst which involves Marlow in yet another character study. Besides suggesting the difficulties Brierly as an official might encounter offering Jim a bribe, Brierly's "but you . . ." indicates to Marlow the distance Brierly places between himself and others. Marlow's recognizing this distance compels him to enter into more conversation. Piecing together the connection between Brierly's simultaneous identification with Jim and his romantic self-opinion requires Marlow to talk with Brierly's chief mate. The conclusion of their conversation, "neither you nor I, sir, had ever thought so much of ourselves" (65), explains Brierly's suicide at the same time it indicates Marlow's compulsion to know. The talk surrounding Brierly is fruitful in that it reveals Brierly to Marlow, to Marlow's listeners, and to Conrad's reader, but it is also compelled and compulsive. Marlow cannot resist conversation in which he confronts and composes the other. All quotations of Lord Jim from: Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, ed. John Batchelor (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983).

4 Fogel 46.

5 This sharing confirms the novel's epigram, "[i]t is certain that any conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it."
6 Indeed Marlow prides himself upon his abilities to interpret correctly the gaps in Jim's talk: "These were things [Jim] could not explain to the court -- and not even to me; but I would have been little fitted for the reception of his confidences had I not been able at times to understand the pauses between the words" 84.


10 The failure of Jim's writing resembles the failure of Marlow's final letter. In each of these failed attempts to compel connection (to build an "us"), writing mimics
(actually represents) conversation in order to demonstrate
(at the very moment Jim's pen splutters its ellipsis) the
failure of talk.
11 Fogel 227.
12 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *Faulkner in the
University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia
1957-1958* (Charlottesville, Va.: The Univ. of Virginia
13 Guerard 127. Other critics who discuss Conrad's influence
on Faulkner include: Richard P. Adams, "The Apprenticeship
of William Faulkner," *William Faulkner: Four Decades of
Criticism*, ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner (U.S.A.: Michigan
State Univ. Press, 1973) 20; Harold Bloom, "Introduction,"
*Modern Critical Interpretations of William Faulkner's
6; Michael Millgate, "William Faulkner" The Problem of Point
of View," *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism* 180;
Stephen M. Ross, "Conrad's Influence on Faulkner's Absalom,
14 For examples, see: John T. Matthews, *The Play of
Faulkner's Language* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press,
1982) 120, 151; Carolyn Porter, "William Faulkner: Innocence
Historicized," *Modern Critical Interpretations of William
Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!* 64-67; Stephen M. Ross,
*Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in*
Faulkner (Athens, Ga.: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 1989)
222; Philip M. Weinstein, "Meditations on the Other:
Faulkner's Rendering of Women," Faulkner and Women: Faulkner
and Yoknapatawpha, 1985, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J.
Abadie (Jackson, Miss.: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1986)
91, 93.
15 Absalom, Absalom! 395. All quotations of Absalom,
Absalom! from: William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New
16 James H. Matlock, "The Voice of Time: Narrative
Structures in Absalom, Absalom!, The Southern Review 15.2
17 Gail L. Mortimer, Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss: A Study in
Perception and Meaning (Austin, Tx.: Univ. of Texas Press,
1983) 77; See also: Matlock 348; Matthews 151, 161; Carolyn
Porter 58; Peter Brooks, "Incredulous Narration in Absalom,
Absalom!" Modern Critical Interpretations: William
Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! 120; Wolfgang Iser, The
Implied Reader (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974)
xii.
18 Matthews 135.
19 John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest/ Repetition and
Revenge (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975) 68.
20 Irwin 114.
21 See: James D. Gray, "Shreve's Lesson of Love: Power of

22 A variety of critics discuss Quentin's passivity. For examples, see: Ross, *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner* 228; Gary Lee Stonum, "The Fate of Design," *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!* 49. Ross connects Quentin's passive listening to Southern oratory and claims that "the oratorical voice attempts to impose its will on Quentin and the reader." Stonum discovers that Quentin actually speaks a relatively small amount, "only 60 pages of a 378 page
novel"; however, Stonum argues that Quentin's powerful relationship to the material of the Sutpen story privileges Quentin's design of that story.


24 For opposing views, see: Nancy Blake, "Creation and Procreation: The Voice and the Name, or Biblical Intertextuality in Absalom, Absalom!" Intertextuality in Faulkner, eds. Michel Gresset and Noel Polk (Jackson, Miss.: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1985) 142; Matthews 160. Blake argues that Quentin's conversation with Henry "is an encounter between a speaker and his mirror image" and "is close to a monologue between the subject and his alienated other"; however, Quentin converses not with his "alienated
other," but with the "alienated other." Whatever else their conversation is, it is not another of Quentin's interior dialogues; it is a painful conversation between two separate people. Matthews uses Derrida to place Henry as "the apparent thing itself." Privileging Quentin's "imaginative ratiocination" over Henry's presence, Matthews concludes that Quentin and Henry's conversation proves "[t]ruth is a matter of invention and not inquiry." Ignoring the power of Henry's presence upon Quentin's "invention," Matthews, like Blake, misses the compulsion and pain which inform and result from this conversation.

In her conversation with Quentin's grandmother, Judith describes the condition which traps all of the novel's characters:

you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep
on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over (157)

26 The phallic suggestion of my sentence may overread Mr. Compson; however, Sutpen's design depends upon his worm's overcoming such accidents (he wants male descendants). And Wash's scythe produces the same results that the gravediggers' picks produce.

27 Porter, Seeing and Being 271. See also: Walter J. Slatoff, "The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric," William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism 172. Slatoff describes the end of Shreve's and Quentin's conversation:

It is pitiful in that Shreve and Quentin seem to have been so little instructed by their immense labor of imagination. It is pitiful [...] in its varied assertions that so much energy, effort, and pain have come to so little: to a lone idiot, an ironic letter, a brutally flippant commentary and an act of cruelty to a roommate, and a bewildered cry of pain.

28 Porter, "William Faulkner: Innocence Historicized" 72; see also, Seeing and Being 259, 276.


How and why does talk in the novel come to oppress and entrap? In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Lord Jim*, two extremes which demonstrate conversation's power to dismantle the self, conversation as the novel replaces conversation in the novel; that is, talk in these novels transforms moments of expression into structures of oppression. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the story defeats Quentin because that story overcomes and absorbs his "puny, [exhaustible] voice."¹ Losing his self to history/ his story/ the talking which is the novel, Quentin the protagonist becomes Quentin the vanquished other. In *Lord Jim*, all of Marlow's attempts to establish through talk an identity relation between his self and the other (most importantly, Jim, but also the various groups of "us" which the novel projects), an identity depending upon the other, fail. After it has coerced Marlow's identity making, the voice of the other in the person of Jim silences itself and thus undermines the identity which it has forced. Escaping talk, the other leaves Marlow no escape and no unified self. In both novels, the conversation which takes over the novel creates a terrifying imbalance. Displacing the self of the protagonist, this conversation places that self in the
position of the fragmented other. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Lord Jim* uncover two related principles informing the displacement which they enact: 1.) Conversation's functions of story-building and identity-building are, in their roots, functions of structure building. 2.) Built structures tend to turn upon their builders, tend to assume control of, or even destroy, their builders.

But why does conversation in the novel erect and reflect a prison-house? Why is the talking self so vulnerable to coercion, attack, to the onslaught of structure? To answer these questions one must understand why the talking self becomes so absorbed in establishing its own identity that it can be absorbed by the structure its identity-building invokes. The residents of James's Paris and London as well as his Ameriços and his Charlottes, Lawrence's Gudrun, Gerald, finally almost any Lawrentian character who avoids Birkinish domination (for example, Carlota and, for a brief moment, Kate herself), and the number of misguided, good-willed people inhabiting *Howard's End* and *A Passage to India* who just want to talk, all the others of their novelistic worlds, drive the self back upon itself. In the novels of James, Lawrence and Forster, conversation reveals a shifting (and shifty), resistant, inadequate other. Talking to this other provides the self an opportunity for necessary self-definition, for self-
structuring; however, in order to distinguish itself, to be fully itself, the self which emerges from this talk must leave behind the problematic other. Its movement explains the self's vulnerability, perhaps even predicts Marlow's and Quentin's failures. Alone, creating its own story/stories, talking to itself (an activity which occupies both Marlow and Quentin), this self is a sitting duck. Over time, suspicion of the other changes the ground of talk. Conversation as the novel characterized by coercion and compulsion replaces conversation in the novel, conversation as moments of equal exchange, because the self erroneously attributes to its self-definition the power of escaping the identity, fate and voice of the other.

But must the self ultimately locate itself in the prison-house (or the funhouse) of language? Must the isolated self lose itself to/in the structure generated by and generating all of its talk? Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot do need the other for a process of identity-building (more in Emma's case than in Anne's) analogous to Strether's, Maggie's, Birkin's, Margaret's ... however, Mr. Knightley and Captain Wentworth (actually and Persuasion's whole naval company) are others of a different order than the others wandering about the later, modern novels. Mr. Knightley and Captain Wentworth are adequate others (selves themselves) whose talk encourages a self-
definition which includes them, which includes the other. As others, Knightley and Wentworth neither disappoint nor compel:² they just talk. Michael Holquist, introducing *The Dialogic Imagination*, writes:

> There is no such thing as a "general language," a language that is spoken by a general voice, that may be divorced from a specific saying, which is charged with particular overtones. Language, when it means, is somebody talking to somebody else, ³

If my discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!* undercuts Holquist's "there is no such thing," recognizing that conversation is Saussure's parole as well as it is, before it is, perhaps more than it is his langue, that conversation is "somebody talking to somebody else" as much as it as the self confronting the other provides a way out of the prison-house. Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, of selves immersed in (and not emerging from) necessary talk in which voices meaningfully conflict without losing ground to one another, in which words are too fluid, too double-voiced to be tools able to erect structures prevents simultaneously the loss of the speaking other and of the speaking self (although Bakhtin's speaking self bears little resemblance to the constructed self who inhabits a great many novels). Bakhtin's polyphony does precisely what he argues Apuleius
and Petronius do; it "[liberates] the object from the power of language in which it [has] become entangled as if in a net; [it destroys] the homogenizing power of myth over language; [it destroys] the thick walls that [have] imprisoned consciousness within its own discourse, within its own language." 4 One "redeems the talk" 5 by listening to it, by energetically participating in it, by discovering in conversation that "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." 6 Bakhtin allows our conversation to escape the prison-house by demonstrating to us that "prison-house" is only one metaphor among many and that the life of language is in our talking to one another, in the sounds of our voices, not the philosophic trace of those sounds.

And yet the very novels which my dissertation discusses (not to mention my personal experience, if not yours as well) prove that Bakhtin's open world is somewhat illusory, that the self should suspect the other, that language produces structures which overwhelm . . . . And, more to the aesthetic point, of what use are Bakhtin's discriminations if they prove only that many novels (perhaps most novels) are more monologic, therefore in some way flawed, than dialogic or that Dostoevsky alone, or practically alone,
among nineteenth and twentieth century novelists writes novels which approach Bakhtin's ideal definition? I am tempted simply to let the conclusion of Dostoevsky's ridiculous man, "if everyone wanted it, everything could be arranged immediately,"\(^7\) answer my objections; that is, Bakhtin's polyphony challenges us to reconsider radically and re-talk our versions of the relationship between the self and the other and of the conversation between them. Reading Bakhtin may first result in ruthlessly applying his terminology to whatever else one is reading, but later reading Bakhtin begins to explain the sense of tragedy which informs novels like the ones this dissertation reads, novels which seem tragic because the reader, the novel itself, wishes that the world were different, wishes for a coming together of the self and the other in which the independent voice of each might be maintained.

Whether or not healing results from the peculiar experience of tragedy prompted by reconsidering conversation in the novel, such reconsidering provides a second, more limited and thus perhaps more convincing response to our nagging "yes, but," to our quietly reminding ourselves of the others who deserve our suspicion and of the real world which defeats us. If reading Bakhtin and thinking about conversation in novels and in the novel encourage us to examine carefully our definition of and relationship to the
other, such examination also discloses another conversation upon which conversation in the novel depends (when *Persuasion* sits on a bookshelf, are Anne and Wentworth talking?). The novel itself needs our conversation, needs our voice. Yet, when we begin to read, we often objectify the novel, make it an other who will promote our identity building; we listen to its story in order to discover ourselves. The problem emerging from such reading is that the novel proves to be a resistant looking glass. The more intently we hold onto ourselves as we read, the more nonsensical our reading becomes (indeed, our versions of the conversations which we overhear bear a striking resemblance to many of Alice's looking glass conversations). However, if we persist in reading, the discomfort arising from our sensing nonsense re-focuses our attention upon the novel's own voice and voices. The novel asserts its independence. We find ourselves encountering not ourselves, but Emma, Anne, Strether, Van, Maggie, Birkin, Kate, Margaret, Fielding, Marlow and Quentin (among others). Immersed in the process of listening to all of these others, we suspend, for a moment, our furious self-construction (perhaps this suspension is part of the reason reading is so pleasurable). In reading novels, we learn to celebrate the other.

And yet, our celebration does not overcome our selves. To a certain degree, the novel approaches us as we approach
the novel. Any novel, in order to be a novel, requires an
other, a reader, someone to hear its story. As this
dissertation demonstrates, novels actively project their
other, one who will identify with certain voices and reject
other voices. However the act of reading undermines the
novel's attitude as well as our own. Novels may attempt to
absorb their others, their readers, us; they may even intend
to contain these others in something of the same way history
contains Quentin, but we generally do not close Absalom.
Absalom! and commit suicide. In fact, we may find ourselves
disagreeing with the voice that concludes Emma, or wishing
that Strether were not so morbid, or simply believing that
Birkin is wrong. The novel loses the overpowered other it
projects, but, maintaining our independent voices, we
experience, in reading, conversation which allows the self
and the other both connection and equal force. Reading the
novel as conversation confirms the centrality of
conversation in and to the novel. And such reading, if we
let it, may empower us to close the novel and avoid the
prison-house. Simply by entering into conversation.
Notes

1 The Sound and the Fury proves that Quentin's voice is exhaustible.

2 However, my discussion of Emma and Persuasion demonstrates that Knightley's voice is more dangerous to Emma's than Wentworth's is to Anne's.

3 Michael Holquist, "Introduction," The Dialogic Imagination xxi.

4 Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination 60.

5 My echoing of Eliot's "redeem the time" intends to dialogize Eliot's, James's, Lawrence's, Forster's ...

ideal, retreating self.

6 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 166.


The key phrase is, "Love others as you love yourself." And that's all there is to it. Nothing else is required. That would settle everything. Yes, of course it's nothing but an old truth that has been repeated and reread millions
of times -- and still hasn't taken root.

"Awareness of life is of a higher order than knowledge of the laws of happiness." That's an adage that we must fight.

And I shall fight it.

And if everyone wanted it, everything could be arranged immediately.