Saying And Silence

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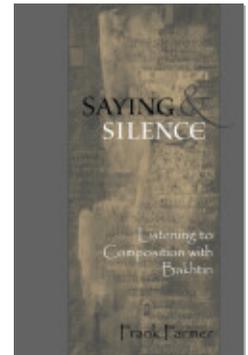
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Toward a Dialogic Understanding of Imitation

> What is wanted . . . is a fundamental intersecting of
> languages in a single given consciousness, one that
> participates equally in several languages.
>
> *M. M. Bakhtin*

Among present-day compositionists, there seems to be little doubt that imitation has all but disappeared from serious consideration as a viable practice in writing instruction. Edward Corbett's claim that imitation has little chance of making a "comeback" seems as prescient now as it did when it was first made some thirty years ago (249). Indeed, it has been eloquently reiterated by Robert Connors, who, in a recent essay on the erasure of sentence rhetorics, sees imitation's demise as the result of our discipline's wholesale rejection of formalism, behaviorism, and empiricism in favor of attitudes toward texts more agreeable to English departments than to departments of speech, psychology, or education—the supposed originators of our prior fascination with the sentence (120-21). Regardless, for many teachers of writing, imitation has been so thoroughly discredited that it may now be looked upon as something of a quaint vestige of days gone by, an amusing holdover from far more benighted times than our own.

Yet there are formidable stumbling blocks that must be overcome in our attempts to eulogize imitation as a pedagogical practice. One of the more baffling difficulties to be met is that despite imitation's reported demise, there exists an abundant literature on its value to the writing classroom. From the very beginnings of the process movement, a fairly large number of scholars in rhetoric and composition have vigorously championed the usefulness of imitation in the

teaching of writing. Indeed, a remarkably varied and rich literature on imitation emerged during a time when imitation's fortunes were, in the view of Corbett and many other informed observers, on the decline.[1]

How, then, to explain this paradox? A few years ago, Phillip Arrington and I conducted an extensive review of the ample literature on imitation. Our purpose was to give an account of imitation's vexed status within our discipline; our method was to regard the many articles, chapters, papers about imitation as utterances situated within a dialogic context. What we found is that, apart from how pedagogically specific any individual article (utterance) might be, the characteristic feature of nearly all writing about imitation was the need to *justify* its usage. We grouped all such justifications into what we thought were the four most likely and predominant categories: stylistic, inventional, interventional, and social. We then argued that the ubiquitous, overwhelming need to justify imitation was, in some considerable measure, evidence that imitation had been *tacitly* rejected by our community at large and that those who championed imitation knew this to be the case. Otherwise, we reasoned, the literature on imitation would not be so abundant; its proponents would be more centrally concerned with refinements for its use; and critics of imitation would feel the need to be explicit in their opposition. We thus concluded that, indeed, imitation was a largely discredited practice among current writing teachers and scholars.

We nonetheless elected to close our review by hinting that maybe it was premature to sound imitation's death-knell, that perhaps there were other ways to think about imitation that had not been previously considered. In keeping with the dialogic approach we chose for our literature review, we suggested that it might be possible to think about imitation dialogically and indicated that two likely sources for such an endeavor could be found in the writings of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, especially the latter.

Of course, others before us had noticed that certain aspects of Bakhtin's work seemed to warrant a rethinking of imitation. In the one essay most responsible for introducing Bakhtin to compositionists, Charles Schuster had already pointed out that imitation, as a

pedagogical practice, becomes vastly more interesting and approachable when regarded from a Bakhtinian perspective:

> When we think of the kinds of accents and intonations that can enter into language from other speakers, heroes, listeners, and languages we begin to establish a perspective from which we can understand more sophisticated language use such as sarcasm, parody, and irony. We begin to see how style develops through the imitation of—and association with—other styles. (598)

But in a disciplinary milieu wherein questions pertaining to style received scant attention at best, Schuster's passing observation about imitation did not spark any particular interest in its rethinking.

Nor, for that matter, did the work of Jon Klancher. In "Bakhtin's Rhetoric," Klancher took a decidedly ideological approach in trying to determine what Bakhtin has to offer the writing classroom. Klancher argues that both paraphrase and parody, from a Bakhtinian view, are capable of suggesting a "pedagogy whose aim is to disengage student writers from crippling subservience to the received languages they grapple with" (89). Klancher proposes that writing assignments ask students to parody the languages of others, so long as parody entails "not the lesser exercise of imitation, but the frankly critical, dialogically informed encounter between social languages" (93). Klancher clearly hoped to draw a qualitative distinction between those kinds of imitation (e.g., paraphrase, parody) that are "critical, dialogically informed" and those, we are to assume, that constitute the more traditional brands aligned with the "servile copying" and "mindless aping" sorts of old.

More recently, Mary Minock has asked for a reconsideration of imitation in light of certain strands of postmodern theory, especially as such strands come to us through the work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Of these thinkers, in fact, it is Bakhtin who figures most prominently in Minock's argument. Reiterating Bakhtin's point that, understood dialogically, the boundary line between one's own words and another's words is always malleable, always elastic, always permeable, Minock argues that the unconscious imitation of another's words is crucial to the continuance of any dialogue with those

words. To maintain and to further dialogue, therefore, we must first know how to speak the words *of* another as a requisite for dialogue *with* the other (494-95). If I understand her correctly, Minock is not too far from the view that imitation, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is something of a condition of possibility for dialogue.

Along with Schuster, Klancher, and others, Minock points to the likelihood that Bakhtin's theory of dialogue ought, at the very least, to encourage us to take another look at imitation. In the following pages, I would like to do just that. More specifically, I would like to sketch out the features of what I call a dialogic imitation, illuminating, among other things, where and how a dialogic approach to imitation would differ from our received understandings of the term. Before offering a model for what I propose, however, it will be useful to review exactly what Bakhtin has to say about imitation.[2]

BAKHTIN AND IMITATION

On the face of things, we might expect Bakhtin to have absolutely no interest whatsoever in imitation. After all, it is hard to imagine a more *antidialogic* concept—literary, rhetorical, pedagogical, or otherwise— than that of imitation. Indeed, and as I suggested in the introduction to this work, silence itself might seem more potentially dialogic than the rote duplication of another's words, if only because parroted words, unlike certain silences, are addressed to no one. As if to emphasize this point, when Bakhtin chooses a counter term for dialogue, he does not offer silence but rather, monologue. And yet, insofar as language learning is concerned, it would seem that, for many, these terms ultimately become identical, since efforts directed toward imitating another's word, for most of us, could only be interpreted as a wish to merge with that word in some sort of monologic unity, that is to say, in undifferentiated silence.[3]

Ought we to conclude, then, that Bakhtin discusses imitation only for the purpose of illuminating the salient features of what he means by dialogue, of highlighting his privileged term, dialogue, by contrasting it with an opposite term that he disparages? No, this does not seem to be the probable motive for Bakhtin's scattered remarks on imitation. Rather, Bakhtin's comments on imitation emerge within

the varied contexts of his working through larger problems and concerns. Thus, if we are to glean something of what Bakhtin thought about imitation, we must return to those contexts to understand what Bakhtin is saying about imitation and then explore whether or not it is possible to formulate a coherent understanding of how Bakhtin regarded imitation.

Imitation and Novelistic Discourse

It is within his varied discussions of the novel where we find Bakhtin evince an interest in the relationship of imitation to dialogue. Bakhtin is fully aware that the kind of novel he describes is very much situated in the *mimetic* tradition. The distinguishing feature in Bakhtin's understanding of the novel, however, is not the imitation of "reality" as such, nor the Aristotelian imitation of dramatic action, but instead the representation of the human voice, which is always and everywhere for Bakhtin, the imitation of the multiple voices that constitute social existence (Bialostosky, "Booth's").

Now, in light of the centrality of "the speaking person and his discourse" to Bakhtin's definition of the novel, it should come as no great surprise to hear Bakhtin aver that any stylistics of the novel must begin with the problem of "*artistically representing language, the problem of representing the image of a language*" (*DI* 336). One might point out that every mimetic conception of the novel has understood this to be a problem, whether explicitly acknowledged or no. But where Bakhtin complicates matters is in his realization that a represented language is always a *representing* language, that a represented language gives voice to *other voices*, that a represented language may even "talk back" to the author whose utterances presumably determine the whole of the novelistic discourse. The complexities of mapping out the dialogic relationships in any novelistic discourse are abundant and complex, as is obvious in Bakhtin's chart of discourses available to the novelist.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Bakhtin offers such a schematic of available discourse types. Among single-voiced discourses, for example, Bakhtin first identifies what he calls *direct, unmediated discourse,* a single-voiced discourse that simply has no need of another voice. It is

discourse, as Bakhtin explains, "directed exclusively toward its referential object" by a speaker whose "ultimate semantic authority" is sufficient and absolute (99). David Lodge points out that this discourse type corresponds to Plato's description of *diegesis,* the representation of reality in the voice of the poet (or narrator) (33). A second kind of single-voiced discourse is *objectified discourse,* words that attempt to represent the speech of a character "objectively." This type corresponds to Plato's mimesis and would obviously include direct quotation, but also, as Lodge reminds, various types of reported speech (33). More to my purposes here, though, are the varieties of *double-voiced discourse*—or, as Bakhtin says, speech "with an orientation toward someone else's discourse" (*PDP* 199). Bakhtin identifies three main types.

First, there is a passive type of double-voiced discourse that Bakhtin calls *unidirectional double-voiced discourse.* It includes stylization, *skaz* (narrator's narration), "the unobjectified discourse of a character" for authorial intentions, and forms of first-person narration. What these share, according to Bakhtin, "is an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations" (*PDP* 193). While two voices are present, only one referential direction may be perceived, that of the author. As Morson and Emerson point out, in passive discourse, the author "uses the other's discourse for his own purposes, and if he allows it to be heard and sensed, that is because his purposes require it to be" (*Prosaics,* 150).

Vari-directional double-voiced discourse, too, is a passive type of double-voiced discourse, but one where the author's purposes are different from the purposes of the "hero" or "character" or generalized "other." This type is passive because, most often, the discourse of the other is at odds with the discourse of the author, who, in order to evaluate the other critically, parodies or ironizes his speech. The other is unwittingly at the mercy of the author; their purposes diverge, and the other is vulnerable to the author's subterfuge. Obviously, then, this type of discourse includes all forms of parody, including what Bakhtin calls "parodic skaz."

Finally, there is *active double-voiced discourse.* Here, Bakhtin observes, the discourse of the other resists the exclusive purposes of

the author, enters into dialogue with the author's discourse, and is able to modify, persuade, affect the author's intentions. Bakhtin claims that in discourse of this type, "the other's words actively influence the author's speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly" (*PDP* 197). This is the most authentically dialogic of all forms of double-voicing and is, for Bakhtin, best exemplified in the novels of Dostoevsky. Under this category, Bakhtin places such forms of discourse as "hidden polemic," "hidden dialogue," "rejoinder in a dialogue," the word with "a sideward glance," and certain forms of parody, so long as the parodied language "answers" the language of the parodist author.

Bakhtin is quick to point out that his schematic is at best extremely limited, since, as he admits, "we have far from exhausted all the possible examples of double-voiced discourse" (*PDP* 198). But the classification system above should offer some insight into the remarkably complex variations that occur not only within the novel itself, but also within the relationships that the novel establishes with other extant genres. We have already seen, for example, how parody figures prominently in the discourse that occurs between and among characters and authors within a novel. But the novel, as a genre, parodies other novels and other genres as well. One of the ways, for example, that the novel relativizes other genres is through its open contentiousness with those genres. As Bakhtin himself says of the novel: "throughout its entire history there is a consistent parodying or travestying of dominant or fashionable novels that attempt to become models for the genre" (*DI* 6).

Parody may also be heard in the novel's representation of those languages within a language that Bakhtin refers to as *heteroglossia*, where, for example, such carnivalized genres as "street songs, folk-sayings, anecdotes," and the "low" genres of laughter consciously parody the "official languages of [their] given time" (*DI* 273). It can also be witnessed in the myriad languages that accompany the realities of everyday life. Bakhtin asks us to consider an "illiterate peasant" who "prayed to God in one language . . . sang songs in another . . . spoke to his family in a third and . . . [petitioned] local authorities through a scribe" in yet a fourth (*DI* 296). So long as this peasant is able to compartmentalize these distinct languages, each will remain "indisputable," that is,

the peasant will be unable "to regard one language (and the verbal world corresponding to it) through the eyes of another language" (*DI* 296-97). However, once the peasant experiences the "critical interanimation of languages" in his own consciousness, the nature of each is radically altered, the hegemony of each compromised, the authority of each eroded. What ensues, instead, is a dialogic awareness that no particular worldview is beyond challenge, that is to say, indisputable.

This newly acquired dialogic consciousness is precisely what the novel concerns itself with. The languages of heteroglossia that interanimate each other in an individual's consciousness find outward expression "on the plane of the novel," the one genre capable of adequately representing the stratification of languages in a given social milieu, as well as the dialogue that occurs between such languages. Moreover, once integrated into the novel, heteroglossia cannot help but be what Bakhtin calls "a special type of *double-voiced discourse,*" since heteroglossia in the novel must necessarily represent "the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (*DI* 324). As in all double-voiced discourse, "two voices, two meanings, and two expressions" may be discerned. Moreover, as Bakhtin suggests, the double-voicedness of heteroglossia is of the *active* sort, because the two voices involved "know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other" (*DI* 324).

To demonstrate at least partially why this is so and, at the same time, to reveal something of how Bakhtin understood imitation, it will be useful to return to Bakhtin's observations on that particular type of double-voiced discourse that he calls stylization.

Recall that Bakhtin regards stylization to be a "unidirectional" type of passive double-voiced discourse. The stylizer, as Bakhtin says, "works with someone else's point of view," or perhaps more exactly, "with the other's speech as an expression of a particular point of view" (*PDP* 189). Because stylization is a double-voiced discourse, there can be no merging of author and character's voices or perspectives. For this reason, Bakhtin points out, stylized discourse is *conditional,* that is, the author, while retaining the style of

the character speaking, has nonetheless penetrated that character's speech with his own attitude, his own voice. The "objectified" discourse of the character "now serves new purposes, which take possession of it from within" and remove from it the possibility of being a thoroughly "earnest" discourse, since the character's discourse must now accommodate the author's intentions (*PDP* 190). Bakhtin goes on to note that "conditional discourse is always double-voiced" and hints that the same discourse was once "unconditional, in earnest" (*PDP* 190).

Bakhtin's observations on the conditionality of double-voiced discourse are important for a number of reasons, one of which is to provide him with a criterion by which to distinguish stylization from imitation—imitation, that is, as traditionally (or narrowly) understood:

> Imitation does not render a form conditional, for it takes the imitated material seriously, makes it its own, directly appropriates to itself someone else's discourse. What happens in that case is a complete merging of voices, and if we do hear another's voice, then it is certainly not one that had figured into the author's plan. (*PDP* 190)

Bakhtin warns that the stylizer is susceptible to crossing over into imitation, "should the stylizer's enthusiasm for his model destroy the distance and weaken the deliberate sense of a reproduced style as *someone else's style*" (*PDP* 190). If and when that occurs, the possibility for dialogue vanishes, since author and character have become one, and dialogue, therefore, has become unnecessary. Essential, then, to stylization, to all forms of double-voiced discourse, and to all manifestations of dialogue is the clear perception of *someone else speaking,* the voice of a necessary other without whom dialogue is impossible.

These observations, as noted above, are made in the context of Bakhtin's discussion of the novel, in particular, the range of author-character ("hero") relationships available to novelistic discourse. As I will show later, it is possible to make certain inferences about imitation in writing pedagogy from Bakhtin's limited remarks on double-voiced discourse in the novel. But what, if anything, does Bakhtin have to say about the role of imitation in more prosaic contexts?

Imitation and Everyday Discourse

Given Bakhtin's understanding of the novel as outlined above, it should come as no great surprise that, for Bakhtin, no absolute division exists between novelistic and everyday discourses. Just as the novel is able to give free expression to the discourses of contemporary, everyday life, Bakhtin likewise seems to indicate that all of the forms of discourse available to the novelist are also available to the speaker of everyday discourse, that is, to oneself as the "author" of one's own utterance. In everyday discourse, Bakhtin argues, we constantly appropriate someone else's words for our own purposes; we constantly represent the speech of others. What determines our particular relationship to the languages we borrow are the "tasks" before us, the discursive intentions we wish to effect. Bakhtin elaborates upon this notion of the speaker as author:

> During everyday verbal transmission of another's words, the entire complex of discourse . . . may be expressed and even played with (in the form of an exact replication to a parodic ridiculing and exaggeration of gestures and intonations). This representation is always subordinated to the tasks of practical, engaged transmission and is wholly determined by these tasks. This of course does not involve the artistic image of his discourse, and even less the image of a language. Nevertheless, everyday episodes involving the same person, when they become linked, already entail prose devices for the double-voiced and even double languaged representation of another's words. (*DI* 341)

In everyday discourse, then, the range of options available for incorporating another's speech into our own include many of the same devices available to the prose artist: imitation (as replication), stylization, skaz, parody, and so on. As in novelistic discourse, our "practical, everyday speech" is capable of merging with the speech of another, losing itself within the speech of another, and thereby becoming a single voice unto itself. But, as Bakhtin suggests, this fusion of voices is rather difficult to accomplish, since the introduction of "someone else's words . . . into our own speech inevitably assume[s] a new (our own) interpretation and become[s] subject to our evaluation of them; that is they become double-voiced"

(*PDP* 195). Bakhtin seems to imply that pure imitation of another's speech is possible only if the speaker is *unaware* that she is using the words of another, "forgetting whose they are" (*PDP* 195). Otherwise, a *conscious* use of someone else's speech cannot avoid the necessity of having to interpret that speech, cannot escape the exigencies of hermeneutic translation.

Further support for this view of imitation can be found in Bakhtin's theory of the utterance. If one characteristic of the utterance is its unrepeatability, then the use of someone else's words can never be a mere duplication of those words, since another's words will necessarily be recontextualized by the "host" speaker. As Bakhtin explains, "the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is—no matter how accurately transmitted—always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great" (*DI* 340). The implicit suggestion here is that only sentences can be imitated, since only sentences are repeatable phenomena, a fact that results from their exclusively linguistic and, therefore, decontextualized nature. From this point of view, the history of imitation in discourse pedagogy might best be understood as the history of students imitating the sentences (not utterances) of chosen others, regardless of whether these sentences were of the spoken or written variety. Models for imitation, in this scheme of things, were never meant to be engaged, worked over, disputed, confirmed—in a word, *answered*. Rather, they were presented as reified, abstracted objects of language, whose forms were deemed worthy of replication.

However simplistic this account might be, it is important to note that Bakhtin did, in fact, address the problem of imitation in school learning, though somewhat obliquely. "When verbal disciplines are taught in school," Bakhtin observes, "two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission—simultaneously—of another's words (a text, a rule, a model): 'reciting by heart' and 'retelling in one's own words'" (*DI* 341). The first is essentially a verbatim transcription from memory and corresponds with most traditional understandings of imitation in the classroom. The second is more akin to what is usually referred to as paraphrase and is of

considerable interest to Bakhtin, since it represents "on a small scale the task implicit in all prose stylistics":

> retelling a text in one's own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another's words, for indeed "one's own words" must not completely dilute the quality that makes another's words unique; a retelling in one's own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to reproduce the style and expressions of the transmitted text. It is this second mode . . . that includes within it an entire series of forms for the appropriation while transmitting of another's words. (*DI* 341-42)

But Bakhtin does not regard these operations to be exclusively pedagogical in interest or value; rather, each strategy corresponds to separate kinds of discourse. As I noted in the last chapter, "Reciting by heart" is representative of what Bakhtin calls authoritative discourse—that is, discourse "intended to be admired, venerated, nostalgicaly invoked. It imagines itself to be eternally repeatable, and thus its authority is catechistic in nature" (*DI* 342). As I also pointed out earlier, and in contrast to authoritative discourses, "retelling in one's own words" approximates what Bakhtin calls *internally persuasive discourse,* a discourse close at hand. It is one open to appropriation by other discourses and thus one thoroughly situated *in dialogue* with those words told and retold. Internally persuasive discourse is nothing less than momentous in human development:

> Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness; consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with a rejection of those discourses that do not matter to us. (*DI* 345)

Bakhtin obviously understands the importance of a dialogic relationship with the language of the *other* to be essential to the development of

individuated consciousness. Bakhtin's remarks on the nature of these relationships, moreover, suggest a resistance to those forms of imitation that exclude—or, more precisely, attempt to exclude—genuine dialogue, since such forms, by virtue of trying to fuse with another's language, exclude the possibility of relationship with that language and, hence, the full development of consciousness. This should not be understood to mean, however, that Bakhtin rejects all forms of imitation. Rather, he disparages only those that seek identity with the object of imitation, that seek a monologic unity, a merging with the language of the other. There are, of course, other kinds of imitation, many of which Bakhtin writes of approvingly.

As noted, Bakhtin is explicitly critical of those kinds of discourse that preclude dialogue, namely, authoritarian discourse, the sentence (as a purely linguistic phenomenon), and the single-voiced discourse that results from a merging of authorial and character voices. In each of these, imitation is conceived as a monologic phenomenon: it refuses the creative mingling of internally persuasive words, the answerability of utterances, the necessary distance between the languages of the stylizer and the languages stylized. Imitation, understood in its most ordinary and narrow sense, attempts to remove the voice of the other from any zone of dialogic contact, either by refusing to hear it or by becoming one with it.

But *must* imitation be a verbal strategy whose only purpose is to silence or ignore the voice of the other; must imitation, in other words, be an exclusively monologic phenomenon? The answer to this is yes, *if*—and only if—imitation is rigidly construed to be the mechanical replication (i.e., "servile copying") of another's words. As I have shown, Bakhtin has very little to say about imitation of this sort, other than to posit its existence in novelistic and everyday discourses. He is far more interested in those representations of another's language that require two or more voices, e.g., stylization, skaz, rejoinder, parody, and paraphrase. Central to my argument, of course, is the proposition that each of these may likewise be, and indeed have been, considered a *kind* of imitation; and, thus, to the extent that each is, as Bakhtin says, a form of double-voiced discourse, it is reasonable to entertain the possibility of a *dialogic imitation*. But what would be the

characteristic features of such an imitation? And how might it appear in the writing classroom?

OUTLINE FOR A DIALOGIC IMITATION

In light of the discussion above, it seems possible to infer certain features of what I call here a dialogic imitation—at least enough to offer a preliminary sketch of what such an imitation might look like. Before I offer that sketch, however, I would remind that, with the possible exception of a few remarks on paraphrase, Bakhtin does not concern himself with the pedagogical implications of imitation. Though by all accounts a remarkable teacher himself, Bakhtin's scholarly interests seldom gravitated toward education and pedagogy. I also wish to point out that in calling upon Bakhtin here, my purpose in these final pages is not to propose any startling "new and improved" forms of imitation. I don't believe any such forms exist, at least none that I could hazard. But as my reconstruction of his scattered comments will show, I do believe that Bakhtin gives us some very different starting points—premises, if you like—by which to reconsider imitation.

This is a matter of some importance. As many have pointed out, there are at least two standard reasons why imitation finds little favor among compositionists. One is that imitation has been inextricably aligned with text-based rhetorics and is, therefore, bound to "product" understandings of how writing should be taught. The other is that imitation is considered unacceptable because it did not comport with expressivist, post-romantic conceptions of selfhood, with notions of the "true self" and how best to address that self in writing pedagogies.[4] Put differently, imitation in our time has been largely discredited because its premises, its starting points, have been aligned with the formalism of traditional rhetorics and because, at a crucial moment in our discipline's history, it stood in opposition to the widely endorsed expressivism of romantic and post-romantic rhetorics.

But to reject imitation according to certain assumed premises is not to reject imitation altogether. It may be that a different understanding of imitation is possible, one that derives from very different starting points, very different assumptions about knowledge, subjectivity, and

language than those that authorize our current refusal to look upon imitation favorably. So then, given a specifically dialogic understanding of imitation, what are its key features?

Dialogic Imitation is Positional

Whether in novelistic or everyday discourse, when we ask of all forms of double-voicing—parody, skaz, paraphrase, hidden polemic, stylization, heteroglossia, and so on—what they have in common, the answer is that each reveals how one speaker's discourse *positions* itself toward the discourse of another, or others. In an ontological sense, for Bakhtin, the acts of positioning, orienting toward, having an attitude— these are not simple matters of choice. Even from his earliest writings, Bakhtin doubts whether it is possible to experience the world and the word in a condition of sublime neutrality. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act,* for example, Bakhtin will repeatedly point out that words are never exclusively used to refer to the objects of the world; rather, words always express "my valuative attitude toward the object, toward what is desirable or undesirable in it" (32). Indeed, Bakhtin hints that it may be oxymoronic to talk of disinterested experience: "an object that is absolutely indifferent, totally finished," according to Bakhtin "cannot be something one actually becomes conscious of" (32).

And yet, what informs most traditional approaches to imitation is the tacit requirement that students *assume no position whatsoever* toward the modeled language, that students voice no evaluative stance toward other people's words *as words actually addressed to someone.* Rather, in a classroom of this sort, students are typically asked to imitate the "word as object" (admittedly, sublime object) or rather, the word as linguistic "matter," say, introductory participial phrases, apposition structures, figures of speech, cumulative sentences, T-unit variations, etc. For what distinguishes traditional imitation from the kind I propose here is that imitation, as it has been conventionally approached, seeks identity not difference, one voice not two, no boundaries instead of the one that allows a student to take a position toward the language of the other.

Cast in a Bakhtinian light, and as I mentioned earlier, the long history of imitation can be understood as the history of imitating

sentences, not utterances. Yet if this is so, there exists no real possibility for a dialogic relationship to the language imitated. In other words, the modeled language is neither answered nor addressed, and thus any resulting imitation of that language could similarly invite no answer and address no one. The conclusion to be drawn here is that because only utterances, not sentences, seek and indeed require the voice of another, then any dialogic imitation will necessarily involve two voices. As Bakhtin says, "any truly creative voice can only be the *second* voice in a discourse" (*SG* 110), and thus dialogic imitation will ultimately require some form of double-voicing, if for no other reason than that a single voice can take no position toward itself.

Dialogic Imitation is Revisable

The process movement took as a cornerstone of its approach the notion that we cannot effectively teach writing if we attend only to the finished product, instead of to the struggles that writers experience in their working toward that finished product. Indeed, I think it safe to say our discipline was founded on the realization that there is little to teach at all if we merely evaluate written products and ignore how student writers develop and order their ideas, how they revise for their own satisfaction and for that of their audiences, how they might better proof, edit, and present their work, and so on. In more recent years, we have expanded this idea to include social and cultural processes larger than the solitary writer and her struggles, but perhaps, in some measure, determinant of each. We have also turned our attentions to the processes of texts as they make their way in a field of other texts and contexts, other writers and other readers.

In light of more recent understandings of process, then, it is not only the case that texts can be mistakenly looked upon as finished products. It is also possible to reify *attitudes toward texts*. In an odd sort of way, that is, we can make into products the very attitudes we invite our students to take toward models that we present them with. Just as product approaches to teaching composition seriously limit the likelihood of any authentic teaching at all, the same follows from any attempt to treat our students' positions toward texts as final,

rigid, unchanging. Therefore, if our students have no opportunity to struggle with the language of the other, if they have no opportunity to develop new perspectives by entering into, trying on, the perspective of another, then, indeed, we have taught them little more than to be content with the immediate positions they assume, to be satisfied with their first impressions, initial reactions, and so on. It is hard to imagine this as a worthwhile pedagogical goal.

But as we have seen earlier, Bakhtin places an enormous amount of importance on the developmental value of struggle, of working through another's discourse, of "coming to terms" with the words of another, so as to assimilate those words and make them one's own. Clearly, Bakhtin understands this struggle diachronically, as a process occurring through time—in fact, one could even say through a lifetime. Yet a problem remains: How is it possible to assimilate the language or voices or perspective of another without becoming one with the other?

Again, such is possible only if we realize that developing a position toward another's words is as much a process as writing a paper in one's own words. We might be able to illuminate this point by extrapolating from Bakhtin's early work on ethics and aesthetics, where he examines the phenomenon of "live entering" and "return" and the possibility of "co-experiencing" the other from within. As always, Bakhtin is resistant to any merging of identities, to any fusion with the other. As a matter of fact, Bakhtin will claim that, despite our occasional desires for achieving such complete empathy, it is not possible to do so. "Strictly speaking," Bakhtin observes, "a pure projection of myself into the other, a move involving the loss of my own unique place outside the other is, on the whole, hardly possible; in any event, it is quite fruitless and senseless" (*AA* 26). And yet, this does not mean that there is no value whatsoever in projecting oneself into the "life-horizon" of another, the position occupied by another. How else, in fact, would understanding and empathy be possible?

In his discussion on the aesthetic relationships that obtain between authors and their "heroes," Bakhtin notes that a "first step" in aesthetic activity is one whereby an author enters into the perspective of another—a narrator, character, hero—for the purpose of understanding that other by "experiencing his life from within. . . . I must

experience—come to see and know," Bakhtin says, "what *he* experiences; I must put myself in *his* place, . . . I must appropriate to myself the concrete life horizon of this human being as he experiences it himself" (*AA* 25). And yet, Bakhtin hastens to remind, this is only a first step. Whether friend or character, neighbor or narrator, we must not reside within the perspective of another. Doing so is "pathological," Bakhtin adds, unless my entering into is followed by "a *return* to my own place outside . . . for only from this place can the material derived from projecting myself into the other be rendered meaningful ethically, cognitively, or aesthetically" (*AA* 25). It is only from that place we return to, from our position outside another, that we can have any meaning for another. Or, for that matter, for ourselves.[5]

It would seem, then, that discovering one's position toward another's word is a sequenced process, a journey of repeated phases of venturing forth and return. Bakhtin's own vocabulary would suggest as much, particularly when he attempts to describe this movement in terms such as "first steps," "followed by," "actually begins," and "return." But, in fact, Bakhtin sees these two "moments" as simultaneous, insisting that they "do not follow one another chronologically," but rather are always "intimately intertwined," coupled (*AA* 27). And importantly, this simultaneity applies not merely to the other, but also to that which the other cannot be separated from, the uttered word.

> In a verbal work, every word keeps both moments in view: every word performs a twofold function insofar as it directs my projection of myself into the other as well as brings him to completion, except that one constitutive moment may prevail over the other. (*AA* 27)

Bakhtin's specific concern here is the aesthetic relationship between author and hero. But having already shown how Bakhtin rejects any absolute division between novelistic and everyday discourses, we can safely assume that Bakhtin's observations have implications beyond their more narrow formulations.

In fact, it seems to me that within our own disciplinary context, Bakhtin's ideas are echoed in the early work of Ann Berthoff, who, in calling our attention to I. A. Richards's "continuing audit of meaning,"

also tried to capture something of the back and forth simultaneity involved in meaning-making—or, translated to my purposes here, the process by which one assumes a position (however much it might be later revised) toward the discourse of another. David Bartholomae has also pointed to what Bakhtin is after, I think, when observing that, as our students struggle with the discourses of the university, "there are two gestures present . . . one imitative and one critical. The writer continually audits and pushes against a language that would render him 'like everyone else' and mimics the language and interpretive system of the privileged community" ("Inventing" 143). These "two gestures" are each crucial to the development of writers, each simultaneously present as writers struggle to negotiate a position within the discourses of the institution.

Thus, even though positionality is key to any understanding of a dialogic imitation, it is a positionality that is, in some sense, hardearned, struggled for, as we appropriate and are appropriated by other people's words. In the process of this struggle, a paradox emerges: to achieve a position toward another's word, we must come to know that word, as it were, from the inside out—never completely of course, since, as Bakhtin reminds, no total merging with another's discourse is possible. But we must know the other's word enough to eventually take up a position outside and directed toward it. To know the other's word in this way, as Mary Minock suggests, may in fact be a condition for dialogue.

Dialogic Imitation is Rhetorical

Even its staunchest defenders, of course, would say that traditional imitation had very clear, rhetorical purposes—among them, to acquaint students with models of writerly excellence, to develop within students an available repertoire of styles and forms, and so on. All such purposes, however, seemed to be limited to the strictly pedagogical. But by rhetorical, I mean something more than what any given teacher might hope to accomplish by having students imitate another's models. I mean that dialogic imitation occurs within the context of some larger intention, some desire to accomplish an effect upon the world in which one's word is uttered.

Imitation, from this point of view, is hardly a passive operation, a simple parroting of someone else's words. It is, rather, something more akin to a rhetorical appropriation of another's words for one's own purposes. What, in fact, makes this appropriation rhetorical is Bakhtin's view that any speaker or writer will have purposes distinct from those to be found in the appropriated language of another speaker or writer. The rote, mechanical act of duplication for no obvious or immediate goal, the lamentable "imitation for imitation's sake" approach would find little favor with Bakhtin, since such a technique requires neither *authentic* struggle with another's language, nor demands any apparent purpose—for the student at least—beyond the fact of imitation itself. Imitation, from a Bakhtinian perspective, must have some purpose beyond itself.

And how might it be possible to illustrate the rhetorical character of a dialogic imitation? One way would be to return to that most obvious of double-voiced discourse, parody. By its very nature, parody offers a way to raise two issues of enduring concern to rhetorical instruction, namely, the importance of situational context and the significance of audience. Indeed, the writing of parody can serve as a springboard for discussions that attempt to address the problems of contexts and readers.

Of the first of these, for example, Gary Saul Morson observes that it is impossible to parody linguistic matter—say, for example, the "unit" of linguistics, the sentence. This is due to the fact that parody is always parody of an utterance, of a speech act occurring within a situational context. According to Morson, "we cannot parody words, syntax, or any other element, whether 'formal' or 'material' out of which utterances are made, but only utterances themselves, since parody cannot avoid the recontextualization of one voice by another ("Parody" 73). Parody, then, is not a comment about the linguistic features of another's word; it is a comment on the situational context in which the original voice was heard. Thus parody directs our attention away from the text "to the *occasion* (more accurately, the parodist's version of the occasion) of its *uttering*" (71). Morson explains how this is possible:

> The parodist . . . aims to reveal the otherwise covert aspects of that occa-
> sion, including the unstated motives and assumptions of both the
> speaker and the assumed and presumably sympathetic audience. Unlike
> that audience, the audience of the parody is asked to consider why
> someone might make, and someone else entertain, the original utter-
> ance. By pointing to the unexamined presuppositions and unstated
> interests that conditioned the original exchange, the parodist accom-
> plishes what Fielding calls "the discovery of affectation" . . . the diver-
> gence between professed and unacknowledged intentions—or the
> discovery of naiveté. (71-72)

Parody, then, is not so much linguistic play, but social commen-
tary, an evaluation and critique of someone else's use of language in a
prior situation. And as Morson also indicates, parody is thoroughly
contingent on a developed sense of audience awareness.

Some of the complexities of this awareness can be apprehended
through an examination of parody, because parody presumes sec-
ondary and tertiary audiences. That is, not only does the parodist
address the one parodied in the parody itself, but every parody is, as
Morson points out, "an interaction designed to be heard and inter-
preted by a third person (or second 'second' person), whose own
process of active reception is anticipated and directed" (65). The par-
odist, to borrow Bakhtin's phrase, deploys the "word with a sidelong
glance," forever conscious that his message is one addressed in at least
two directions. Moreover, the parodist often invokes what is some-
times called a *conspiratorial audience,* one that is invited to something
of a privileged view on a prior discourse—or even a prior audience.
Indeed, in order to accomplish their intended effects, some parodies
demand that the parodist's audience evaluate the audience addressed
by the original.

Requiring students to write their own parodies, then, is important
because, as a particularly dialogic form of imitation, it allows them
the opportunity to have experience and practice in writing double-
voiced discourse and, hence, an opportunity to exercise simultane-
ously the "two gestures" that Bartholomae refers to—one imitative,
the other critical. It also (and typically) entails seeing through the

eyes of another's language, and, thus, requires the kind of continual shifting in perspective that Bakhtin might applaud. But finally, as I have tried to show here, parody is useful because it offers an excellent way to broach some of the complexities of three enduring staples of rhetorical education: context, audience, and purpose.

IMITATION, IMAGINATION, AND DIALOGUE

While I have taken some pains to show how Bakhtin might ask us to rethink imitation, and while I have tried to enunciate some general features of what such an imitation would consist of, I have avoided offering classroom activities and exercises, assignments, guidelines, pointers, etc. In one sense, I doubt whether it is necessary to do so. Having co-authored an extensive review of the literature on imitation, I can attest to no shortage of imaginative approaches to imitative pedagogies. The only shortage I can discern is that few scholars in rhetoric and composition have seriously attempted to develop classroom pedagogies that understand imitation dialogically.[6]

This is unfortunate in my view. Bakhtin's theories of dialogue, I think, have the potential to free us of our conventional ideas about imitation—and conventional ideas about why it ought to be rejected. Bakhtin would remind us that our present certainties, even those regarding imitation, are likely to become canonized, routinized, and that we therefore might be wise to eschew any and all last word pronouncements about anything. "Nothing is absolutely dead," Bakhtin tells us, "every meaning will have its homecoming festival" (*SG* 170). Could this be true, even of imitation?

I do not know the answer to that question. Perhaps, despite the judgments of Corbett and Connors, imitation will someday make a comeback. Whether or not this comes to pass, I happen to believe that Bakhtin's ideas may already help us understand why imitation was a centerpiece of language instruction through centuries past. I also happen to believe that Bakhin's ideas could possibly challenge us to develop pedagogies that find a place for imitation in the future, but only an imitation understood dialogically. I have tried to offer a few signposts along this pathway.