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### III. RUSSIAN THOUGHT

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## A Bakhtinian Analysis of Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel

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### Abstract

This paper offers a Bakhtinian analysis of the distinctive character of Dostoevsky's novels, which depends on the author's unique relationship with the hero. Firstly, I explain the notion of "polyphony" and the role of the "idea" in Dostoevsky's novels by reference to Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Secondly, I investigate the possibility of an "aesthetic event" in terms of the dialogical relationship between the author and the hero through Bakhtin's work "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." After analyzing the notions of "surplus of seeing" and of "artistic consummation," I clarify the way Dostoevsky visualizes the "event" in terms of space and time and its effect on plot developments in his novels. Finally, I analyze the time of the dialogue in Dostoevsky's novels and its consequences on the reader's experience. Through a consideration of some of Bakhtin's prominent works, I elucidate the internally dialogic relationship between the author and the hero, which is the underlying condition of polyphony in Dostoevsky's novels.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics • Bakhtin • dialogue • Dostoevsky • otherness • polyphony

### 1. Introduction

A significant task in the relevant literature on Dostoevsky is to clarify the specific character of his novels, which reveals itself in the creative activity of the author as well as in the reader's experience *vis-à-vis* the novel. In the following sections, I put forward the idea that to read one of Dostoevsky's novels is by itself an unparalleled experience. In the polyphonic novel, the reader finds herself in the peculiar position of having the responsibility of listening to the hero for making any judgement on his per-

sonality instead of locating herself in the pre-given perspective of the author against the hero. This peculiarity, however, is not an arbitrary phenomenon; it finds its ground precisely in the possibility of an actual dialogue. What Dostoevsky does is principally to ensure this ground in his unique way. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the creator of a new artistic way of thinking that he appropriately calls “polyphonic.” Here I attempt to explain and critically examine the conditions of the polyphonic novel by primarily focusing on Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* and “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.”

## 2. The Notion of Polyphony

In the *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin describes the chief characteristics of Dostoevsky’s novels as a “*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.*”<sup>1</sup> He draws attention not merely to the plurality of characters in the novels but also to their independence from one another as well as from the author. In Dostoevsky’s novels, the consciousness of the hero is not an object of a single authorial consciousness; rather they are represented as equal participants in the unity of the event “*with equal rights and each with its own world.*”<sup>2</sup>

Before going into a detailed description of the above-mentioned definitions, we need to clarify what Bakhtin means by the word “event.” Bakhtin originally uses the Russian word “*sobytie*” and the term has crucial importance for understanding what is intended here. Its root lies in the word “*bytie*,” which means “existence” or “being”; and “*sobytie*” can ordinarily be read as “event,” but it literally means “co-existing, co-being, shared existence or being with another.”<sup>3</sup> The implication is that the necessary condition for any event to occur is the plurality of interacting consciousnesses. There can be no isolated event—there must always be an “I” and an “other” and the categorial difference between the two is unsurmountable. Therefore, any event emerges from the co-existence of

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<sup>1</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Editor’s explanatory note (Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 6, fn. a).

different interacting consciousnesses in a dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

Only in the unity of the event, which is mediated through the artistic vision of the author, can the plurality of different integral fields of visions co-exist without losing their independence from each other. In Dostoevsky's novels, multiplicity of utterly incompatible elements, such as completely different worldviews, are distributed among several different consciousnesses, i.e., the multiplicity is not represented through a single authoritative point of view. Instead, they are presented within several fields of vision. Moreover, as Michel Gardiner says, the "multiplicity of interacting consciousnesses is a necessary but not a sufficient characteristic of a genuine polyphony."<sup>5</sup> The dialogical principle can be accomplished only when the heroes are treated as other subjects with their own words. For example, Dostoevsky unites together the criminal/thinker Ras-kolnikov and the righteous prostitute Sonya, and we do not see them through the eyes of a transcendent observer who does not participate in the event, but rather through their own eyes; we see them through their dialogue with each other. They are united in the event as equal participants. In other words, the heroes are not reified by the author. Instead, each hero is considered as the author of his or her own worldview and not as an object of Dostoevsky's artistic vision.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the reader does not meet the heroes through Dostoevsky's own judgment about

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<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin also introduces the term "*sobytiie byitiia*" in his early work *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and the term has crucial importance in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," where he focuses on the architectonics of the I/other relationship. The term "*sobytiie byitiia*" can be translated as the "ongoing event of Being," "event of Being," or "Being-as-event." He explains the term in "Author and Hero" as follows: "The event of being is a phenomenological concept, for being presents itself to a living consciousness as an event, and a living consciousness actively orients itself and lives in it as in an event" (p. 188). Since Being is an ongoing event and is possible for a consciousness only as being-with-another (*sobytiie*), any event directly refers to being in a relation/dialogue with the other. According to him, as I will explain, one cannot be conscious of oneself without being in relation with the other, and further, any relationship between two consciousnesses can only be dialogic.

<sup>5</sup> M. Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> H. J. M. Hermans, "The Construction and Reconstruction of a Dialogical Self," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, vol. 16, 2003, p. 93.

them, but rather listens to and questions Raskolnikov himself. Unlike the cases of *monological constitution*, in a polyphonic novel there is no stable perspective from which the heroes are situated and contemplated one-sidedly. The authors of monological novels tend to have this god-like vision over the characters. In that kind of structure, the author knows everything about the character and even things that the character does not know about itself. On the contrary, in the polyphonic novel, there is nothing to say about the hero which the hero cannot articulate about himself. To put it concisely, the hero is a free consciousness of himself. We can know the hero only through his own voice. He enters into dialogue both with himself and with the others and, moreover, the event provides the realm in which the hero's consciousness is revealed. In Bakhtin's thought, the function of dialogue is to provide a basis for a freely flowing and potentially inexhaustible human exchange.<sup>7</sup> Monologism is the enemy of the genuine novel, since it distorts the interaction and ensure a single authoritarian position. The main premise of the dialogue is the destruction of the monopoly and omnipotence of the author. The author must lose his divine control over the hero and heroes, and their speech can be safe from the author's superintendence. Only after that can the dialogue ensue.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. "Idea" in the Polyphonic Novel

In the majority of studies on Dostoevsky's novels, the notion of polyphony is not mentioned at all. It is obviously possible to approach his novels in completely different ways of literary analysis. However, in the foreword of the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin states that

[l]iterature on Dostoevsky has focused primarily on the ideological problems raised by his work. The topical acuteness of those problems has overshadowed the deeper and more permanent structural elements in his mode of artistic visualization. Critics are apt to forget that Dostoevsky is first and foremost an *artist* (of a special type, to be sure) and not a philosopher or a publicist.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> G. Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 4.

At first glance, Dostoevsky's novels seem to embody different, or even opposite, philosophical attitudes, and critics often try to analyze and interpret the diversity of opposite ideologies in the novel. That kind of critique leads to failure since different ideas of particular heroes are impersonalized. As far as Dostoevsky's work is concerned, this attitude seems to be rather inadequate: none of the philosophical ideas embodied in Dostoevsky's work has authority over the others and none of them clearly belongs to the author himself. They are rather personal ideas peculiar to the heroes. Bakhtin rejects the claim that an idea or an utterance can be meaningful in the same way for anyone and under any circumstances. Rather, he always places the emphasis on the unique character of a particular subject and of an utterance. Similarly, in Dostoevsky's novels, an idea is not an abstract assertion, but is always the thought of a particular person from his or her unique perspective in the event.<sup>10</sup> When one attempts to construe the ideational complexity of the novel as if the ideas belonged to the author and as if the heroes were just mouthpieces, the attempt inevitably ends in abstraction. With this kind of approach, all we can obtain is a list of ideas and not the holistic understanding of the novel itself. Dostoevsky's novel is composed of the interactions between consciousnesses and not of the monological regulation of ideas.

The above-mentioned approach is not the proper way of tackling Dostoevsky's novel insofar as the notion of "idea" plays a remarkable role in the novel. And, as Bakhtin says, the "idea is not the hero in the novel."<sup>11</sup> Dostoevsky represents not the idea in man but "*the man in man*."<sup>12</sup> The idea is a medium, an environment in which consciousness is revealed. All ideas are personalized in his novels, as if they were them-

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<sup>10</sup> Since neither the event nor the participants of the event are represented from a single authorial point of view, there is no unified consciousness inherent in the novel that carries the philosophical or ideological structure of the novel.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Quoting Dostoevsky's own words from his last notes in 1881: "With utter realism to find the man in man . . . They call me a *psychologist*; this is not true. I am merely a realist in the higher sense, that is, I portray all the depths of the human soul" (Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 60). Dostoevsky's original statement can be found in: *Biografiia, pis'ma I zametki iz zapisnoi knigi F. M. Dostoevskogo* [*Biography, Letters and Notes from the Notebook of F. M. Dostoevsky*], St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. S. Suvorina, 1883, p. 373.

selves free agents. Consequently, there is no idea which belongs to no one. Each and every idea originates from the necessarily unique position of a particular person in the event and becomes the representation of this unique position. Ideas may change, but they never break free from the consciousness to which they belong; they are never free floating. In Dostoevsky's novels, thinking is interwoven with feeling; an idea has a unique meaning for someone and under certain circumstances. Moreover, an idea gains meaning as it is uttered. A word as an item in the dictionary is meaningless when it is deprived of its living context.<sup>13</sup> Only when uttered does it become a concrete person's voice and, in this way, the idea becomes an active participant of the event.

It should be stressed here that none of Dostoevsky's novels can be regarded as a philosophical work *stricto sensu* because the idea never becomes the *principle* of representation or construction of the novel, but is the *object* of representation. It is not the principle since the idea exists only for the hero and not for Dostoevsky himself as the author.<sup>14</sup> The idea shapes the world of the hero; it becomes the principle for his understanding of the world from his unique and irreplaceable point of view. However, it must be pointed out that ideas do not become the principles of authorial representation of the novel. In other words, the idea does not become the hero of the novel. The hero is the consciousness of the hero itself, which does *not* coincide with the author's consciousness. Dostoevsky represents the consciousness of the hero in a way that regards the hero's consciousness as a second consciousness independent of himself. Furthermore, this other independent consciousness of the hero is not the object of the author, but another subject on its own. As an author, Dostoevsky creates free "others" with their own ideas that are related in the overall unity of the event. The other reason why Dostoevsky's novels are not properly speaking philosophical is that, although they contain plenty of different confronting ideas, they never dialectically evolve into an ultimate statement—just as different consciousnesses do not merge in one another and do not dissolve into the single unitary consciousness of the author. Since the idea is always embedded in a concrete conscious-

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<sup>13</sup> J. A. Simons, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Man and His Penultimate Word a Radical Humanistic Philosophy of the Unfinalizable Whole*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 1988, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 24.

ness and the event is the interaction of different consciousnesses, the idea serves as a principle to understand the world from a unique position in the hero's ongoing event of life. In "From Notes Made in 1970–71," Bakhtin clearly distinguishes between dialectic and dialogue with respect to the embodiment of the idea:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the attempt to abstract an idea from a hero ends up in distortion, since to trace an idea abstractly as if it exists on its own is nothing but to expel the idea from the event in which it is rooted in the first place.

#### 4. The Relationship Between the Author and the Hero

According to Bakhtin, aesthetics is not about the subject-object relation, but rather about a relationship between two noncoinciding consciousnesses. In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin investigates the conditions of possibility of the aesthetic event that depends on the specific kind of being in relation with the other. In this article, Bakhtin emphasizes the difference between the notions of the "aesthetic" and "cognitive-ethical": "Cognitive and ethical objectivity is the impartial, dispassionate evaluation of a given person and given event."<sup>16</sup> In that context, the directed object is not evaluated as a whole. He states that "[b]y contrast, the center of value for aesthetic objectivity is the whole of the hero and the event of his lived life, and all values that are ethical and cognitive must be subordinated to that whole."<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin exempli-

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<sup>15</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970–71," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

fies the author's position against the hero through two living persons who stand against and contemplate each other. When they look at each other, their experienced "horizons" do not coincide;<sup>18</sup> each one sees something inaccessible to the other. These two persons view different horizons from their unique points of view and see two different worlds behind each other. Bakhtin calls this phenomenon "the surplus of seeing."<sup>19</sup> The surplus is grounded on both the limitedness of one's positioned vision and uniqueness and the irreplaceability of that position in the event of being. From that particular position, the "I" can never coincide with its own horizon. I am out of my horizon, I am the origin of my directedness towards the world, and I always fall into the other's horizon. An event becomes aesthetic when different viewpoints do not coalesce into one encompassing point of view. As Clark and Holquist say, "[s]urplus is after all a relative term having no meaning without reference to others."<sup>20</sup> The "I" is also the "other" simultaneously and the "other" for the "I" is not a passive object, it is not a mere object of cognition.

From the Bakhtinian point of view, "[a]ny object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be *dialogic*."<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin says that "[a]n aesthetic event can take place only when there are two participants present; it presupposes two noncoinciding consciousnesses."<sup>22</sup> The difference between two consciousnesses can be maintained only if the "I" posits itself side

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<sup>18</sup> Bakhtin introduces a difference between horizon and environment in the "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity": "There are two possible ways of combining the outside world with a human being: from within a human being—as his *horizon*, and from outside him—as his *environment*" (*Author and Hero*, p. 97).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> K. Clark and M. Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin, *Author and Hero*, p. 22.

by side with the “other” and not suppress the other as an object of cognition. In a genuinely polyphonic novel, the author neither invades the position of the hero nor objectifies the hero from a top-down point of view. When the author and the hero share the one and the same position, there no longer are two consciousnesses but only the authoritative authorial consciousness. Since the “I” is never impersonalized, the author must recognize the hero’s unique point of view in the event. Only after that can the hero become an aesthetically consummated whole of meaning.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in “lived life,” as opposed to the literary plane, this surplus does not belong to one participant in the event but to both of them equally. The surplus can be regarded as problematic when it comes to the relationship between the author and the hero in the novel: there is an obvious difference between their ontological statuses. A living person always remains incomplete and always finds oneself as “a task, and in its essentials, as *yet-to-be*”;<sup>24</sup> just as the eye cannot see itself, one cannot coincide with herself. Consummatedness is possible only in a momentary sense and one’s life does not become consummated as a whole, until one dies. The author, however, contemplates the whole of the hero and the hero is created as a whole self-consciousness with her environ-

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<sup>23</sup> At this point, two of Bakhtin’s crucial terms can be explained. “Transgression” is one of those important terms. It refers to the consequence of being situated in the world, in the ongoing event of Being. It implies the inaccessible features of the “I” for itself. The “I” is incomplete temporally for itself in the sense that the birth and death of a person are beyond his own experience. And the “I” is also always incomplete spatially as one’s own facial expression and “the world behind one’s back” are always out of one’s own gaze. The second important term that Bakhtin makes use of in his analysis is “consummation.” Bakhtin’s own term “*zavershennost*” can be translated both as “consummation” and as “completedness.” The act of consummation requires two independent consciousnesses. The “I” cannot consummate itself, since there is always something transgredient to itself both inwardly and outwardly. Only an “other” can consummate or complete the “I,” since the act of consummation necessitates outsidedness (*vnenakhodimost*), which refers to the condition of having a surplus of seeing. This surplus is the source of the consummation of the other’s transgredient features for himself and of the possibility of the other’s becoming a whole. In that sense, consummation is always an artistic act.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

ment and interrelations in the event. In the polyphonic novel, the different ontological planes of the author and of the hero do not coincide with one another, since the author guards the line between his own position and the hero's position by granting the uniqueness of the consciousness of the hero as an "other." Still, they come into contact through the author's dialogical relationship with the hero. As an author, Dostoevsky, represents the consciousness of the hero with her *own* world, but does not represent a person against a static background constructed in a merely one-sided fashion. It is not a cognitive-ethical relationship in which the "I" is looking at the other, but an aesthetic relationship in which the "I" listens to the other.

### 5. The Artistic Consummation of the Hero

Bakhtin mentions that the action of contemplation is active and productive.<sup>25</sup> The "I" needs the "other" to have a total understanding of itself. There is always something transgredient to myself, which can only be consummated by an-other. In the polyphonic novel, the positions of the author and of the hero are external to each other and that externality depends on the author's attitude in his creative activity. The author contemplates and consummates the hero both inwardly and outwardly. Bakhtin writes: "It is only the position of being situated outside the hero that enables the author to produce the aesthetic value of the hero's exterior: the spatial form *of* the hero expresses the author's relationship *to* the hero."<sup>26</sup> It must be underlined that when it comes to the hero as an aesthetic creation, what is represented is not the hero's horizon but her environment. The author organizes and orders all the transgredient features of the hero's exterior, including her body.<sup>27</sup> The represented object-world of the novel does not coincide with the hero's horizon, since the author's unique position is not obliterated: the author does not see through the hero's eyes but apparently has contemplated her from the outside. Besides, the author relates to the hero in terms of the hero's inner experience of herself and of the world. Empathy, for Bakhtin, does not produce meaning; it is the "passive mirroring or duplication of an-

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

other's experience within myself (nor is such duplication really possible)."<sup>28</sup> In order for my self-activity in relation to the other's inner world to produce a new understanding, I must relate to the other outwardly. Two interrelated consciousnesses must sustain their unique positions in that interrelationship. Bakhtin calls this "sympathetic understanding."<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, I can relate to the other's inner experience, such as fear. In other words, I can co-experience the other's fear. However, when I co-experience it from the outside, it is not the same experience but one that is principally different from the other's fear as he experiences it for himself—and one that is also different from my own experience of fear. Sympathetic understanding is a new valuation that recreates the whole inner person in aesthetic categories.<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin contends that a lived experience, when it is just for the I who experiences, does not yet exist in full.<sup>31</sup> A lived experience, an inward given, is not something contemplated for the one who is experiencing. Therefore, otherness is a necessary condition in order for meaning to be enriched aesthetically; "[t]he withdrawal of one of the participants destroys the artistic event, and we are left with nothing but a misleading illusion of an artistic event."<sup>32</sup> By means of sympathetic co-experiencing, the hero gains his own unity and wholeness as an independent consciousness but always and principally in relation with the author. The author creates the background for the hero in which the latter's consciousness takes place in the unity of the event, and the author takes the other's place to consummate the hero's inward experience of herself. What Dostoevsky does as an author is the artistic consummation of the hero's consciousness and of the hero's own world outwardly without consuming her from the inside.

## 6. Space-Time and Plot in the Novel

It must be stressed that Dostoevsky does not "consume" the hero, since he does *not* constrain the hero within the boundaries of some fixed, unchanging personality. At this point, his way of visualizing the event in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

the novel is crucial. His artistic visualization is remarkably based on his vision of the world in spatial rather than temporal terms.<sup>33</sup> He depicts a multitude of noncompatible materials as if they simultaneously coexisted in space. Hence “[t]he fundamental category in Dostoevsky’s mode of artistic visualizing was not evolution, but *coexistence* and *interaction*.”<sup>34</sup> A linear timeline necessitates an authorial view “from above” that is not relative to the heroes but monologically all-encompassing. In Dostoevsky’s novels, the specific relationship between the author and the hero produces a world in which all the meaningful elements of reality are contained in the same time frame. In a single moment, all the interrelationships of the hero in the event with the other heroes and the awareness of the hero’s situation relative to his or her surroundings are represented simultaneously. Dostoevsky develops reality extensively. In this manner, he plays with the function of the plot in the novel. Since the ongoing event is developed extensively but not temporally, he breaks the essentiality of causality over his heroes. It is no accident that a great deal of his characters show clear symptoms of various mental illnesses. The hero seems to live in his own mind and not in his socially conditioned spatiotemporal environment. Dostoevsky does not examine the psychological continuity of the hero. This kind of examination results in excessive control over the “other.” Particular past experiences of the hero would become the explanation of the acts of the hero. Bakhtin states that the “real connections begin where the ordinary plot ends.”<sup>35</sup> The reality of the novel depends on the linear timeline that brings certain experiences and reactions in that time period together. In this manner, the hero’s actions would become interpreted by the author and this interpretation would also result in giving a description of the personality of the hero—to wit, the hero’s life would no longer be an open-ended event but would be finalized. Rather, Dostoevsky depicts the hero in the ongoing event of his life, always in his presence. Accordingly, Bakhtin states that the goal of the plot in Dostoevsky’s novels is as follows: “Its goal is to place a person in various situations that expose and provoke him, to bring people together and make them collide in conflict.”<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

plot serves to reveal the unpredictability and unfinalizability of a living person. The hero is in becoming and the author gives this freedom to be oneself to the hero by not describing or finalizing him. Although his depiction depends on the artistic consummation of the hero as a whole, just as a living person, the hero sees himself “inwardly” as a task still yet-to-be. A story can be told only after it is once known. On the contrary, the hero’s life has not yet ended—the hero stands against the author as a living person who has endless possibilities. The rejection of the monological perspective prevents the hero’s possibilities from being consumed. Since the event of the hero’s life always unfolds in the present time, the author depicts the hero’s ongoing event of becoming himself but not his own judgement about the personality of the hero. In other words, the author does not play the judge in the polyphonic novel.

### 7. Simultaneity and Co-existence

All these artistic innovations of Dostoevsky which make possible to present a person in his or her ongoing event of life are tied in with the notion of simultaneity and manifest themselves as genuine polyphony. Different unmerged consciousnesses—with their unique positions in the event—are represented simultaneously at the threshold, bordering on a crucial decision, on the eve of a crisis, and even in the state of delirium. Dostoevsky provokes the heroes to spell out ultimate revelations about themselves in extreme situations.<sup>37</sup> The space is organized accordingly and the plot is used for the meeting and juxtaposition of different consciousnesses in the very complexity of the event. Actions take place in the doorway, in the foyer, in the stairway, on the bridge, etc. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov’s room is six steps long, not unlike a coffin, and still is the place for crowded scenes where lots of commotion take place. Marmeladov’s room is a walk-through hole but becomes the scene of a significant crowd when Marmeladov is just about to die. In *The Double*, Goladkin encounters himself as another on a bridge. Time expands as the space narrows and all the significant multitude converges and coexists. Turning points are squeezed in these narrow spaces so that the weight of the event is increased. The possibility of simultaneous co-

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<sup>37</sup> S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 41.

existence turns into a criterion for distinguishing the essential from the nonessential. As Bakhtin says:

Only such things as can conceivably be linked together at a single point in time are essential, and are incorporated into Dostoevsky's world, such things can be carried over eternity, for in eternity, for Dostoevsky, everything is simultaneous, everything coexists. That which has meaning only as "earlier" or "later," which is sufficient only unto its own moment, which is valid only as past, or as future, or as present in relation to past or future, is for him nonessential and is not incorporated into his world.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Dostoevsky gathers all the meaning at the very moment of interaction. In such moment of crisis, each hero enters into the event with his or her unique point of view. The meaning of the event gravitates through each other and for each of them differently. There is no standing point outside the event; the objective, all-encompassing point of view is categorically rejected. Moreover, it is not just that contradictions among different consciousnesses as if they were not in time but only in space. Dostoevsky also represents the conflicts in one particular consciousness as they belong to different bodies, side by side and facing each other as if the inner dialogue of a person occurred in space and not in time. Through paired characters such as Ivan and the devil or Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov, he dramatizes the contradiction and develops it extensively.<sup>39</sup>

## 8. Microdialogue and Great Dialogue

Dostoevsky's relation with the hero is, in a nutshell, an internally dialogic relationship. He interrupts the discourse of the hero dialogically—he interrupts through another discourse. Dostoevsky's novel is essentially dialogic; the dialogue between consciousnesses is not just compositional. Particular dialogues between two heroes, such as between Raskolnikov and the court investigator Porfiriy Petrovich, are truly dialogic in the sense that they are not images of dialogues, but each of them hears the other's voice inwardly. Their possible responses, doubts, fears,

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<sup>38</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

thrill, and all that are not uttered also pervade the dialogue. Thus, the other becomes an active constituent of one's own words and one's own speech turns into an internal dialogue with the other. In one's speech, the other's voice echoes simultaneously: "Dialogue has penetrated inside every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of one voice by another"; this is what Bakhtin calls "microdialogue."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, dialogic relations exist among all elements of the novel, not just in the interrelations of the particular consciousness of the hero, but the "*polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*."<sup>41</sup> Dostoevsky forces different worlds of the heroes to enter into relation with each other and forces the heroes to see and know what the others know about both themselves and the others and, further, what the author knows about the heroes. Dostoevsky, as the author of polyphonic novels, extends his own point of view on the hero to the heroes' own consciousnesses and the hero thereby becomes capable of answering the author. He writes that "[f]or the author the hero is not 'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'thou,' that is another autonomous 'I'" capable of answering the author.<sup>42</sup> The condition for creating fully valid voices of other consciousnesses lies in the construction of the author's discourse as dialogically addressed to the hero. The author of a genuinely polyphonic novel talks with the hero and not about the hero.<sup>43</sup> The consciousness of the other cannot be treated as an object or as a mere thing among other objects; rather, to think about them is to talk with them, and to understand them requires entering into a dialogical relation with them. For Dostoevsky, thought is two-sided, "to think means to question and to listen."<sup>44</sup> He definitely creates his novel as a great dialogue, by creating the sphere of interaction and by granting the juxtaposition of different voices. His novel is never quiet.

The disturbance of quietude by sound is mechanical [...]; the disturbance of silence by the word is personalistic and intelligible: it is an entirely different world. In quietude nothing makes a sound

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

(or something does not make a sound); in silence nobody *speaks* (or somebody does not speak). Silence is possible only in the human world (and only for a person).<sup>45</sup>

If the hero's consciousness fell silent, Dostoevsky would be left with nothing to say.

## 9. The Time of the Dialogue in the Novel

The great dialogue of the polyphonic novel takes place not in the past but always in the present; it is never an already finished dialogue.<sup>46</sup> If it were a finished dialogue, the author's position would be outside the dialogue, he would not partake in the event and would only view the whole of the dialogue from above. This would end as a successful monologization of a lifeless dialogue. All we heard would be the voice of the narrator and not that of the interlocutors of the dialogue. On the contrary, the condition of the ultimate dialogicality is the simultaneity of emergence of the dialogue with the author's creative activity and the reader's participation. As aforementioned, the fundamental necessity for the dialogical relationship is the outsideness and interaction of the consciousnesses with respect to each other, and the reader is not positioned out of this event either. If the dialogue's time were the past, and if it were represented by the omniscient monological consciousness of the author against the firm background of a unified consciousness, it would result in the location of the reader in the author's point of view, since there would remain no other position. Heroes would become dead silhouettes of once living persons, and the living plurality of voices would be covered by monotony. Rather, the dialogue, the event, takes place just right now. Furthermore, since the dialogue occurs between the independent and unmerged consciousnesses that do not become objects for each other and are not objectified by the author, there is no ground for the reader to choose any position in the ongoing event of the novel. The readers must take a position on their own and, in a manner, this prevents the readers from being passive witnesses and forces them to become active interlocutors.

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<sup>45</sup> Bakhtin, *From Notes*, pp. 133–134.

<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 63.

## 10. Conclusion

I believe that an adequate understanding of Dostoevsky's internally dialogic relationship with the hero is a *conditio sine qua non* for understanding the specific character of his novel. Unlike the omniscient and unitary consciousness of the author of the monological novel, we find Dostoevsky's creative power in the great dialogue of the novel itself. In a monological novel, the characters reach us through the filter of the author's own consciousness. The author, who has an indisputable authority over the past, present, and future of the character, presents us with the power of his authorship in all its majesty. The author of a monological novel does not share his creative power with the character of the novel and does not make the character the center of its own world or the author of its own fate. The author constructs the characters as images, not as consciousnesses, and what the author relates himself to is not the necessarily unique point of view in which the hero has a sense of herself and her world. What is represented is the author's own perception of the character in the world wherein the character is situated. This impersonal reality surrounding the character loses nothing of its own reality and of its meaning if the character is removed from it because the world in the monological novel does not gain a new meaning through the perspective of the character. As a result, a character image is not transformed into the living consciousness of the hero.

Bakhtin was undoubtably the most influential figure among those who tried to explain Dostoevsky's attitude towards his heroes. As Bakhtin claims, what makes his novels polyphonic is the presentation of the hero as an "independent consciousness" along with his own world and not merely as the depiction of a character image. The author of the polyphonic novel indeed listens to the hero's voice and externalizes it. The subtle relationship between Dostoevsky and his hero, which is completely different from the authoritarian and one-sided relationship of the author with the character in the monological novel, has now become a *mutual* relationship. Consequently, there is no single truth or isolated whole of meaning in the polyphonic novel. The authoritarian monocentrism, however, is skillfully replaced by multi-voicedness and multi-centeredness. The author does not pass judgments and deprive the hero of his or her right to answer the author.

We must also indicate here that Bakhtin regards the novel as responsible for re-creating the dialogical nature of actual human understanding and communication. He does insist that there is no possibility

for any event to occur within the limits of a single consciousness. Solitude, in this sense, is nothing but an illusion. He says that a “person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*.”<sup>47</sup> The reason why Bakhtin celebrates the polyphony of Dostoevsky’s novel is the latter’s unique attitude against heroes, which results in the freedom of the hero against the author-creator and his ability to hear all the different voices and orchestrate them. The relationship between the author and the hero is dialogized and the possibility of the reader’s dialogical relation with both the author and the hero is secured by Dostoevsky. Since truth is not impersonal and not readily presented from the perspective of a single authorial consciousness, the reader of a polyphonic novel is compelled to become an active participant in the novel’s event. In order to make her own judgement about the hero, the reader is obliged to listen actively to the hero.

I am inclined to think that this unique and peculiar situation one finds in one’s own experience as a Dostoevsky reader is what forcefully drives one to explore the conditions of this experience. The ultimate question of what kind of authorship emerges via a novel of this sort is perhaps the most intriguing and crucial question that Dostoevsky’s novels can raise. In Dostoevsky’s novels, we sense and witness the author’s consciousness in an extremely powerful manner, as it is aptly embedded in the whole great dialogue of the novel. Thus, Dostoevsky’s voice maintains its existence as a creative principle in the independent voices of the heroes that he creates *qua* “free others” and without any need to show off an absolute authoritative power.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>48</sup> I am indebted to a referee of this journal for their criticisms and suggestions on the earlier version of my manuscript. I would also like to thank Halil Turan and Murat Baç for their comments and criticisms from which this paper has greatly benefited.