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Games of Circles:
Dialogic Irony in Carlyle's <u>Sartor Resartus</u>,
Melville's <u>Moby Dick</u>, and Thoreau's <u>Walden</u>

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Abstract

This thesis examines the connections between three frequently associated nineteenth-century texts, Carlyle's <u>Sartor Resartus</u>, Melville's <u>Moby Dick</u>, and Thoreau's <u>Walden</u>. It begins by reviewing the contexts normally offered for them, and then proposes an alternative one, "dialogic irony," that is based upon the complementary theoretical models of Friedrich Schlegel and Mikhail Bakhtin. After this conceptual background is outlined, the various modes of dialogic irony presented in the three works are discussed. That of <u>Walden</u> arises out of a close analogy between self and text: both are a series of inner voices juxtaposed with and often contradicting one another. <u>Sartor</u> complicates this relatively unobstructed form of selfhood through the inclusion of the Editor, whose unitary voice represents a challenge to the kind of selfhood sanctioned by <u>Walden</u>. <u>Moby Dick</u> also challenges dialogic irony, but its forms of opposition are more penetrating and various: while in Carlyle's text dialogic irony is ultimately affirmed through the figure of Teufelsdröckh, Ishmael is left stranded and displaced by the multitude of voices in his text. Melville's work therefore provides an excellent way to review and critique some of the prevailing assumptions about dialogue in contemporary criticism, a task sketched in the conclusion.

Résumé

Cette thèse traite des liens entre trois textes du dix-
neuvième siècle frèquemment regroupés, <u>Sartor Resartus</u> de
Carlyle, <u>Moby Dick</u> de Melville, et <u>Walden</u> de Thoreau. On
commence par analyser les trois oeuvres dans leurs contextes
critiques habituels, et puis on propose une nouvelle
approche, "l'ironie dialogique," qui se base sur les modèles
thèoriques complémentaires de Friedrich Schlegel et Mikhail
Bakhtin. Ayant présenté ces fondements conceptuels, on
discute des modes divers d'ironie dialogique articulés dans
les oeuvres des trois écrivains. Celle de <u>Walden</u> découle
d'une analogie étroite entre le soi et le texte: les deux
consistent en une serie de voix intérieures se juxtaposent
et souvent se contredisent. <u>Sartor</u> complique cette forme
relativement simple du soi par l'inclusion de l'Editeur,
dont la voix unifiée représente une contestation de la
notion du soi sanctionée par <u>Walden</u>. <u>Moby Dick</u> conteste
également l'ironie dialogique, mais ses formes d'opposition
sont plus diverses et plus pénétrantes: tandis que le text
de Carlyle finit par défendre l'idée d'ironie dialogique à
travers le personnage de Teufelsdröckh, Ishmael se retrouve
naufragé parmi la multitude de voix dans sa narration.
Ainsi, grâce à l'oeuvre de Melville, on peut faire une
critique efficace des suppositions courantes sur la dialogue
dans la critique contemporaine, tâche qui est esquissée dans
la conclusion.

Acknowledgements

Conversation is a game of circles... When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker, to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men.

--Emerson, "Circles"

Introduction

Schlegel's Irony and Bakhtin's Dialogism

The connections between Carlyle's Sartor Resartus,
Melville's Moby Dick, and Thoreau's Walden are some of the
most well-documented of nineteenth-century Anglo-American
literary relations. Sartor is usually given first place in
the triad, as the text that, in part, stirred and inspired
the others. First published in book form in Boston in 1836,
it was given a laudatory preface by Emerson, whose own
version of Transcendentalism benefited much from Carlyle's
thinking. As Emerson's reputation and influence grew in mid-
century America, Sartor naturally became one of the starting
points for serious writers of the period, and today is
generally regarded as one of the most significant influences
on the American Renaissance.[1]

The relation of Thoreau to Carlyle is in many respects
that of a pupil to a master. Thoreau first encountered
Sartor while an undergraduate at Harvard, and during his
first year at Walden Pond reread it in preparation for a
lecture on "Thomas Carlyle and His Works," given at the
Concord Lyceum in February 1846 and published the following
year in Graham's Magazine. Like many of his contemporaries,
Thoreau paid tribute to Carlyle for making accessible and
popularizing German thought in the English-speaking world
(Sattelmeyer 38), and at times even afforded a glimpse into

the effects Carlylean thought was having upon the book taking shape in his journals: "Carlyle," he says, "though he does but inadvertently direct our eyes to the open heavens, lets us wander broadly underneath, and shows them to us reflected in innumerable pools and lakes" (252-3). If, as James McIntosh has said, Thoreau "generally prefers not to exhibit his acquaintance" with Carlyle and other European writers (51), Walden would not have been possible--stylistically, intellectually, formally--without such powerful influences to suppress.

Moby Dick's relation to Sartor was perhaps even more direct, and criticism of Melville's text has long been concerned with the ways in which the author seized upon Carlyle's work. Ahab's dark vision of a universe of "pasteboard masks," for example, has been identified as a "devilishly scandalous" appropriation of Professor Teufelsdröckh's claim that "all visible things are emblems" and clothes are the highest form of symbolism (Thompson 127-34). Other readers have traced more local influences, citing "the Loom of Time" in "The Mat-Maker" and "The Castaway" as Melville's inversion of Carlyle's Wertherian imagery (Wenke 516), or arguing that the quadrant in "The Quadrant" and "The Needle" echoes Sartor's "Getting Under Way" (Howard 378-9). Moby Dick, it is generally agreed, strove in part to be the antithesis of Sartor: Melville saw blackness where Carlyle--and, by extension, Thoreau--saw light. The context for all three books is by and large the same; Melville distinguishes himself from the others chiefly by what he

makes out of their common frame of reference.

This frame of reference is often construed in terms of what M.H. Abrams has called "natural supernaturalism," which takes the central Romantic project to be the "displacement from a supernatural to a natural frame of reference" (13).[?] Most largely this means the reformulation of traditional Judeo-Christian history, a movement from original Edenic innocence to a fall into sin, and ultimately a higher innocence in heaven at the end of time. In the great Romantics, says Abrams, this schema is secularized into a two-term system of subject and object (or ego and non-ego) and then psychologized, so that every human life may be mapped according to this mytho-poetic pattern. Original innocence is reconceived as a primordial union between the mind and nature; the fall into alienation occurs when the ego recognizes itself as a subject distinct from the objects it perceives; and reconciliation, the equivalent of the traditional paradise, is achieved when the isolated mind, through poetry or a renewed acquaintance with the natural world, is sensitized to its ability to consummate a reunion with the world outside itself. Whether imaged as a holy marriage or a prodigal son returning home, this progress of fragmentation and reunion is the pattern lying at the heart of Romantic poetry and philosophy. Carlyle's Professor, according to such a line of thought, offers a model of this "circuitous journey" that Thoreau reiterates in Walden and Ahab's monomania overturns in Moby Dick.

Surely it is correct to say that Sartor, Moby Dick, and

<u>Walden</u> arise out of a similar literary-historical setting, and that Melville's text reverses some of the principal suppositions shared by Carlyle and Thoreau. But problems quickly arise when we frame these suppositions in terms of natural supernaturalism. For one thing, we immediately blur many of the qualities that make the texts the anomalous and enduring works they are. <u>Sartor</u>, <u>Moby Dick</u>, and <u>Walden</u> are the products of three powerfully individual minds, but when placed in Abrams's categories, they begin to seem merely different versions of the same master text, rewritings of Wordsworth's <u>Prospectus</u> or Hegel's <u>Phenomenology of Spirit</u>.[3] More importantly, such a contextualization overlooks a more basic vision informing these works, and forces them into a model they cannot truly bear. Certainly the twin themes of the fall and redemption, both in the traditional Christian and the natural supernaturalist's sense, figure prominently in all three works. But in fact they remain just that: themes, considerations, topics of debate. Teufelsdröckh, Ishmael, and Thoreau entertain the possibilities for unity and redemption in a post-Christian world, but these ideas do not penetrate into their method of narrative and the total vision they present. The texts examine and evaluate circular patterns of redemption, but do not allow such patterns to determine their own shapes, do not allow them to create and organize and direct the different versions of reality they ultimately offer. The works take form through a different principle of narrative structure.

The context in which I propose to situate these works

is what I am calling "dialogic irony." The term is something
of a neologism, designed to bring together two related
categories. The first is the concept of irony, as it was
developed by Friedrich Schlegel at the end of the eighteenth
century. In a sense this is my primary point of reference,
in that Schlegel's thought is the immediate literary-
historical background I want to provide for Carlyle,
Melville, and Thoreau. Carlyle of course read Schlegel, as
he did all the German romantics; and if there is little
evidence Thoreau and Melville knew Schlegel extensively,
Schlegelian aesthetics were readily available to them
through not only _Sartor_, but through Byron, who, in addition
to being the most well-known contemporary poet in the
English-speaking world, was also what Anne Mellor has called
"the finest literary exponent of romantic irony" (_ERI_ 4).[4]
Recent criticism has been more appreciative of irony, and
the result is that many texts are more fully understood,
both as individual works with their own distinctive
figurations and as instances within a more general literary-
historical development. In one respect, the present study is
another such revaluation: much is to be gained, I believe,
simply from shifting Carlyle, Melville, and Thoreau to a
context of irony.

The second term, however, is intended to extend and
clarify our usual conception of irony by expanding upon a
term Schlegel himself often applied to his thought,
"dialogue." More specifically, I want to bring to bear on
irony some of the concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose

theories of dialogue can supplement Schlegel's more general, impressionistic considerations. At first glance, this may appear a curious pairing: in recent years, Bakhtin has been claimed by Marxists, structuralists, and post-structuralists, but rarely has his name been associated with German romanticism.[5] In fact, though, Schlegel's irony provides a closer analogue to Bakhtin's dialogism than any of these other schools of thought. Indeed, I would argue that the two men could be regarded as complementary thinkers, and that the fundamental orientation of their thought is in many respects the same. Taking advantage of the greater conceptual rigour Bakhtin brings to the principle of dialogue, we can potentially sharpen our understanding of irony and, in turn, Carlyle, Melville, and Thoreau.

Such an experiment, of course, entails some hazards. Most particularly, one risks simply equating the two thinkers, presenting Schlegel as a nineteenth-century version of Bakhtin or implying that Bakhtin was rehearsing secondhand ideas. Bakhtin himself, however, provides the sternest counsel, with his insistence on the absolute non-coincidence of self and others: "What would I have to gain if another were to fuse with me?" (qtd. in Morson and Emerson 102). Indeed, Bakhtin's diverse interests, ranging from anthropology to linguistics and psychology to literature, offer a number of concepts that have no room in a discussion of Schlegelian irony.[6] As fertile as his thought is, however, it is based upon a few governing

principles. What I am suggesting is that several of these foundational principles are compatible with those of Schlegel, and that some (not all) of the concepts Bakhtin spent his life developing can strengthen a discussion of irony. I want in the rest of this introduction to sketch the ways in which the concerns and critical inclinations of each man could be said to reinforce those of the other, and discuss how the categories they held in common can throw a fresh light on Sartor, Walden, and Moby Dick. The conceptual backdrop of dialogic irony will provide not only an effective means of discerning the informing vision behind these works, but also a means of understanding the formal idiosyncracies that have puzzled readers since their publication.

2

By the time Schlegel chose the word "irony" to describe his developing worldview, the conditions facilitating the term's traditional rhetorical associations had begun to dissolve. Samuel Johnson's definition of it in his Dictionary as "a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words" was predicated on a secure center of "meaning" to which one might advert: an Augustan hierarchy of values, a Great Chain of Being, and so forth. In the wake of the French Revolution and Kant's radically destabilizing theory of knowledge, the ground for such assumptions became more slippery. Europe had begun to move away from what D.C. Muecke has called a "closed ideology," which had fostered "a

society whose values are more or less established, whose members, as a body, are 'assured of certain certainties,'" and into one which saw the cosmos as infinite and eternal and "open," beyond humanity's powers of control and structure. Within such an "open ideology," any fixed system of value or means of organization (social, religious, artistic) began to seem a falsification of something essentially fluid and dynamic (Muecke 120-6).[7]

Schlegel's irony[8] is an attempt to respond positively to this early stage of modernity by magnifying the ancient rhetorical term into a metaphysical and aesthetic category. He begins with what might be identified as two crucial premises. One is the condition of an "open ideology": the fundamental state of the universe, as far as we can see, is chaos; nature is without discernable pattern and without an ultimate telos. The Kantian thing-in-itself, in such a postulate, is identified not as being, but becoming: the essential nature of reality is never finalized, but continually unfolding and growing. The second premise, supplementing the first, is his affirmation of Kant's primary distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal. For all our attempts to achieve or comprehend the absolute, human perceptions are indeed finite and limited.

From these two assumptions, it follows that the defining trait of irony is a constant awareness of human limitation, an acknowledgment of the perimeters restricting knowledge and the impossibility of capturing the incessant motion of absolute reality in any human-created form. One

must view with irony all philosophical systems, mythoi, and social structures, which, being static, necessarily distort the thing-in-itself. In many later writers, of course, such knowledge becomes afflictive, reason for despair,[9] but for the Schlegelian ironist this keen awareness of limitation grants a joyful sense of liberation: because finalization is impossible, the mind is forever free to create new postulates, new mythoi, new systems. Enthusiasm, that is, is given as much emphasis as ironic skepticism: "nothing is duller," writes Schlegel in his journals, "than the empty form of irony without enthusiasm" (113). The ego, in Schlegel's words, approximates the motions of the universe best when evincing "self-restraint" (L 28, 37),[10] that is, an alternation between enthusiastic drives toward order and drives toward destruction and chaos.

It is this practice of "self-restraint" that distinguishes Schlegel from "natural supernaturalism," which is modelled in part on Hegelian dialectics. At the heart of irony is a resistance to a clean resolution of opposites; in contrast to Hegel's paradigm, contradictions and conflicts are never settled, never converge in a harmonizing third term. For an ironist, the reconciliations sought by natural supernaturalism are inconceivable: at best, unity is only a fleeting consolidation that will in turn be dismantled; at worst, it is a delusion, open to a deconstructionist's accusation of bad faith. Final syntheses signify not rediscovered wholeness, but stagnation and fixity, a falsely achieved resolution of essential enigmas. On the one hand,

the ironic ego must always work to achieve order: to abandon
this task would lead to debilitating skepticism and make
futile the process of creation, which is the very source of
nature's inexhaustability and animation. On the other hand,
though, it must always be aware, paradoxically, that any
form of order is inadequate and impermanent. "It is equally
dead for a mind to have a system or to have none," says
Schlegel in an important aphorism. "Therefore it will have
to decide to combine both" (A 53, 54).

The greatest art, from this point of view, is a scene
of unfinalizability and freedom, a performance of universal
"becoming": "The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming;
indeed, its particular essence is that it is always becoming
and that it can never be completed" (A 116). The central
term Schlegel uses in this concept of art-as-process is
"dialogue": just as the defining attribute of conversation
is its "many-sidedness" (DP 55), the work of art takes shape
as a collection of voices, a series of discrete perspectives
uttering distinct points of view. In dialogue, each
perspective is capable of revealing its own truths, but the
ongoing process of statement and reply, provocation and
contradiction, reveals all of these truths to be finite and
partial. No voice can claim the final word; any one that
attempts to do so overlooks the limitations of its own
perspective, mistakes its own particular position for an
inaccessible, universal one. In some works, this dialogic
process might take the form of shifting aesthetic modes.
Anne Mellor has suggested, for example, how the "hovering"

stance grants the ironist the freedom to use in concert such disparate tropes as allegory and symbol, as voices of enthusiasm and skepticism: "a powerful symbolism generates a powerful allegory; the capacities of figural discourse are celebrated even as they are finally found inadequate" (FRI 238). Taking this dialogic principle a step further, a work might openly reflect upon itself, self-consciously drawing attention to the partiality of its own voices, as in the reflexive self-criticisms of Cervantes and Sterne. Whether or not it openly exposes its irony, however, the Schlegelian text will always be an "arabesque" of "self-creation and self-destruction" (L 37), a site at which the conflicting currents in the "chaos of nature" (DP 86) are never finalized, but stand as testament to process over product.

The form best suited to this dialogic conception of art, believed Schlegel, was the novel. "Novels," he writes in a famous fragment, "are the Socratic dialogues of our time" (L 26). A novel, in this sense, is defined by its diversity of "voices" brought together and allowed to stand side by side, emerging sequentially over time as "an artfully ordered confusion" (DP 86). The result is a many-colored mosaic that is the antipode of the well-made novel: "I can scarcely visualize a novel," writes Schlegel, "but as a mixture of storytelling, song, and other forms" (DP 102). Schlegel's novel, then, resembles less the works we commonly associate with that term--works based around "character" and "plot"--than a text such as his own Dialogue on Poetry, which is ostensibly a set of philosophical or critical

reflections.[11] Based upon the Platonic dialogues, which Schlegel regarded as a model of ironic form and thought, the text presents itself as a transcript of an actual conversation between friends, several of whom read set-speeches in an effort to illuminate the differences between their points of view about poetry. The conversation moves forward through an exchange of voices, each of which comments upon, critiques, and further clarifies the other voices in a process that demonstrates what Schlegel elsewhere called "the impossibility and necessity of total communication" (L 108). As Cyrus Hamlin has argued, the dialogue offers no authoritative spokesman able to direct the conversation toward a definitive conclusion. "Each of the friends," says Hamlin, "is sympathetic to poetry as a common concern, but each speaks with an apparent bias and limitation of perspective" (19). The text's ironic, inconclusive juxtaposition of voices, that is, is the matrix of its narration: the "story" is able to continue because, without a stable center from which a reader might "reconstruct" the irony of the text, the questions raised are never fully answered.[12]

3

The only critic to make anything substantive of the similarities between this Schlegelian concept of the novel and that of Bakhtin is Tzvetan Todorov, who draws a number of accurate parallels between the two men. Like Schlegel, for instance, Bakhtin cites the Socratic dialogue as one of

the chief forerunners to the modern novel. His discussions
take in a variety of ancillary topics--the role of dialogue,
for instance, in the displacement of the "canonical genres"
of epic and tragedy and lyric--but the grounds of his
observation are precisely the same as Schlegel's: Platonic
dialogue begins the process whereby a multiplicity of
heterogeneous voices and perspectives are acknowledged.[13]
Similarly, for both men, the novel is a genre like no other,
in that each of its instances is irreducibly individual; as
an admixture of all the genres that existed before, every
novel is a genre in itself, an individual entity for itself.
And while other literary forms are completed, even ossified,
both men consider the novel young and still developing,
still in process. To Bakhtin, the study of other genres is
comparable to the study of dead languages and the study of
the novel akin to that of modern languages; to Schlegel,
"other poetic genres are now completed and can now be fully
dissected" while the "genre of the novel is still in
becoming" (Todorov 86-7).[14]

Todorov outlines the similarities between the
Schlegelian and Bakhtinian novels primarily as a critique of
the latter: Bakhtin's concept of the novel, he suggests, is
less original than we usually think. Rather than citing
these parallels as a shortcoming in Bakhtin's thought, a
"massive and uncritical borrowing" of Schlegel's ideas
(Todorov 86), I would suggest instead that they testify to
the fundamental assumptions the two men shared: their
respective notions of a farraginous, processual novel are

the logical outgrowths of a common conception of the world. For, as with Schlegel, the basic premise from which almost all of Bakhtin's thought derives is a vision of the world as becoming, a site of conflicting impulses and unresolvable voices continually emerging and responding to one another. As he writes of Dostoevsky's novels: "Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (PDP 166, italics in original). Like Schlegel, Bakhtin strongly resists all forms of thought that seek dialectical synthesis and final resolution (notions which by his time could be identified with Hegel and Marx). On the one hand, making sense of experience and living in a social body requires a certain degree of systematization, be it communal, linguistic, or artistic. On the other hand, though, any system that ignores or suppresses the essential multiplicity and unfinalizability of the world, any form of order that attempts to speak the final word, is delusory and "monological."

And as with Schlegel, Bakhtin felt such a vision is best captured artistically, rather than discursively in the univocal form of philosophical treatise (or literary criticism). Thus their mutual interest in the "arabesque" (Schlegel's word) or "grotesque" (Bakhtin's), forms which represent the world in "instantaneous process," liminal, beyond totalizing description (Harpham 11): Schlegel celebrates Cervantes's "fantastic wit" (DP 70) and

"transcendental buffoonery" (L 42) in much the same spirit
that Bakhtin eulogizes Rabelais's carnival laughter and
images of the eating, copulating, pregnant body.[15] And for
both men, as Todorov points out, the greatest and most
accommodating of all artistic mediums is the novel, which
provides the elasticity and openness necessary for the
juxtaposition of multifarious, conflicting impulses and
voices. As Jochen Mecke has suggested, Bakhtin's theory
highlights the temporal kernel of both dialogue and
narrative, an analogy which makes the novel, with its
syntagmatic dimension, well-suited for dialogicality: it "is
able to unfold the story of the different uses of utterances
made by different subjects and thereby to set off a tension
between different conceptions of the world" (201).[16] For
Bakhtin, the novel is essentially "multi-styled or styleless
... multi-accented and contradictory in its values" (15).
"From the point of view of methodology," he notes elsewhere,
"it makes no sense to describe 'the language of the novel'--
because the very object of such a description, the novel's
unitary language, simply does not exist" ("Discourse" 416).
Like Schlegel's novel, Bakhtin's is a crystallization of
disunity, emergence, and incompletion.

Given the similarities between their respective forms
of thought, then, how can Bakhtin be said to extend and
clarify Schlegel's concept of irony? As I suggested earlier,
the most valuable way he does so is his greater conceptual
rigour, the more concrete means he provides for discussing
and analyzing the dialogic nature of a text. To be sure,

Bakhtin is not a close reader in the traditional Anglo-American sense; his books have been justifiably bemoaned for their occasional repetition, abstraction, and reliance upon the grandeur of generalization. He does, however, furnish several important conceptual categories that make such a close reading possible. If Schlegel's impressionistic criticism initiates and orients a general discussion of irony, Bakhtin can alert us to more specific textual features to look for along the way. Indeed, in one of his few direct references to Schlegel, Bakhtin himself suggests that he thought of his own work on the novel in just this way: citing Schlegel's <u>Letter on the Novel</u> in a footnote to "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," he implies "the Romantics" were correct for praising the heterogeneous nature of the novel, but faults them for not drawing further "stylistic conclusions" (41).[17]

Perhaps the most fundamental of Bakhtin's contributions is his concept of genre. Schlegel's ideal of the novel, like Bakhtin's, is rooted in generic multiplicity, "a mixture of storytelling, song, and other forms." But he does not elaborate as fully how generic heterogeneity actually delineates plurality. To Bakhtin, genre is not (as the Russian Formalists had insisted) a closed system into which an artist, through a series of "devices," plugs this or that aesthetic idea. The artist, that is, does not begin with a concept of reality and then search for the appropriate genre in which to express this understanding. Rather, "seeing is shaped by genre" (Morson and Emerson 275): genres are

particular conceptions of the world, and an artist's use of one or another genre depends largely upon the one in which he or she "thinks." The "generic mind" of an epic poet, in other words, is not that of a lyric poet, and that of a lyric poet is not that of a short story writer. Different principles, different visualizations of reality--each implying different blindnesses and insights--govern the vision of each type of artist, as Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson have explained:

> Genres convey a vision of the world not by explicating a set of propositions but by developing concrete examples. Instead of specifying the characteristics of a worldview, as philosophical theories might, they allow the reader to view the world in a specific way. A particular sense of experience, never formalized, guides the author's efforts in creating his or her work ... In short, a genre, understood as a way of seeing, is best described neither as "form" (in the usual sense) nor as "ideology" (which could be paraphrased as a set of tenets) but as "form-shaping ideology"--a specific kind of creative activity embodying a specific sense of experience.
> (282-3)

When genres are understood in this way, it becomes more evident why the generic heterogeneity of the novel is one of its most powerful characteristics. A novel does not bring together various genres for the sake of aesthetic "eclecticism" or to demonstrate the author's stylistic virtuosity, but in order to juxtapose various interpretations of reality, to contrast different--and

potentially antagonistic--visualizations of the world. The
effect is that each "form-shaping ideology" is "dialogized,"
relativized by its contact with other languages and forms of
thought. In a novel, no genre can pose as the unitary,
unquestioned vision of reality, for each is cordoned by a
host of other genres. A legion of characters is not required
to obtain a multiplicity of perspectives, because genre
itself has a characterological element. A genre, we might
say, is comparable to one of the various speakers in the
Dialogue on Poetry: each is capable of revealing its own
particular truths, but, as Hamlin says of Schlegel's group
of friends, "each speaks with an apparent bias and
limitation of perspective," each is incapable of
encompassing or unifying all the others (19). Thus, as
Bakhtin says in "Discourse in the Novel," the novel could be
thought of as "centrifugal" in its insistence upon the
essential heterogeneity and becoming of life, while other
individual genres are "centripetal," insinuating a single
version of reality ("Discourse" 270-2).

According to Bakhtin, genres are not restricted to
literature, but pervade all of language and thought. The
value of his description, then, is that it opens up a number
of other areas of discussion as well. Because, for example,
all language, not only that of literature, is immersed in
genre, and because, according to him, the novel is
especially skilled at incorporating diverse social
languages, we can examine not only the large clusters of
"literary" genres (lyric, epic, drama, and so on), but also

the use of "non-literary" forms and their contribution to the vision of a text. How does a text draw upon doubly-directed discourse, i.e., speech with "a twofold direction" toward both the referential object and another generically saturated discourse (PDP 185)? What are the different voices yoked together within particular sentences and clauses? Alternatively, because, according to Bakhtin, consciousness is not (as Freud had implied) a collection of primordial, pre-linguistic impulses, but "inner speech" between different perspectives seeking authority,[18] we can investigate a text's presentation of selfhood and personality. What are the different kinds of selves a text imagines? Does it present selfhood as multiple and emerging, open to the future, or unitary and stable, fixed to a single genre and vision of life? What are the conclusions it draws from its various versions of consciousness?

As we shall see, this last group of questions plays a particularly significant role in Sartor, Moby Dick, and Walden, all of whose authors made the workings of the individual mind one of their primary themes. For the time being, however, such questions can only be hinted at; they will become more explicit as we move through the discussions of Carlyle, Melville, and Thoreau. By now, though, it should be clear how Bakhtin can supplement Schlegel, and how their mutually illuminating thought, which I am designating "dialogic irony," differs from the context often associated with these authors. Such a recontextualization pursues two basic lines of inquiry, two lines which are in fact one and

can be separated only in theory. First, it entails a new way of discussing the philosophical underpinnings of a text, the underlying mode of thought generating a work's presentation of reality. In place of a vision that insists upon unity and the potential for finalization, we pay attention to the ways in which a work suggests process and emergence and a resistance to final syntheses. Second, such a revision demands a new way of describing a text's formal structures, the ways in which it actualizes a particular vision through its various patterns of organization. In saying that <u>Sartor</u>, <u>Moby Dick</u>, and <u>Walden</u> do not structure themselves on a "circular journey," or that they are not ordered by a Hegelian-style dialectic, we must be careful to avoid claiming they are wholly devoid of structure. To banish structure from these works would be to lapse into the one-sided relativity and skepticism that both Schlegel and Bakhtin warned against. What structures emerge, however, do so according to principles different than those we normally associate with the term "structure," which imply closure and inflexible frameworks. Dialogue, we might say, is a formal device that does not close down and restrict form. Accordingly, it resists squeezing different works into a predetermined paradigm; it provides a means of identifying similarities between texts without irreparably blurring the differences. Dialogues share a method of interchange, but no two dialogues, if they are authentic, materialize in precisely the same fashion or end at precisely the same point.

And as we shall see, <u>Sartor</u>, <u>Moby Dick</u>, and <u>Walden</u> each bear a different relation to dialogue. Understanding this will require a small rearrangement from what might seem their logical order. <u>Sartor</u> of course was the earliest, and the text that influenced the others, but <u>Walden</u>'s dialogicality, arising from what I will argue is a close analogy between self and text, provides the best introduction to a dialogic imagination, and thus will be my first consideration. Presenting itself, in Schlegel's words, as "a compendium, an encyclopedia of the entire spiritual life of an individual genius" (<u>L</u> 78), <u>Walden</u>'s interests are those of a conventional <u>Bildungsroman</u>, the growth and experience of a self over a long period of time. This emergence, however, is conveyed less through an account of events and momentous choices than through Thoreau's tack between diverse voices and genres, which when allowed to stand side by side suggest an individual consciousness in process. In the second chapter, I hope to discuss how <u>Sartor</u> complicates this relatively unobstructed form of selfhood through the inclusion of a contrary, non-ironic self. In the figure of Professor Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle makes use of a dialogic consciousness, but his main interests are the forms of opposition dialogic irony may encounter. Univocal, stable, secure in his selfhood, the Editor represents in effect a challenge to the Thoreau of <u>Walden</u>, testing and questioning what he sees as an aberrant, if fascinating, personality. Like <u>Walden</u>, <u>Sartor</u> ultimately decides in favour of the dialogic-ironic self, affirming the creativity

and growth such a consciousness can achieve. <u>Moby Dick</u>'s inversion of Thoreau and Carlyle, the topic of my last chapter, is that it does not take such valuations for granted. Melville's text is indeed darker than Thoreau's and Carlyle's, as critics have always noted. But its darkness has less to do with Ahab's inversion of Teufelsdröckh's maxims or Melville's appropriation of Carlylean imagery than with Ishmael's status as a dialogic-ironic self. Like <u>Sartor</u>, it offers a formidable challenge to the kind of vision intimated in <u>Walden</u>; unlike <u>Sartor</u>, it remains undecided about what the outcome of such an encounter should be.

Each of these chapters, I hope, will themselves be read as individual voices, potentially illuminating and even persuasive, but always in need of others to complement, clarify, and expand upon them. What follows is my effort to enrich the many-sided dialogue that has surrounded these texts in the past and will surely surround them in discussions to come.

Thoreau's <u>Walden</u>, <u>Walden</u>'s Thoreaus

> H.D.T sends me a paper with the old fault of unlimited
> contradiction ... It makes me nervous and wretched to
> read it.
> > --Emerson, Journal (116-17)
>
> The dialogic nature of consciousness.
> > --Bakhtin, <u>PDP</u> (293)

It is commonplace to remark on the formal experiments of
mid-nineteenth-century American writers. Whitman's sprawling
free verse, Hawthorne's "romances," and Dickinson's
idiosyncratic lyrics are routinely cited as evidence for the
American's dissatisfaction with the traditional artistic
models inherited from Europe. And yet even among these
anomalous texts, <u>Walden</u>'s ability to defy succinct formal
classification is singular. Is it, for example, an epic that
writes "the nation's scripture," as Stanley Cavell suggests
(33), or a "report on an experiment in transcendental
pastoralism," as Leo Marx has said (242)? Would it be better
placed among the travelogues that, thanks to Melville and
others, fascinated Thoreau's contemporaries, or might it be
akin to the manifestoes drawn up by the Brook Farmers and
other utopian groups? Or is it best thought of alongside
Emerson's homiletic essays and lectures?

One of the most prominent responses to this question of

Walden's genre has come from Charles Anderson, who has chosen to read the text "as a poem--the transformation of a vision into words, designed so as to contain and reveal it" (14). Anderson centers his discussion around the cycle of the seasons, which he sees as the largest of Walden's many circles and "the encompassing image of the book" (227). Admiring the "perennially young," "unchanged" pond, Thoreau wishes to "recover his lost youth in a second spring" (227). Accordingly, the penultimate chapter, "Spring," represents rebirth into life and marks the climactic moment in the book. In it, argues Anderson, Thoreau finally overcomes the progression of linear time by transforming it into a pattern of life, death, and rebirth. The overarching design of the seasons is not at all decorative, but the machinery through which a potentially unremarkable report of a retreat in the woods becomes a representation of transcendental regeneration. Such an interpretation clearly aligns Thoreau's text with the tradition of natural supernaturalism, a context whose attractions are understandable. Thoreau immerses himself in the natural world, replacing a supernatural frame of reference with a natural one, and the text in many respects follows the "circuitous journey" that M.H. Abrams claims characterizes Romanticism. The clearest manifestation of this, as Anderson suggests, is the seasonal cycle, which evokes the progress of the speaker's inner growth, the ways in which his spiritual awareness is higher at the end of his twenty-six month "sojourn" than it was at the beginning. Providing such

a structure for the text would appear to be one way of answering James Russell Lowell's complaint that Thoreau had "exquisite skill in the shaping of sentences and paragraphs," but "no artistic power such as controls a great work to the serene balance of completeness" (235).

It is precisely this kind of reading, however, to which the present study hopes to respond. If by "poem" we mean, as Anderson apparently does, a well-wrought, unified and integrated whole whose parts neatly synthesize in a celebratory conclusion, then Walden is emphatically not a poem. Thoreau, of course, wrote many poems, but to read Walden as one of them makes it a more conventionally systematic book than it is, and neglects much of what makes the text so compelling: its spaciousness and inclusiveness, its novelistic range of incidental notation and prosaic detail. As I hope to suggest, a better reading highlights, rather than elides, the intractability of Thoreau's text, and interprets it, in Schlegel's terms, as an "encyclopedia," a collection of unresolvable voices and angles of vision.

2

Thoreau was obviously not a fiction writer.[1] There is very little in Walden that one could identify as fabrication, and the few characters that do appear remain cyphers for the author to derogate or eulogize as he sees fit. In this sense, the text is justifiably read as a "spiritual autobiography." But this strong autobiographical impulse

does not diminish the text's capacity for irony; it simply forces irony to enter on a different plane than it does in other fictions. Ironic multi-voicedness in Walden does not arise through embodied characters, but within the figure of the author himself. As James McIntosh has argued, Thoreau's works are "records of consciousness" (45): they are concerned chiefly with the epistemological and cognitive acts of the author's mind. What is important about these "records," however, is that they are continually subject to revision; the mind recorded in them is not static, but self-conscious and in motion, continually seeking different topics, perspectives, and modes of vision. Thus, as McIntosh also says, "consciousness is form" (45). Reading Walden, one senses a mind committed to an exploration of the present moment, with each moment evincing a voice of its own. The voice of a given moment might fully contradict the previous one, but both are given a place in the text. Walden, as Bakhtin would say, is a record of Thoreau's psychic life imagined as "inner speech."

Perhaps the most effective way to approach the workings of this inner speech is by drawing an analogy to a feature of Thoreau that has drawn considerable attention, his famous "divided vision." Which plays a greater role in the acquisition of knowledge and the recognition of truth, the subject (the perceiver) or the object? The best answer is that Thoreau sought a balance between two modes of perception. Neither the completely subjective vision nor the completely objective vision was suitable: truth lay

somewhere between the two. Close observation of nature tended to place too much emphasis on the object, while (in contrast to Emerson's love of horizons) distant views tended to encourage subjective idealization at the expense of actuality. Because of this divided vision, as Richard Schneider says, Thoreau shifted radically between "Emersonian idealism" and "scientific empiricism" (65-6).

It is this ability to hold together what appear to be irreconcilable opposites that has frustrated and confused many readers of Walden. The interplay between the subjective and objective modes of perception spills over into the text's formal composition, as if the writer were searching for the true point of interest between two extremes of language as well. In terms of irony, we might think of these modes as two of the text's most frequently recurring voices. Read independently, neither can fully represent the life of the pond, for this life is too multifarious to be captured in a unitary language; in effect each voice illustrates the limitations of the other. Placed side by side, though, they begin to approximate the motions of the natural world and the mind's relation to it.

It is Thoreau's "objective" vision, generally speaking, that distinguished him from Emerson.[2] For Thoreau, the universe was less "transparent" and less easily "dissolved" than it was for his mentor: it stands more resolutely outside the ego, beyond the creative mind's transformative will. It may be that Thoreau never expunged Calvinism as fully as Emerson did, and thus had a stronger sense of

humanity estranged from God; his residual puritanism, that is, may have told him that spirit is less easily gleaned from nature in a fallen world (Baym, "Science" 224). Whatever the explanation, McIntosh sums up the differences between the two figures nicely when he notes that, most of the time, Thoreau does not want to assimilate the world but to have what he described as "direct intercourse and sympathy" with it. Whereas Emerson imagines Nature as a "servant," Thoreau refers to it as a friend of sister or mother. "Thoreau," writes McIntosh, "seeks his knowledge not by mastering nature but in large part by involving himself in the experience of it ... Even when a natural fact corresponds to a moral quality, it is not dismissed as superficial, as merely a 'figurative tool'" (34).

The most visible manifestation of Thoreau's desire not to master nature but to involve himself in it is his relish for natural science. The lavish attention he pays to the gritty details of the external world arises not out of a dominative impulse but out of the profoundest respect. Adopting and making rigorous Emerson's nominal interest in science,[3] he came to regard it as a way to re-acquire pre-lapsarian instinct or "anticipation." In the fall, he believed, humanity lost the ability to sense the rhythms of the universe, and to discover nature's laws through close analytic observation was a means of regaining this understanding (Baym "Science" 224-8). "It takes us many years to find out that Nature repeats herself annually," he wrote in his journal in 1860. "But how perfectly regular and

calculable all her phenomena must appear to a mind that has observed her for a thousand years" (xiii 279). In Walden this is echoed in "The Ponds in Winter": "Now we know only a few laws [of nature], and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of any essential elements in the calculation" (259). The relationship of mind and nature imagined by Emerson, then, is inverted by Thoreau's scientific inclinations: one must be submissive before, and a student of, the fullness of nature, rather than appropriating it as a "figurative tool."

The effect of this on Thoreau's prose is analogous to John Updike's justification of his own style: "it surprised me to hear it called luxuriant and self-indulgent; self-indulgent, surely, is exactly what it wasn't--other-indulgent, rather" (103). Much of Walden is composed in the language of a natural science textbook: the focus of study is frequently nature in and of itself, as it exists independently of the ego. Paragraphs are written "other-indulgently," devoted to the details of the external world without the intrusion of personal opinion or subjectively designed tropes. In his prose he registers an acute awareness of the forms and complexity of the external world, as well as his conscious distance from it--an recognition of an object's alterity unable to be shaped by the subject.

I take as an example a passage from "The Ponds." Thoreau has been reviewing his piscatorial experiences at Walden, and offers a description of some of its fish:

> Nevertheless, this pond is not very fertile in
> fish. Its pickerel, though not abundant, are its
> chief boast. I have seen at one time lying on the
> ice pickerel of at least three different kinds: a
> long and shallow one, steel-colored, most like
> those caught in the river; a bright golden kind,
> with greenish reflections and remarkably deep,
> which is the most common her; and another, golden-
> colored, and shaped like the last, but peppered on
> the sides with small dark brown or black spots,
> intermixed with a few faint blood-red ones, very
> much like a trout. The specific name reticulatus
> would not apply to this; it should be guttatus
> rather. (167)

The empirical rhythm of this voice is detected in the
sharpening focus of the first three sentences, which slide
from a general category, fish, to a subset of that category,
pickerel, and finally rest upon an even more specific
segment of the species, the three varieties seen in Walden
Pond. In the final sentence, this attention to analytic
detail is buttressed by parenthetical Latin. As with a
footnote, the reference to genus and species provide
"verification," an authoritative discourse--indeed, a
universal language--reinforcing the book's claim to
scientific precision. Reading the third sentence, one senses
the speaker groping after systematic exhaustiveness: with
its semi-colons and parallel constructions, it creates a
kind of syntactical juxtaposition of the different fish, as
if they were entries in a ichthyologist's guidebook.

In the sentences that follow this passage, Thoreau
elaborates on his encyclopedic knowledge of the area and its

inhabitants. The fish in Walden Pond, he says, are "cleaner, handsomer, and firmer-fleshed" than those in the nearby river; and it is not uncommon to see a duck or goose or fish-hawk among the frogs and tortoises that make the pond their home. The next paragraph turns to the pond itself:

> You may see from the boat, in calm weather, near the sandy eastern shore, where the water is eight or ten feet deep ... some circular heaps half a dozen feet in diameter by a foot in height, consisting of small stones less than a hen's egg in size, where all around is bare sand. (167-8)

Again we hear the naturalist's descriptiveness and deliberation, the same patient effort to delineate the physical details of the pond without administering them to the play of the author's consciousness. Almost immediately after this, however, a very different voice jumps in:

> A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is the earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows. (168)

If Thoreau distinguished himself from Emerson most visibly through the cultivation of his scientific inclinations, it is in passages such as this that he most seems his mentor's pupil. Reading it, one recalls Emerson's principle of correspondences, outlined in the "Language" chapter of Nature: "Particular natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts ... Nature is the symbol of spirit" (197). Nature

"dissolves," becomes "transparent." Subjectivity is given free rein: the lake and its surroundings yield to Thoreau's imagination, and figural discourse transmutes what had been a carefully recorded external world. Nature becomes a vehicle for the mind's tenors, the pond transforming into an eye, the trees into eyelashes, and the cliffs and hills into eyebrows.

The sudden shift between these paragraphs from "The Ponds" is noteworthy because they exemplify much of the composition of Thoreau's work as a whole. The "metaphorical turn" of the latter passage--from empirical lake to "earth's eye"--is an abrupt transition from one inner voice to another: scientific naturalism is answered by romantic naturalism. One language has directly encountered and clashed with another, bringing to the text a wholly different (not "higher" or "lower") vocabulary and diction. Both voices are unquestionably Thoreauvian; neither is more characteristic than the other. Nor can these voices ever be said to synthesize: they remain distinct theses and antitheses, responding to and even undermining one another without finally being resolved. Indeed, the differences between them are absolute, the "subjective" voice positing the essential unity of mind and nature just as the "objective" preserves the difference.

The hovering stance between these two seemingly discordant voices has dismayed some readers of the text. While some have tried to resolve Thoreau's "inconsistencies" through paradox, other critics have chosen to see the glass

as half-empty, and contended that the hierarchies
established in the text between such dichotomies as the
literal and the figurative are constantly breaking down. The
consequences for the reader, according to such an
interpretation, are dire. Thoreau's concern in Walden,
writes Walter Benn Michaels, is to break down hierarchies
into contradictory alternatives and thereby show that we do
have choices left; but if there are no hierarchies of value,
"what authority can we appeal to in accounting for our
decisions" (146-7)? Such a deconstruction, however, betrays
an unnecessary assumption. In short, it demands that Thoreau
write a coherent, unified, and instructive text, and is
scandalized when the demand is not subsequently satisfied.
The expectations underlying his judgement are actually the
same as many of the critics he has faulted for trying to
unify Walden: that it is a pedagogic text wishing to "teach"
or "show" the reader the avenue to truth, including truth in
language. But Walden does not ask to be read this way; such
logic would also tell us that Thoreau finds fault with
anyone not brazen or inventive enough to build a cabin in
the woods. Thoreau's text, I would argue, does not try to
"teach" or "guide" the reader toward anything in particular,
and his various voices are incongruous or contradictory only
if we ask in advance that the text be a univocal act of
instruction. As a transcript of inner speech, with interior
voices responding to and often disagreeing with one another,
Walden is best described as a record of extended play, in
the Schillerian sense.[4] It is less a manifesto than an

aesthetic act: the figural and the literal are simply two
modes of perception; no decisive decision between them is
required. On their own, these languages are indeed imperious
and totalizing, and ask to be privileged above all others.
Side by side, though, they become self-conscious,
provisional, notional. The true Thoreau does not lie in one
particular voice, but in the space between different voices.

3

To describe Walden solely as an oscillation between the
subjective and objective would not be wholly accurate. These
poles are indeed the chief loci of Thoreau's epistemology:
the constant give-and-take between the mind and nature, the
imagination and the external world, is present on almost
every page. But such a polarity is inadequate as a
description of the voices in his text. A distinction might
be made between "mode" and "voice": out of the subjective
and objective modes of Thoreau's mind, a plurality of
different voices is allowed to emerge. Most of the voices in
the text, that is, might be thought of as falling into one
of the two categories of vision; the external world is
either tangible and embraced, or it is "transparent" and
amenable to the imagination of the artist. But not all the
voices are, so to speak, as unalloyed or direct as those
found in "The Ponds." There, "mode" is indeed nearly always
synonymous with "voice." Other voices in the text, though,
are refracted and multi-directional: they seek to do more
than simply verbalize Thoreau's competing objective and

subjective visions. They serve purposes beyond the articulation of this fundamental dichotomy.

Take, for example, the voice with which the book opens, the voice of "Economy." Both of the familiar alternating linguistic currents are here. On the one hand, the speaker scrupulously details the construction of his house, the making of his bread, the austerity of his furniture, and so forth. And on the other hand, he finds metaphorical parallels between nature and spirit; a snake lying in a torpor at the bottom of a pond hole, for instance, triggers the thought that, "for a like reason men remain in their present low condition" (37). Despite these similarities, however, the voices of "Economy" and "The Ponds" are cast quite differently. In Bakhtin's terms, "Economy" is written as a "hidden polemic," that is, a discourse in which the words are intended both as referential act and as a polemical blow against another discourse on the same theme (PDP 195). Indeed, it is appropriate that "Economy" made up most of Thoreau's original lyceum lecture. What Stephen Railton says about the book as a whole is especially true of this introductory chapter: "in its words he is never alone ... He treats his audience very much as a live one," and an adversarial one at that (50-1). The chapter is formulated not as a simple description of his life in the woods, but as an argument defending it, an implicit attack on counter-views being raised by a hypothetical audience. With each word, he strikes a tacit blow against those who are "said to live in New England"--the way they build their homes, the

way they dress, the way they eat, their ideas of economy, and so on. Key moments in the chapter are those where the speaker explicitly acknowledges or addresses his audience: "you who read these pages" (4); "Yes, I did eat $8.74" (53); "But all this is selfish, I have heard my townsmen say" (65). In all of these cases, Thoreau is shaping his language according to the potential responses it will generate in his particular social and historical setting. By comparison, both the subjective and objective languages in "The Ponds" sound almost meditative and introverted; they remain voices in an interior dialogue, ruminative and less mindful of a potential audience. "Economy" externalizes these competing inner voices and places the speaker at the head of a noisy lyceum hall. This is perhaps the voice that has done the most to make Thoreau's popular reputation--recalcitrant, somewhat priggish, disdainful of his townsfolk, insistent upon the dignity of self-reliance and sympathy with the natural world--and accordingly, it is the voice that has made critics want to read the entire text as a how-to guide. Again, however, it must be remembered how this brash oration is qualified by later voices in the text. It is the primary voice only in a temporal sense: not the most important voice, only the voice that appears first.[5]

"The Bean-Field" operates in a similar way. As in "The Ponds," we hear the Thoreau who finds metaphors in daily experience: "I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity,

faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil" (148). And again, in the chapters methodical description of farming practices, we have the studiously rational voice detailing the particulars of the external world. He begins by noting the size of his plot (two and a half acres) and his preparation of the land (clearing the stumps, using no manure), after which he proceeds to the trials he encountered while actively farming--the escapades with the squirrels and woodchucks, the chats with gainsaying townsfolk, and his struggles with weeds. After compiling a statistical account of his labours, the costs and income of his experiment, his voice grows still more analytic and expert:

> This is the result of my experience in raising beans: Plant the common small white bush bean about the first of June, in rows of three feet by eighteen inches apart, being careful to select fresh round and unmixed seed ... But above all harvest as early as possible, if you would escape frosts and have a fair and salable crop; you may save much loss by this means. (147-8)

Again, however, there is an important difference between this account of husbandry and that of the natural world in "The Ponds": the descriptions in "The Bean-Field" cannot fully be understood unless historically situated. Though apparently given in earnest, the details of his toil are in fact playful responses to circumstances in the agricultural life of mid-nineteenth-century New England. A few years before Thoreau moved to Walden Pond, a well-

meaning ex-clergyman named Henry Colman (the "Mr. Colman"
twice referred to in the chapter) had conducted a survey of
Massachusetts farms that he hoped would contribute to a
reform of agricultural practices. New England farmers, his
belief was, were overly wasteful and inefficient, and had
not kept up with changing technologies in the field. Lazily
expecting more acreage than they needed, farmers were
growing discouraged as the population increased, and were
emigrating to the cheaper and more open spaces of the west.
In an effort to keep "the children of Massachusetts" at
home, Colman recommended a series of reforms--new crops, new
fertilizers, new rotations--which were intended to reduce
farmers' acreage, update their methods technologically, and
maintain the Yankee virtues of honesty, industry, and thrift
(Gross 487-91).

Placing "The Bean-Field" in this historical context,
one understands the true--i.e., farcical--nature of much of
its language. Adopting the voice of an agricultural
specialist, Thoreau burlesques the recommendations proposed
by Colman and others when he earnestly advises the reader to
plant late (June), do nothing to improve the soil, and hoe
while the ground is still wet with dew (141). Considering
that the New England Farmer of 1845 recommended two feet
between rows and six inches between plants, Thoreau's
suggestion (three feet and eighteen inches, respectively
[147]) seems anything but industrious and thrifty. Perhaps
the most blatant appropriation of the reformers' discourse,
however, is his diligently compiled statistical account. The

meticulousness and accuracy of the report is defused when
one examines the figures in relation to other Massachusetts
bean farmers of the day: the normal yield for bean crops at
the time was twenty bushels per acre, while Thoreau's was
seven or eight at best; and while other bean cultivators
required only one and a quarter quarts to produce a bushel,
Thoreau needed four (Gross 495).

As Robert A. Gross comments, the point of all this is
to turn upside down "the sober literature of agricultural
improvement, with its spiritually deadening obsession with
crop rotations, manures, and tools" (495). The voice of this
chapter, in other words, differs from the others in its
heavy use of parody: the humorless discourse of the
agricultural crusaders is comically appropriated in order to
subvert whatever authority they might have had. But this is
not all "The Bean-Field" does. The parodic discourse is
directed not simply at the agricultural reformers, but also
doubles back and pursues Thoreau himself. The author has
presented himself as an agricultural savant, and yet his
advice is flagrantly specious; and he proudly records how
long he labored in his field ("I used to hoe from five
o'clock in the morning till noon" [145]), though his yield
was abysmally low compared to other farmers. The derision in
the chapter, that is, doubles back on itself and pursues the
speaker. Thoreau does not exempt himself from his own
ridicule, but parodies his own agricultural ineptitude.
Indeed, read in this light, much of "The Bean-Field" recalls
Walden's most obvious self-parody, the "Hermit" character at

the beginning of "Brute Neighbors" who makes a mockery of "Economy" with curt, pedantic maxims such as, "He that does not eat need not work" (201).

The travesty of "The Bean-Field," then, might be said to contain its own set of competing, contradictory voices. One voice ridicules the social discourses of the day while another lampoons Thoreau's own declaration of self-reliance. To recognize only the first of these voices is to suffocate the play of the text. "The Bean-Field" is not a Swiftian parody in which the author stands comfortably over and above the staid vocabulary being ridiculed. It is not an instance of "reconstructible" or Augustan irony, but romantic irony: the language of the chapter simultaneously affirms and criticizes the capacity of the author to recognize and articulate truth. Failure to see these elements of self-parody would lead one to think that Thoreau dismantles the socially instituted discourses of his culture only to empower his own monological voice, or that the text endorses the breakdown of hierarchically saturated rhetoric only to establish one of its own. In such a misreading, <u>Walden</u> would be open to the charge that it does not wholly honor the heteroglot nature of the social world, and that, though it attempts to carnivalize official language, it is--as Michaels reveals by following another path--woefully inconsistent and perniciously hypocritical.[6]

Early in "Economy," Thoreau writes:

> So thoroughly and sincerely are we compelled to
> live ... denying the possibility of change. This

> is the only way, we say; but there are as many
> ways as there can be drawn radii from one center.
> All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is
> a miracle which is taking place every instant.
>
> (10)

Walden's heterogeneous voices are one version of these "radii." Those touched upon here--the naturalist and the poet, the lecturer and the parodist--are only a few of the ones that speak in the text. One could easily add to this list: Thoreau the parable maker, Thoreau the (mock) travel writer, Thoreau the sage and Thoreau the fool, Thoreau the ascetic and Thoreau the sensualist. Each speaks in the ongoing dialogue of Walden, and none is expressive or communicative enough to hold sway over the others and be considered the single, principle language. Their concatenation is testament to the author's emphasis on process over product, the eternal, ironic sequence of statement and reply.

4

How might this reassessment of Walden as a fiction of dialogic irony influence our reading of it? One major effect concerns the nature of time in the text. Charles Anderson might stand for the prevalent "natural supernaturalist" interpretation. In reading the text "as a poem" whose central image is the circle, Anderson sees the seasonal cycle on which the book turns as an emblem of Thoreau's effort to suspend linear, chronological time. In the act of "anticipation" ("To anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn

merely, but, if possible, Nature herself!" as Thoreau cries in "Economy" [15]), he strives to achieve cyclical time and become united with the patterns of nature, an endeavor that effectively becomes a quest for personal salvation or immortality. As I noted earlier, Anderson sees the penultimate chapter, "Spring," as the culmination of Thoreau's effort to transcend the limitations of linear time by shaping it into a pattern of life, death, and rebirth: "Having collapsed the two years into one ... he then extended that year to include two springs so he could bend time into a circle--a movement from the given spring of youth to the earned one of a remade spirit" (264).

Considered as a work of dialogic irony, however, Walden appears quite different. What emerges is not the vague circular pattern of the seasons, but the ongoing progression through time that the text enacts. One way of articulating this would invoke Frank Kermode's classic distinction between chronos and kairos. The first signifies time as it is usually experienced in life, "one damn thing after another" without obvious telos; the second refers to time as it is felt in a novel, in which moments "charged with past and future" are filled with significance derived from a relation to the end (43-7). In these terms, one would argue that Walden is marked more by chronos than by kairos: moments in the text are rarely felt as "significant seasons" that will be "fulfilled" somehow by a conclusive ending. Chapters and events are most often experienced by the reader as "passing time": one follows another without finalization,

just as one voice in a dialogue responds to another without any authoritative one to consummate the process. To emphasize the _kairotic_ elements of the text--seeing the seasonal cycle as the dominant structure into which one may tuck all its loose strands--is to risk turning an ongoing process into a closed system. Spatial metaphors evoking the timelessness of the experience are therefore inappropriate. To be sure, a _kairotic_ structure is present as a shaping force in the work. But it is important to see how the pressure exerted by this structure is mitigated: the seasonal cycle is not even visible in the first half of the book, and "Spring"--the ending into which, according to some critics, the entire text is channelled--is followed by the noticeably more hesitant "Conclusion."

An analogous way of putting this would begin with the image of selfhood presented in _Walden_, and argue that the text represents time as "open," as Gary Saul Morson, developing certain Bakhtinian concepts, uses the term in _Narrative and Freedom_. Time in Thoreau's text is not portrayed as deterministic: events and voices are not ordered in relation to an "inevitable" ending, but emerge through the free dialogic process of becoming. This temporal openness might be contrasted with other first-person narratives, which traditionally feature a speaker who is at a higher level of comprehension than the character (his or her younger self) experiencing the events in the story. The superiority of the present, narrating self--which may be the wisdom of age or the wisdom that comes with the process of

narrating--manifests itself in his or her deeper understanding of life, a recognition of hitherto hidden patterns that shaped the events of the past and will shape his or her "destiny" (Miller, "Problems" 34-7). Time, in such a narration, is "closed": the speaker is finalized, being rather than becoming, and is able to discern and order the meaningful events of his or her earlier life. But in Walden, the speaker does not exhibit this kind of surplus wisdom vis-à-vis his younger self. He does not portray his present self as a finalized, godlike figure able to contemplate his life as a synchronic whole or grasp it as a pattern (such as a circle) displayed to the mind in an instant (Morson, Narrative 97). Indeed, it is often difficult to tell whether Thoreau is writing from his past or present position. Though he is retrospectively recounting a past event, his discursive statements are almost always written in the present tense, and at some points he writes as if he were still in his cabin next to the pond: "As I sit at my window this summer afternoon..." (104); "This is a delicious evening..." (117). This conflation of past and present selves arises from their shared temporal predicament, their analogous states of flux and process: the present self cannot authoritatively measure the achievements of his past life (or lives) from a stable vantage point, for he himself is unfinished and open to change. Far from tying together all the loose strings of the text, the ending affirms the commitment to the present moment that has guided the entire book, and opens out toward an ongoing,

unfinalizable future: "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star" (297).

In saying that Walden lacks the kairotic structure present in most nineteenth-century fictions, or that the voices in the text are not determined by an inevitable end, I do not mean to say that the text is entirely devoid of structure. Indeed, Walden is the perfect example of a text structured according to dialogue rather than a synthetic system. Witness, for example, the paired sets of chapters that echo throughout the text: "Reading" and "Sounds," "Solitude" and "Visitors," "The Ponds" and "The Pond in Winter," and so on. These chapters are orchestrated as moments responding to one another, heterogeneous inner voices given the freedom to speak but not allowed to signify the final word: moods that, as in Emerson's "Circles," "do not believe in each other" (298).

And ultimately, the entire experiment at Walden should be regarded as one of Thoreau's many "moods." Though the text is commonly read as a manifesto, a document announcing the sanctity of the individual or the poet's union with nature or the reformer's model for Transcendentalist utopianism, it is crucial to remember that its writer eventually leaves Walden Pond, that a path wears outside his cabin door just as readily as it would outside anyone else's. As liberating as his experiment was, it was not the final answer; it too had its limitations, and, as he remarks in "Conclusion," he has "several more lives to live" (288). "There are innumerable avenues to the perception of truth,"

reads a suggestive journal entry from 1851. "Probe the universe in a myriad of points ... He is a wise man who has taken many views" (ii 457). The source here is appropriate: in a journal, time is optimally free and never finalized; every new entry is an occasion for fresh voices and selves, new "points" and "views." That the journal form became, after 1851, the focus of much of Thoreau's energies[7] is perhaps unsurprising. Walden is in many respects a search for a medium expansive and elastic enough to accommodate all the author's inner voices. But as a work geared for publication, written to be placed within the covers of a book, it too, like the conventional texts next to which it seems so peculiar, needed to be given an ending, or at least a provisional stopping point. For a sensibility as ironic-- and obstinate--as Thoreau's, even this must have seemed a concession, a falsification of a process which in reality is inconclusive and never cleanly finalized. Walden's achievement, in this sense, is the skill with which it points beyond itself: like the many voices it contains, it is itself self-conscious, cognizant of its own incompletion, ironically aware that it is only one voice among many in the dialogue of literary texts.

Chapter Two

Carlyle's <u>Sartor Resartus</u>:
Order Out Of Chaos

> The device of making a book by pretending to
> edit the papers of another person may appear
> to be a rather stale one, and has certainly
> been of late pressed quite unconscionably in-
> to the service. But in the present instance it
> was absolutely essential to the management of
> the author's plan, and has been so ingeniously
> availed of as quite to reconcile us to it.
> --N.L. Frothingham, 1836
> review of <u>Sartor Resartus</u>[1]

> ... for better or worse, it is the commentator
> who has the last word.
> --Charles Kinbote, editor of
> <u>Pale Fire</u> (29)

Carlyle's <u>Sartor Resartus</u> is a fiction in a way that

Thoreau's <u>Walden</u> is not. To treat <u>Walden</u> as a work of non-

fiction, and to identify Thoreau the speaker with Thoreau

the historical man, would of course be imprecise, but the

book does retain strong ties to the traditions of

documentary realism and travelogue literature. By contrast,

the most prominent features of <u>Sartor</u>--Teufelsdröckh, <u>Die</u>

<u>Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken</u>, and the Editor who presents

and analyzes them--are entirely fabricated: they never

existed outside of the author's imagination.

This is perhaps obvious, but worth stating

nevertheless: it has customarily been overlooked. Among his

Victorian contemporaries, Carlyle was revered as a cultural

critic and prophet, the man whose work George Eliot, writing in 1855, could say had modified every "superior or active mind of this generation" (213). And by and large this reputation has survived into the twentieth century, a circumstance that has severely diminished, even dismissed, his status as a writer of fiction. Gerry Brookes, for example, has warned against overemphasizing the novelistic qualities of the text, characterizing it instead as a "persuasive essay" (7). Sartor's characters and other fictions, he says, "do not have the intrinsic and sustained interest that fictions have in a novel but serve the persuasive purpose of the whole work" (9). If we read the text as a fiction, one of its central characters, the Editor, seems grossly inconsistent, and his alleged conflict with the Professor appears decidedly undramatic: "The story of an Editor struggling to comprehend and to shape a mass of documents by a mysterious German philosopher looks insubstantial and uninteresting next to Emma, Great Expectations, or Middlemarch, and even against lesser nineteenth-century novels" (49). A better reading, suggests Brookes, acknowledges that the Editor is never truly involved in any conflict with the Professor (50), recognizes how the two voices are in fact "fully coordinated" (60), and attempts to understand more fully the Clothes Philosophy that is the raison d'être of the book, indeed, the premise upon which all of Carlyle's thought was based.

One is justified in seeing the Clothes Philosophy as Carlyle's major motivation behind the text. Reading Sartor

as a "persuasive essay" has on its side Carlyle's famous
ambivalence towards fiction, which had begun to blossom as
"Biography," an 1832 essay whose fictional spokesman
Sauertig declaims: "Fiction partakes, more than we suspect,
of the nature of _lying_" (iii, 49).[2] It also has considerable
biographical support. Writing to the editor of _Fraser's
Magazine_, which serialized _Sartor_ between November 1833 to
August 1834, the author remarked: "it contains more of my
opinions on Art, Politics, Religion, Heaven Earth and Air,
than all the things I have yet written. The Creed
promulgated on all these things, as you may judge, is _mine_,
and firmly _believed_ ..." (228).

But to acknowledge the primacy of the Clothes
Philosophy is not, in fact, the same as arguing that the
fictions in the text are simply tangential, or that they are
allurements to an otherwise uninterested audience. Contrary
to what Emerson wrote in his North American review of
Sartor, the "foreign dress" and "gay costume" of the work
are not at all "superficial" (241). One need not disregard
Carlyle's commitment to the Clothes Philosophy; but it is
helpful to downplay his excoriations of fiction, which are,
after all, blatantly belied by the imaginative structure of
the text. Indeed, given that Carlyle's ouevre is otherwise
almost totally bereft of fiction, the fictional designs of
Sartor, and the implications arising from them, should
perhaps be given special attention. In brief, _Sartor_ is made
up of two voices placed side by side, and which engage in a
conflict whose dramatic unfolding elaborates and extends the

central vision of the text. The fictional composition of the book, I hope to show, allows Carlyle to present not only a vision of multiplicity and openness (as Thoreau does), but also the principal forms of opposition such a vision encounters.

2

In the same letter that Carlyle declares his commitment to the "Creed promulgated" in his text, he refers to the Editor as "the main Actor in the business" (228). Such a notation is valuable in light of a critical tradition that has tended to regard the Professor as the central personage in the text, and sometimes even confused Sartor with his own work on clothes. Carlyle's remark reminds us that the Professor does not in fact write any of Sartor: the text is not Die Kleider, but an interpretation of Die Kleider, and, equally important, Book Second is a biography rather than an autobiography. The quotation marks that barnacle the Professor's words throughout the text cannot go unobserved: the systematizing Editor never abandons his intermediary position between the reader and Teufelsdröckh. Everything we read, including the protracted passages from the Professor's book, arrives by way of an intermediary.

The quality of the Editor as a "character" distinct from the Professor has been unclear to some readers, and a matter of some contention. Brookes, for instance, argues that the Editor is not "consistently represented" (73): he is without a clear "psychology or mental growth" (56), and

his written style is little different than that of
Teufelsdröckh. Daniel P. Deneau, elaborating this latter
critique, argues that the lack of stylistic differentiation
between the two figures constitutes a major flaw in the
text. The supposed contrast between the Editor and
Teufelsdröckh, he writes, "is never definite enough to give
the illusion of two distinct and individualistic voices ...
Although there are supposedly several voices in Sartor
Resartus, there is, in reality, a single voice which raises
and lowers its tone as the occasion shifts" (19). Carlyle,
Deneau concludes, had too little control, and was unable to
develop his intricate groundplan to its logical conclusion.

The notion of character on which such arguments are
based is obviously derived from the fiction of Carlyle's
contemporaries, the "classic realist text" of the nineteenth
century. To Brookes and Deneau, a character is an
individualized consciousness developed through various
methods of characterization (psychological omniscience,
physical description), and capable of both evolution and
personalized expression. Under such criteria, the Editor is
rightly found wanting: he would not measure up to any of the
main players in, say, Middlemarch. But to argue this is to
misread the Editor's character and subject him to the wrong
touchstone of values. In fact he requires an altogether
different set of terms than those we use for the characters
in Middlemarch, namely the one developed by Bakhtin in his
discussions of Dostoevsky.[3] To Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's
characters are defined less by their physical

characteristics or the complexity of their personal psychology than by their position within the ongoing debates of the text. They are embodiments of a point of view, voices that speak a particular perspective. In writers such as Tolstoy and George Eliot, multiplicity exists within the individual consciousness, and, accordingly, is linear and temporal: a character moves through a plurality of ideological positions without finally subscribing to any one in particular. In Dostoevsky, on the other hand, multiplicity is spatial and coexistent, spread over a number of different characters, each of whom is inseparable from the perspective it bears (PDP 85). A plurality of characters are allowed distinct--and therefore limited--points of view on a single subject of debate, and the multiplicity of the text arises out of the orchestration of these idea-bearing voices. A voice could be likened to a block spilled onto a table and knocked against other blocks: each is fastened to a particular position, and contends with a host of other positions, which, themselves distinct and limited, can never coincide with one another. Rarely do these voices emerge from, or escape, their own particular points of view; they are not assimilated into other voices or dissolved into a single dominant voice, but stand as points in a shared space, perpetually in opposition, unresolved.

The Editor is created in much the same fashion. As a voice, he is defined not by a complex, ever-shifting psychology but by the stance he adopts toward Teufelsdröckh and his book. Contrary to Brookes's claim, he stands fully

independent of the Professor: appreciative and receptive, but always wary, never coinciding or "fully coordinated" with him. Individuating stylistic tics or habits are therefore not required: his contrary perspective is enough to mark him as a particular point of view.[4] Moreover, as we see by his confusion over Die Kleider, his particular point of view is limited and finite: his is obviously not an omniscient voice. As George Levine has noted, Carlyle firmly believed in the "inescapably partial nature of man's perceptions and knowledge" (57), writing, for example, in the 1830 essay "On History": "The old story of Walter Raleigh's looking from his prison-window, on some street tumult, which afterwards three witnesses reported in three different ways, himself differing from them all, is still a true lesson for us" (ii, 87). The Editor is a character in the sense that he resembles these three different witnesses. Rather than the lordly omniscience of a third-person narrator, he embodies a particular perspective, with all the constraints and potential faults such a position entails.

It is not a large leap, as Levine points out, from here to the experiments with point of view in the work of such writers as James and Conrad. "A fiction such as Sartor inevitably shifts attention away, at least in part, from the substance to the point of view from which it is being related," a technique which among the Victorians Carlyle was one of the first to exploit (74). Carlyle, suggests Levine, separates himself from the novelists that he anticipates by avoiding relativism in the same way Browning does in his

monologues: he ultimately believes in what cannot be known, and trusts in some fundamental values (sincerity, for example) that can lead the reader through the labyrinth of conflicting and partial views. Another distinction should be made, however. The experiments with narrative voice undertaken by the great modernists reflect a keen interest in personal psychology: their speakers (or "centers of consciousness") are specific individuals whose inner ghosts and machinations distinguish them from the other characters. By contrast, Carlyle's Editor, though in every sense speaking from a restricted and partial perspective, is never granted a unique individual identity. There is little, that is, to distinguish him as a private mind: he does not possess what one would call a "personal" psychology and, aside from a brief reminiscence about his first encounter with Teufelsdröckh, there is little evidence of a "personal" history. The perspective from which he speaks, we might say, is less private than collective or social. Behind him stands a select community, which provides him with the standards (tastes, sympathies, expectations) to measure the Professor's book: not a first-person singular but a first-person plural, not an "I" but an editorial "we." Indeed, it is appropriate that even his few direct self-references are cast in the third person rather than the first, as if to acknowledge his place within the larger body: "the Editor of these Sheets." His consciousness is circumscribed, but unlike the speaker of a more conventional Ich-Erzählung, it is circumscribed by the disposition of a particular group of

minds rather than a particular individual mind.

The nature of the collective consciousness speaking through the Editor is not difficult to discern. Its conservative slant is evident, for one thing, in Carlyle's letter to Fraser, in which he says his Editor "assumes a kind of Conservative (tho' Antiquack) character; and would suit Fraser [sic] perhaps better than any other Magazine" (228). Michael L. Allen, in a study of early nineteenth-century British periodicals, has described how Fraser's was one of a group of literary magazines that modeled themselves on the highly successful Blackwood's, whose formula, designed to appeal to both the established social elite and the ascending, newly enfranchised middle classes, led Fraser's to retain an air of exclusiveness and High Toryism amid a "relaxed, personal, and intimate ethos" (21). Such a conservative angle of vision would have been understood by Carlyle's early readers, who would have recognized the implications of a stylized Fraser's review, but in Sartor it is acknowledged openly when the Editor explains his "fitness for the Enterprise" he is about to tackle:

> On one other point the Editor thinks it needful to give warning: namely, that he is animated with a true though perhaps a feeble attachment to the Institutions of our Ancestors; and minded partly to defend these, according to ability, at all hazards; nay it was partly with a view to such defence that he engaged in this undertaking. To stem, or if that be impossible, profitably to divert the current of Innovation, such a Volume as Teufelsdröckh's, if cunningly planted down, were

> no despicable pile, or Floodgate, in the Logical
> wear. (11)

No personal connection with Teufelsdröckh, writes the
Editor, "can pervert our judgement, or sway us to extenuate
or exaggerate" (11). At the same time, however, he confesses
to a preference for order over chaos and logic over untamed
speculation. Receptive as it may be to Die Kleider, the "we"
speaking in the text is ultimately more at home with British
pragmatism than the eccentricities of German mysticism.

And this is the function the Editor ultimately serves
in Sartor: to embody the impulse for order, the desire to
impose familiar patterns upon a given text. At one level,
the Editor's "Conservative (tho' Antiquack) character" is
just that--political and social moderation, a preference for
domestic over foreign custom. At a deeper level, though, his
political and social predilections could be considered a
metaphor for the tasks of reading and criticism. The Editor
is not a reactionary, nor are his opinions too tendentious
to be treated seriously; his claim not to "extenuate or
exaggerate" the oddities of the Professor's text is fair.
But as with any reader approaching a new work, his reception
of Die Kleider is informed by certain pre-formed
expectations and temperaments. Robert Alter has argued that
in all self-conscious novels, the act of fiction implies an
act of criticism, and that, broadly speaking, this criticism
may move in one of two directions: inward, to the
experiencing mind that gives life to the literary artifact,
as in Tristam Shandy; or outward, to the society that

supplies the materials for literary representation and tries
to dictate literary convention, as in <u>Jacques le Fataliste</u>
(81). Though, as a youth, Carlyle admired Sterne, <u>Sartor</u>
undoubtedly falls into this latter, "outward"-moving
category, its book review format allowing it to address and
question the foundations of British literary convention and
the society that instills them. In making a work more
familiar, a book review assumes a horizon of expectations
among its readers, a shared corpus of intellectual tastes
and learning. Secure in the knowledge of a culturally
unified audience, it is able to untangle the knots of a
given text by relating it to other, more or less similar
works, or critique it through a tacit system of values. The
Editor's voice is thus a frame in more than the formal
sense: its motivating impulse is to harness the Professor's
work, to hold it within its own interpretive boundaries, and
make sense of it through its own ready-made methods of
evaluation.

3

The Editor's urge for shape and order, of course, is in
sharp contrast to the vision presented in <u>Die Kleider</u>, the
source of which might be traced to a passage in
"Reminiscences." Recalling his brief visit with the
Professor, the Editor records a long speech by
Teufelsdröckh, who stands before the window of his attic
apartment, the highest point in Weissnichtwo:

> I look down into all that wasp-nest or bee-hive

> ... and witness their wax-laying and honey-making,
> and poison-brewing, and choking by sulphur. From
> the Palace esplanade, where music plays while
> Serene Highness is pleased to eat his victuals,
> down to the low lane, where in her door-sill the
> aged widow, knitting for a thin livelihood, sits
> to feel the afternoon sun, I see it all.... (16)

The gerunds of the first sentence, accrued one by one, set

the tempo for the labyrinthine set of phrases in the second,

which in two tightly packed images, the aristocrat and the

widow, moves sweepingly from the highest to the lowest

classes of society. In effect these prefatory sentences

prepare for the activity and plenitude that marks the

subsequent description of the town. The focus of the

Professor's rhapsodic oration is not the edifices of the

city--churches, houses, banks, buildings representing

established cultural institutions--but the swirl of motion

running around and between them: couriers arriving to

deliver mail; the country baron arriving behind his four

horses; the "lamed Soldier" hopping along the street begging

alms; "the carriages, and wains, and cars" tumbling into

town delivering and receiving food (17).

Translated into a written text, such a vision of the

world could only appear, in Schlegel's terms, "an artfully

ordered confusion" (DP 86). Though we never read Die Kleider

itself, the overriding impression we receive of it is the

same we receive upon first encountering Walden: expansive,

generically variegated, digressive, prone to contradiction

and paradox. In short, Die Kleider accommodates the

plurality of voices and modes of vision comprising Teufelsdröckh's consciousness. Languages ranging from mysticism to social satire and abstruse speculation to parodic history are strung together by the Editor in an effort to make sense of the text. Unnerving shifts between gravity and levity are reported between chapters; a passage on the divinity of humanity ("the mystic god-given Force that is in him") is juxtaposed with one beginning, "Man is by birth somewhat of an owl" (167); ideas "ridiculous in the extreme" may be either "a mad daydream" or part of a "deeper intention" that disregards "strictures and glosses" (161). The word the Editor most often assigns to this heterogeneity is "chaos": Die Kleider is a "farrago" (147) of "confusion and capricious indistinctness" (84). In "so capricious inexpressible a Work as this of the Professor's," he concludes, our course cannot proceed "straightforward, step by step, but at best, leap by leap" (157).

In "The World Out of Clothes," this roil is ascribed to Teufelsdröckh's ignorance of formal logic:

> By what chains, or indeed infinitely complected tissues, of Meditation this grand Theorem is here unfolded, and innumerable practical Corollaries are drawn therefrom, it were perhaps a mad ambition to attempt exhibiting. Our Professor's method is not, in any case, that of common school logic, where the truths all stand in a row, each holding by the skirts of the other; but at best that of practical Reason, proceeding by large Intuition over whole systematic groups and kingdoms.... (41)

A better, and more affirmative, interpretation would say that Teufelsdröckh recognizes the inability of any philosophical system to capture the incessant motion of the world. "Which of your Philosophical systems," he asks, "is other than a dream theorem; a net quotient, confidently given out, where divisor and dividend are both unknown?" (43). The "thousandfold production and destruction" of Nature (44) precludes an orderly system wherein premises may lead to a clean, synthetic conclusion. In essence the Clothes Philosophy is a philosophy skeptical of all philosophies: all totalizing forms of thought, all unself-conscious systems that do not recognize their own impermanence, must be undressed or, as v' say today, deconstructed. Reconstruction, or redressing, is an equally necessary act; but it must be performed with the knowledge that any new-formed mode of thought is likewise provisional and subject to future amendment. To the extent that any system is static and designed to make totalizing predictions, all systems are inadequate as expressions of universal flow and becoming.

Ultimately this holds true for linguistic systems as well. "What are your Axioms, and Categories, and Systems, and Aphorisms?" asks Teufelsdröckh in "The World Out of Clothes." "Words, words. High Air-castles are cunningly built of Words, the words well bedded also in good Logic-mortar; wherein, however, no Knowledge will come to lodge" (43). It is here, perhaps, that the difference between the two characters in the text is most significant. The Editor

embodies what Bakhtin calls the "centripetal" forces of culture and language: as a representative of an "official" position--the conservative world of literary Britain--he seeks to impose order on multi-voicedness, attempts to restrict heterogeneity by framing it within what he regards as literary and cultural norms. By contrast, the Professor, recognizing the impossibility of a wholly expressive and unified language, incorporating a multiplicity of discourses and voices within his work, aware that the best he can do is approximate the "living flood" of bodies and time described in his vision of Weissnichtwo, tends to be "centrifugal." It is true, as Mellor says, that the Editor continually reveals the inadequacy of Teufelsdröckh's expression (ERI 119); in a sense, though, Teufelsdröckh's own juxtaposition of "piebald, entangled" languages continually reveals it as well. Indeed, it is significant that the Professor's learning is marked by "reading and literature in most known tongues" (24): he is linguistically self-conscious, aware that his native German is only one of many different possible languages.[5] Again, distinctive written "styles" are unnecessary for the two characters in the text: they use the same words, but the direction in which they take them are wholly different. One writes in a genre, the book review, whose relatively inflexible checks and stays continually guide the writer and which will appear much the same in any periodical aspiring to "literary" status. The other composes a work of "boundless, almost formless contents" (8), a multi-generic and wholly anomalous text that countermands

all accepted notions of literary convention.

4

As with _Walden_, a discussion of dialogue in _Sartor_ leads directly to a consideration of time, for in both texts the preference for multi-voicedness and generic heterogeneity translates into a sense of time that is open and always becoming. The matter is more difficult in Carlyle's text, however. The temporality it sanctions is similar to that of _Walden_, but its more complex structure of fictions makes its vision less easily discerned than in Thoreau's work. Whereas _Walden_, as a record of an emerging individual consciousness, proceeds along a single, unchallenged line of inquiry, _Sartor_ embodies in its central characters two conflicting responses to time, and allows them to engage with one another within the symposium of the text. _Sartor_'s fictional machinery, in other words, allows it the freedom to investigate various ideas and test them against what it finally regards as a truer and richer notion of temporal process.

The Editor's sense of time is best witnessed in Book Second, his biography of Teufelsdröckh. In her _Victorian Autobiography_, Linda Peterson provides one of the most illuminating readings of this portion of the text. Setting it within the context of English spiritual autobiography, she regards it a work concerned as much about the writing of biography as a biography itself. Carlyle, she suggests, resembles other Victorian biographers in that he recognizes

the central dilemma of writing modern spiritual autobiography: the post-Enlightenment suspicion that biblical hermeneutics, which had governed the structures and shape of autobiography from Augustine to Bunyan, "are humanly conceived rather than divinely ordained" (39). Though the need to interpret and give shape to individual events endured, the (auto)biographer's traditional means of ordering experience had been undermined. Carlyle's response to this, Peterson suggests, was to incorporate within his account of the Professor many of the patterns and motifs that had become available to the Romantic autobiographer. In the opening chapters of Book Second, for example, the young Teufelsdröckh is cast as Ishmael wandering in a desert of "waste, and howling with savage monsters" (88-9); the Wandering Jew who "begins a perambulation and circumambulation of the terraqueous Globe" (114); and finally, a Goethean extension of these models, Werther travelling the "whole surface of the earth (by footprints) [to] write his Sorrows of Teufelsdröckh" (121). Sartor does not, however, present these models in order to substitute them for biblical patterns, but to examine them critically: unlike other Victorian autobiographers, such as Ruskin in his Praeterita, Carlyle ultimately rejects these Romantic-inspired patterns in favour of a traditional hermeneutic model, the story of the Exodus. By the three central chapters of the book, Peterson writes, Teufelsdröckh has become a modern Moses leading a nation of one. In "The Everlasting No" we see the rebellion against Pharaoh, "The

Centre of Indifference" follows the course of the wilderness wandering, and "The Everlasting Yea" recalls the entry into Canaan, with Teufelsdröckh standing above "the nine Towns and Villages that lay round [his] mountain seat" just as Moses overlooked the promised land from the top of Mount Pisgah. Thus, Peterson concludes, though Sartor shows an awareness of its problematic presentation through the inclusion of different motifs and models, it is in the end an attempt "to reassert the primacy of the Bible in a post-rationalist interpretation of history" (48).

What is important about the typological analogies ringing throughout these chapters, however, is that they are almost entirely the makings of the Editor: they arise out of his interpretive collation of Teufelsdröckh's life more than Teufelsdröckh's own self-presentation. The Professor himself cannot be said to chronicle his life in a static, uniform pattern in which all loose ends are tied together. Indeed, he refuses to organize the data of his experiences, presenting instead what Peterson calls "an anti-autobiography" (32)--six paper bags filled with scattered reminiscences and reflections "treating of all imaginable things under the Zodiac and above it, ... and then in the most enigmatic manner" (60). It is the Editor, that is, who shapes the raw experience of the Professor's life into a familiar, "normative" cultural model, who identifies Teufelsdröckh as Ishmael, Cain, the Wandering Jew, Werther, and finally Moses, and who decides which "pools and plashes" are momentous enough for inclusion in Teufelsdröckh's

biography.[6]

In temporal terms, these impulses reflect the Editor's tendency to see time as closed. Interpreting history as a series of foreshadowings and prefigurations, he fits the Professor into a predetermined, familiar model, and thereby restricts his capacity for future emergence and becoming. Forced within such an interpretive structure, the events of Teufelsdröckh's life have in a sense already taken place; its course has already been determined, its significant seasons have already been identified, and no room exists for stray or meaningless episodes falling outside the pale of these patterns. Though he himself presents the events of his life in a deliberately haphazard and disorganized way, his biography is made into a well-plotted story. Indeed, it is unsurprising that the Editor would prefer the "Historical-Descriptive" portion of Die Kleider over its "Philosophical-Speculative" half: history, in his view, is composed of systems and patterns that make order and arrangement immediately accessible.

The Editor, in short, is a hands-on worker. Struggling to apprehend the Professor's life and work, he takes full advantage of the surplus knowledge arising from his temporal position, i.e., the privileges of writing years after the events have taken place. A good example of this editorial stance comes in "Getting Under Way." Quitting his position as a law clerk, Teufelsdröckh, in the bag Pisces, describes himself enthusiastically as a young colt who "breaks off his neck-manger" to seek freedom: "Then, in the words of Ancient

Pistol, did the World generally become mine oyster, which I,
by strength or cunning, was to open, till I broke it off"
(94). What he, as an ephebe, is unable to realize, however,
is what the Editor understands from his position as
biographer: that the freedom sought can be earned only after
a long interlude in a metaphorical wilderness. While the
young Teufelsdröckh is himself blind to the intermediary
period of wandering that comes between bondage and the
promised land, the Editor, bolstered by the interpretive
power that retrospection and typology provide, is able to
pick out all the stages of life's process. The wilderness to
be encountered is not, as Teufelsdröckh believes, "bosky,"
but the site of future tribulation: "He ... must enact that
stern Monodrama, No Object and No Rest; must front its
successive destinies, work through to its catastrophe, and
deduce what moral he can" (95).

Peterson interprets such editorial work positively:
"The revision," she writes of this example, "suggests that
without reliable systems of interpretation we will misread
our experience, if indeed we can read it at all" (45).
Sartor as a whole, however, is more insistent on the frailty
of such totalizing interpretive systems. In "Pause," for
example, the chapter that concludes Book Second, the Editor
surveys his biography, now complete, and immediately raises
doubts about its foundations:

> Here, indeed, at length, must the Editor give
> utterance to a painful suspicion which, through
> the late Chapters, has begun to haunt him; ... a

> suspicion, in a word, that these autobiographical
> Documents are partly a Mystification! ... Could it
> be expected, indeed, that a man so known for
> impenetrable reticence as Teufelsdröckh, would all
> at once frankly unlock his private citadel to an
> English Editor and a German Hofrath; and not
> rather deceptively inlock both Editor and Hofrath,
> in the labyrinthic tortuosities and covered ways
> of said citadel ..., to see, in his half-devilish
> way, how the fools would look? (153)

The consequences of this "painful suspicion" are especially
important when we consider that the chapters immediately
preceding "Pause, the "late Chapters" to which the Editor
refers, are those that have traditionally been regarded as
the central ones in the text: "The Everlasting No," "The
Centre of Indifference," and "The Everlasting Yea." That
these chapters, which according to many readers map the
definitive pattern of Carlylean regeneration, might all be a
fabrication or hoax on the part of the Professor raises
doubts about the entire biography. Is any of it reliable or
accurate? Can it really be used as an explanatory gloss on
Die Kleider, a way to avoid "entire misapprehension," as the
Editor reasons (9)? It may be that Teufelsdröckh has
exaggerated the importance of some events, or it may be that
his tripartite division is a deliberately oversimplified
version of his spiritual growth; which exactly does not
matter. What is important is the suggestion that the
Editor's scrupulous work--the "Bridge for British
travellers" he struggled to construct out of the "perplexed
cursiv-schrift" of Teufelsdröckh's documents (61)--may have

been for naught: the hours spent assiduously organizing the paper bags may have been a waste of scholarly time and effort. A practical joke may have been played at the expense of the Editor's compulsively systematizing temperament.

A second, and more critical, indication that his interpretive strategies are inadequate, however, arises immediately after this, when, closing the bags out of which he has constructed the Professor's biography, the Editor writes:

> Let it suffice that we know Teufelsdröckh, so far,
> if "not what he did, yet what he became:" the
> rather, as his character has now taken its
> ultimate bent, and no new revolution, of
> importance, is to be looked for. The imprisoned
> Chrysalis is now a winged Psyche; and such,
> wheresoever be its flight, it will continue. (154)

At the time of _Sartor_'s writing, that is, the Professor is complete, has reached a state of being rather than becoming. The "pools and plashes" of his past have been gathered and organized; his apparently tangential developments, too cluttered and random to follow closely, have been discarded; his life has achieved final consummation. The only biographical task still left to carry out is to polish the pieces already in place: "Over much invaluable matter that lies scattered ... in those Paper-catacombs, we may have occasion to glance back, and somewhat will demand insertion at the right place: meanwhile be our toilsome diggings therein suspended" (154). According to the Editor, Teufelsdröckh's identity has run its course and his

biography finished.

The weaknesses of this interpretation, however, are made manifest in the final chapter, "Farewell," when the Professor proves that he is still open, in process: he descends from his tower to join the revolutions in Paris and, the Editor suspects, London. After a lifetime of political inactivity, such a gesture can only be seen as an important "new revolution" of Teufelsdröckh's personality. The image in "Reminiscences" of the Professor perched high above Weissnichtwo could have been criticized as a kind of ethical callousness or insensitivity, an obtusely selfish disregard for life outside his own distinguished consciousness; but even this image is finally undermined.[7] The political "revolutions" reported in "Farewell" are perhaps the most persuasive evidence that Teufelsdröckh is, as he is often designated, a "Son of Time," that is, subject to time, moving through it and evolving in its course. Saturated with typological allusions, the Editor's biography attempts to restrict this continuing process by placing him in a preconstructed frame, but in the end the edges of this frame begin to crack and collapse. It is significant that--like, "The sun is but a morning star," the sentence closing Walden--the last words quoted from Teufelsdröckh look to the future rather than the past: "Es gaht an (It is beginning)" (224). Indeed, it would be a mistake to read the Professor's metamorphosis into a political activist as his final development. To paraphrase what Dostoevsky said of Tolstoy's Levin, this phase will not last very long; another hitch

will develop and another personal revolution will overtake him.[8]

That Sartor regards this vision of openness and becoming as the truer of the two perspectives is evident in the form of the ending. Not only does Teufelsdröckh descend from his watchtower and undergo yet another "revolution" of personality, but the Editor himself begins to abandon the attention to order and structure that has governed his task: as many readers have noted, he comes to resemble the Professor more and more as the book draws to a close. In "Farewell," for example, he confesses his language has been "infected" by Teufelsdröckh's "piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style of writing" (204). Even more instructive, though, are "The Dandaical Body" and "Tailors," the chapters preceding "Farewell." Critics have often complained of these as a major shortcoming of Sartor, an unfortunate anti-climax that badly mars the book's symmetry (Tennyson 302; Reed 421), and in many respects such descriptions are well-warranted: after the rhapsodic mysticism of "Natural Supernaturalism," a satirical essay on dandies and a short discussion of tailors seem something of a cooling-off. But the value judgements attached to such critical accounts are misguided, do not attend to the particular vision Sartor presents. The digressiveness of "The Dandaical Body" and "Tailors" is in fact precisely the point, for in a truly open text, conclusions cannot be anything but tentative. The anti-climax of these chapters, in other words, is the most fitting climax possible. To end with "Natural

Supernaturalism" would have gone against the grain of the text, would have implied that, in the bold announcements of Die Kleider's "stupendous section," the final word had been spoken. The Editor is not without reservations at the end, of course--he leaves Teufelsdröckh, he says, with "a mingled feeling of astonishment, gratitude and disapproval" (221)-- but in adding two chapters that wander without obvious aim, in allowing himself to experiment and speculatively extend the principles of Die Kleider, in making his book stop rather than end, he enters more fully into the spirit of the Professor's philosophy. He becomes, in a sense, more like Old Leischen, the maid who satisfies herself with a monthly "partial clearance" of Teufelsdröckh's apartment: to order fully such a "wild" and "capricious" text would be to domesticate the energy from which Die Kleider arose. Even the commentator, we might say, cannot have the last word.

At the end of Sartor, the Editor himself seems to recognize the limitations of the interpretative method that has directed his critical endeavor. Glancing at his earlier reference to the "ultimate bent" of the Professor's life, he now corrects himself in light of his subject's sudden political turn: "So that Teufelsdröckh's public History were not done, then, or reduced to an even, unromantic tenor; nay, perhaps, the better part thereof were only beginning?" (225). It is in this movement from a position of certainty to uncertainty, from authority to scrutinizing self-consciousness, that Sartor has its crucial dramatic movement. By the end of the book, the Editor has begun to

abandon what he had presumed at the beginning, the notion
that he could arrange the Professor's text and life
according to his ordinary principles of organization.
"Custom," as Teufelsdröckh says, "doth make dotards of us
all" (196). In the process of applying his customary
procedures, the Editor curbs the multi-accented play of
Teufelsdröckh's text and closes the emerging process of his
biography. A more honest perspective is heard when,
considering the Professor's future, he observes in the
penultimate paragraph, "We stand in a region of conjectures"
(225). Such a confession could be read as a kind of
conclusion reached by Sartor, the only place at which it
could ever end. "Conclusion," however, in a tenuous and
ambivalent sense, for Carlyle's point d'appui is in no way
as solid or definite as that word commonly implies.
Conclusions, he concludes, cannot be reached.

Chapter Three

Moby Dick and the Horizons of Dialogue

Lord, when shall we be done changing?
                    --Melville, letter to Hawthorne (143)

Surveying the reasons commonly cited for Melville's

withdrawal from fiction--illness, critical and popular

neglect, a steady job at the New York Customs House--Denis

Donoghue offers a persuasive alternative:

> My own feeling is that after 1857, when he had
> driven himself to distraction with private
> visions, elemental forms, and strange obliquities,
> he craved the comfort of simplicity. He wanted the
> relief of strong, easy attitudes, massive
> commitments, solid images. He wanted, in short, to
> live like other men. So he turned away and tried
> to live with conventional forms, the rhyming
> couplets of a life at last normal ... Think how
> much indecision, complexity, frustration is
> resolved, one way or another, when we have
> recorded a vote, yes or no. (Connoisseurs 78-9)

After ten works of fiction in eleven years, that is,

Melville turned to poetry in an effort to surmount the

indecision and frustration evident in Hawthorne's famous

characterization: "He can neither believe, nor be

comfortable in his disbelief" (433). The result was hundreds

of poems that give the impression of a man trying to talk

himself into something, clambering to convince himself he

could see the world as a more conventional mind would:
"wishful noise," notes Donoghue, written not because the
author felt a certain way, but because he desperately wanted
to feel a certain way (Connoisseurs 80-81).

Read from this perspective, the later poetry can shed
retrospective light on Moby Dick, which is perhaps the
supreme evidence of the unconventional visions Melville was
led to in his fiction. As Walter Bezanson says, the text has
"the peculiar quality of making and unmaking itself as it
goes," the sense of being "a restless series of morphic-
amorphic movements" (438). In Schlegel's terms, it is marked
by simultaneous "self-creation and self-destruction" (L 37):
what is surmised or imagined on one page is always qualified
by what is surmised or imagined on the next. But the kind of
restlessness that characterizes Moby Dick took its toll on
Melville. In an 1849 letter written after seeing Emerson
lecture, he wrote: "I love all men who dive ... the whole
corps of thought-divers, that have been diving and coming up
again with bloodshot eyes since the world began" (79). In
his own career, this perpetual "diving and coming up again"
gradually went beyond bloodshot eyes and grew into
weariness, disillusionment, and despair. Fiction for
Melville was a forum in which to entertain multiplicities
and paradoxes, but the effects were less exuberant, less
life-enhancing, than Schlegel and others would have
envisioned.

While most critics have pointed to Pierre as the
earliest sign of these effects,' there are in fact

significant traces in <u>Moby Dick</u> itself. In saying this, I mean to suggest an important distinction between Melville's text and those of Thoreau and Carlyle. Much of the complexity of Ishmael's mighty book arises from the misgivings it articulates about the kind of ironic vision affirmed in both <u>Walden</u> and <u>Sartor Resartus</u>. If <u>Walden</u> juxtaposes a series of languages and voices, and implies that the progression of an inner dialogue is more important than any final consummation, <u>Moby Dick</u> interrogates its individual voices more sharply, and questions whether dialogic processes are as benign and salutary as Thoreau's text suggests. And if, in the person of the Editor, <u>Sartor</u> presents a challenge to the vision of dialogic multiplicity and openness, <u>Moby Dick</u> offers more various--and more formidable--challenges, and is finally less inclined than Carlyle's text to privilege one option over another. In short, <u>Walden</u> and <u>Sartor</u> are indeterminate in the sense that they resist resting at a single voice: they are fictions attesting to process over essence. Through the figure of Ishmael, the controlling sensibility and voice of the text, <u>Moby Dick</u> also emerges as becoming rather than being, as a "strange mixed affair" (224), but the attitude toward this circumstance is equivocal, its indeterminacy more radical and precarious. At the very time it unfolds its voices and plurality of perspectives, it doubts the validity of dialogic process and the final virtue of multiplicity.

2

An analogous way of saying that in his later years Melville sought "the relief of strong, easy attitudes, massive commitments," or that he hoped "to live like other men," is to say that he wished to live like one of the crew members of the Pequod. Characters such as Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask resemble Carlyle's Editor, in that they are defined not by an intricate, evolving psychology but by the different postures they adopt toward the ongoing debates of the text. They are each, in Bakhtin's phrase, "carriers of an idea" (PDP 85), non-coinciding ideational positions offering singular visions of reality. "Development" does not enter into their composition: the figures we meet in "Knights and Squires" are the same as those frenzily pursuing the White Whale in the closing chapters: Starbuck never wavers from his place as the "staid, steadfast," and pious sailor (111), Stubb is invariably the "happy-go-lucky ... neither craven nor valiant" (114), and Flask remains as "lost ... to all sense of reverence" (115) at the end as he does at the beginning. Despite their radically divergent make-ups, that is, the crew members are in fact mirror images of one another: all are stable points of view, fixed in a particular perspective and tied to a specific idea, men, as Donoghue would say, who have cast their votes.

This is most readily apparent in "The Doubloon," which draws together these heterogeneous voices into a kind of symposium around the gold coin Ahab has hung as reward for the sighting of Moby Dick. To be sure, the chapter is one of

the most stagy in the book, and the various interpretations
of the doubloon that are offered could be regarded as
stereotypical[2]: Starbuck reads the coin in terms of
traditional Christian imagery, Stubb relies on the
Massachusetts calendar to interpret the zodiac, and Flask
calculates its worth at 960 cigars. But the very
resoluteness and fixity of these responses highlights the
debate-like quality that underlies all of the interaction
between the characters and the orchestration of their
various voices. Each represents a discrete point of view
unable to merge with other perspectives. Indeed, each exists
only by virtue of his[3] alterity vis-à-vis the others; the
compass and quality of each voice is recognized and
clarified by its difference from the others. Despite the
text's occasional gesture toward a brotherhood of whaling--
"A Squeeze of the Hand," "The Monkey-Rope"--the men remain
"Isolatoes ... not acknowledging the common continent of
men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his
own" (118).

The most powerful and important of these Isolatoes is
Captain Ahab. Far from distinguishing him from the rest of
the Pequod's crew, Ahab's passionate single-mindedness, and
the intensity with which he embodies a particular
perspective, make him its avatar, the model of the
unequivocal, stable character that, as Bezanson says,
"increasingly reduces all pluralities to the singular"
(432). In his case, the conditions of this "singular" are
supplied by his own mind; what orthodoxy grants Starbuck,

and gold grants Flask, a powerful ego allows for Ahab. In "The Doubloon," this order of reduction is heard in his incantatory reading of the coin's cabalistic signs: "The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab" (427). Ahab's monomania is perhaps the most famous feature of Moby Dick, but in a sense his is only the most pronounced case among many on the Pequod. His obsession accents the ways in which every crew member operates according to a unique, hermetic frame of reference and is unable to move beyond the confines of a rigidly defined self.

Indeed, this inability to escape a particular, strictly unified self is underscored by a series of scenes in which characters momentarily entertain other potentials and forms of personality. In "The Candles," for example, Stubb lapses into a moment of piety when the lightning-rods catch fire: "Blast the boat! let it go! ... The corposants have mercy on us all!" (497). Similarly, in "The Musket," walking into the state-room to find Ahab asleep, Starbuck is given the chance to deliver the crew from its crazed captain, and temporarily rationalizes the moral codes that have demarcated his character: "Is heaven a murderer when its lightning strikes a would-be murderer in his bed, tindering sheets and skin together?--And would I be a murderer, then..." (507). In both of these instances, an alternative vision of life presents itself to a character, jarring him momentarily into a world other than the one they normally inhabit, with

different laws of causation and different potentialities. In each, though, the opportunity passes through the character's mind as quickly as it arrived: Stubb reverts to the clown we have come to know ("I said the corposants have mercy on us all ... But do they only have mercy on long faces?--have they no bowels for a laugh?" [498]), and Starbuck, resisting the "evil thought," cautiously sets the musket against the door. Ahab's temptation, in "The Symphony," is more explosive, but the movement is precisely the same. Gazing out on the "clear steel-blue day," he momentarily mistrusts the idea that has possessed him and formed his character:

> Oh, Starbuck! It is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky. On such a day ... I struck my first whale--a boy harpooner of eighteen! ... what a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now? ... Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearthstone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye. (534)

As Richard Brodhead notes about this scene, Ahab's sudden self-realization only moves him closer to his dark fatalistic vision; he ultimately chooses not to choose (160):

> What is it, what nameless, unearthly thing is it, what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that

against all natural lovings and longing, I so keep
pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all
the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in
my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much
as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, or God, or who,
that lifts this arm? (535)

Linguistically, the crew of the Pequod is a collection
of distinct vocabularies, each of which harbours a
totalizing ambition: each man uses a unitary language that
seeks to explain the world in its words alone. Ahab's, an
imperious concoction of Shakespearean tragedy and Miltonic
epic, is obviously the most magnificent, but, juxtaposed
with the others, it too is shown to be partial and less
adequate to the (expressive, communicative,
representational) task than it implies. Just as, for
example, his language reveals the tendency of Stubb's
vocabulary to trivialize the workings of the natural world,
Stubb's exposes the possibility that his is exaggeratedly
introspective and fatalistic. There is always a congregation
of languages in the text, each of which is circumscribed
and, in different ways, one-dimensional. Each voice acts as
a rein upon the others, pointing to something overlooked or
suppressed in them, assuring that a particular perspective
is never mistaken for the only valid source of speech. Ahab,
of course, does not recognize the bounds of his own
perspective, and in the final chapters his will to overwhelm
other voices, other possibilities, destroys the Pequod and
its crew. The destruction to which he drives the ship could
be read as the dramatized fate of all the individual

languages in the book: an incontrovertible commitment to any of them would lead to an analogous, if less spectacular, end.

In narrative and temporal terms, Ahab's lack of linguistic self-consciousness translates into the distinctly linear shape he gives his life and story. Just as his voice has no room for others, so his story has no room for adjunct plots or neutral, incidental details. In the chapters devoted to his quest, his voice seems to take hold of the narrative and thrust it forward, imposing its own teleological vision on the progression of events. This grows increasingly furious as the text draws to its end, in the chapters following the last of Ishmael's great meditations on the whale, "Does the Whale Diminish?" In these scenes-- the building of Queequeg's coffin, Ahab's operatic conversations with the blacksmith and destruction of the quadrant, the storm that sets the lightening-rods on fire-- the captain's vision siezes the narrative perspective: the whale seems to lurk in every natural event, and each moment resonates in its relation to the outcome of the quest. The narrative, that is, takes on an intense single-mindedness akin to Ahab's absorption in his one dark idea, and becomes charged with the sense of an ending (Brodhead 157-8). When this ending eventually arrives, however, we are left with an image bespeaking the futility and presumption of imposing such singular, closed narrative patterns on time and the natural world: the Pequod is mercilessly swallowed, the calamitous chase ends, "and the great shroud of the sea

rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (565).
Nature, this final image suggests, is sublimely indifferent
to any significance humanity may invest in its motions, and
time is wholly open, wholly beyond the shaping powers of
humanity, wholly above the narrative forms and endings we
create for our lives.

3

Against this will toward a unitary language and _kairotic_
plot-fashioning stands Ishmael, who, as critics have often
noted, is in this regard Ahab's antithesis (Bezanson 432;
Seelye 63; Brodhead 134-62). Whereas his captain speaks the
blank verse of the tragic hero, Ishmael speaks any and all
genres--high or low, solemn or jocular--moving across
linguistic lines with the agility of a master ventriloquist.
Every chapter calls upon a distinct generic character: stage
drama, scientific dissertation, philosophical treatise, art
criticism, anecdote, soliloquy, adventure narrative, and so
forth. This commitment to a plurality of languages arises
from the multiplicity Ishmael locates in nature itself--or,
more specifically, the whale itself, _Moby Dick_'s emblem for
the natural world in all its immensity and mystery. He
determines to know the whale in much the same way that
Thoreau determines to know beans and Walden Pond: he
resolves to subject one piece of organic reality to
consciousness (Marx 301-2). And like Thoreau, he finds this
possible only through a gathering of diverse languages, and
by allowing the process of such a gathering to convey the

irregularity and unpredictability of the natural world. Faced with a creature too multifarious, too chaotic, to be represented by a single vocabulary, Ishmael compiles assorted linguistic versions of it. Like the whale itself, his languages "form such irregular combinations; or, in the case of any one of them detached, such an irregular isolation; as utterly to defy all general methodization" (135). The result is the rambling, digressive series of meditations and essays that acts as the counterweight to Ahab's teleologically driven narrative. No language is final, no qualitative "progress" from one voice to another can be definitively followed: thus his "story"--so far as his effort to know the whale requires that description--can only be disjointed and inconclusive. When "Leviathan is the text" (450), "a careful disorderliness is the true method" (358), linguistically and narratorially.[4]

At one level, Moby Dick could be said to endorse such a vision of openness and multiplicity. Unlike the other members of the Pequod's crew, Ishmael resists the temptation to interpret the world unequivocally and of represent it in language through one set of terms alone. Refusing to rest at a single vision of life, he is the ironic-dialogic counterpart to Ahab: determined to try all things, content to achieve what he can. While Ahab's single-mindedness coerces the Pequod's crew into his mad hunt and ultimately precipitates its destruction, Ishmael's openness to experience could be regarded as his saving grace, the chief reason he is able to avoid being consumed by Ahab's ending.

He is fascinated by the captain--"Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine," he remarks after Ahab's sensational speech in "T! Quarter-Deck" (174)--and "drawn towards the closing vortex" (566) of the _Pequod_'s fate, but he ultimately rises from the sinking ship and lives to write the book we read. He is, it would seem, Melville's equivalent to _Sartor_'s Professor and _Walden_'s Thoreau: a playful, improvisational relativist defined by his dexterous avoidance of finalizing commitments and, as in the present case, tragic fates.

But such a reading neglects the ways in which _Moby Dick_ significantly qualifies the ironic-dialogic vision it works to foster. It is true that Ishmael is capable of companionable chatter and a kind regard for the sunnier aspects of life, and that his irony often gives rise to Shandyean humour.[5] One thinks, for example, of his far-fetched classifications of whales in "Cetology" or his self-consciously specious expiations on whaling and painting, in which "I have another idea for you" (346) and "Consider!" (263) seem to be comic refrains. The final implications of his irony, however, go much further, and draw the text toward a darker vision than those evinced by Thoreau and Carlyle. While in _Walden_ and _Sartor_ the ironic personage achieves a delicate balance between what Schlegel calls "enthusiasm" and "skepticism," Melville disrupts this equilibrium, and pushes his text toward the latter term.

One of the principal ways he does this is through the very thing I cited above as the origin of Ishmael's ironic vision, his conception of nature as myriad and chaotic. One

of Melville's starting points, of course, is the benevolent
image of nature favoured by his transcendentalist
contemporaries. In _Walden_, for example, Thoreau evokes the
heterogeneity and inscrutability of the natural world, but
on the whole that world remains gentle, a friend, sister, or
mother: its multiplicity and mystery, if impossible to
capture in language, is a source of assurance and wonder.
Moby Dick's nature--or rather, Nature--provides far less
comfort; powerfully imaged in the whale, its measurelessness
and unintelligibility engender uneasiness, even dread. The
result is a greater sense of linguistic failure in
Melville's text than in Thoreau's. Like Thoreau, Ishmael
draws attention to the inadequacy of language through the
juxtaposition of discrete voices, but on several occasions
he pauses to confess a certain frustration towards this
unending process, so overwhelming is the whale:

> The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do
> I deplore my inability to express it. At times
> there are gestures in it, which, though they would
> well grace the hand of man, remain wholly
> inexplicable ... Dissect him how I may, then, I
> but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will.
> (375)

> How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for timid
> untravelled man to try to comprehend aright this
> wondrous whale ... No. Only in the heart of
> quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of
> his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded
> sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and
> livingly found out. (449)

The mood of these particular sentences is one of mild

mistrust more than panic. In "The Whiteness of the Whale,"
however, such intuitions of linguistic failure are magnified
as Ishmael dives more deeply into unfathomable Nature and
tries to define his sense of nature "in some dim random way"
(184). For what strikes "a vague, nameless horror" into his
soul, what makes him "almost despair of putting it into
comprehensible form" (184), is the "well nigh ineffable"
quality of the whale, its transcendence of the static and
artificial systems we try to impose on it. The term he
eventually resorts to in his description of the color white,
"an elusive something" (185), is suggestive: the vague,
indeterminate, almost banal pronoun testifies to his
dissatisfaction with words and the impossibility of accurate
representation. Standing before something that demands a
sublime language, he has only ordinary, everyday words and
grammar at his service. Faced with this crisis, he applies
added pressure to these structures, making them bear more
than their usual weight: semi-colons stretch sentences to
hundreds of words, and a dense series of images--the albino,
the White Squall, the pallor of the dead, the White Tower of
London, a milky white sea, and so on--are piled on top of
one another in paragraphs that struggle for the "elusive
quality" heightening terror "to the furthest bounds" (185).
One could argue that this layering of words and images gives
the impression of fullness or, in Schlegel's term, nature's
"abundance"; i.e., that Ishmael, despite his doubts about
the efficacy of language, approximates its multiplicity and
becoming simply through his brilliant powers of accumulation

(Baym, "Quarrel" 918). But it is important to remember that the normative stance in "The Whiteness of the Whale" is not declarative but interrogative: the chapter is a compendium of questions, qualifying all propositions at the very time it offers them. Ishmael presents hundreds of words and images to account for "the supernaturalism of this hue" (188), but is always uncertain, even skeptical, of their authenticity. As Paul Brodtkorp says, his questions point toward a waiting, an emptiness, a void to be filled by the future (119). Though his speech is voluble, he is ruefully aware that "the great genius" of the whale "is declared in his doing nothing particular to prove it," that, despite the clamor of his own sentences and paragraphs, the wisdom of the whale lies in "his pyramidical silence" (344). "What has the whale to say?" he asks rhetorically in "The Fountain." "Seldom have I known any profound being that had anything to say to this world" (368).[6]

4

The acute awareness of linguistic inadequacy in "The Whiteness of the Whale" leads inevitably to the question of authority in language, for if all languages are found partial, upon what ground is a speaker capable of establishing his or her individual voice? Thoreau and Carlyle respond with the suggestion that, reality being constantly in flux, a unitary language is as disagreeable as it is unfeasible: an individual voice can never be finished, but remains an ever-shifting plurality of perspectives, in

process and indefinite. Ishmael's self emerges in much the
same way. Like Thoreau looking retrospectively on his
twenty-six months at Walden, he does not stand as a
finalized, omniscient consciousness able to discern
definitive patterns in the development of his earlier self,
because the experiences of his past are not fully understood
(Bezanson 426). None of genres he speaks, past or present,
can therefore lay any claims to absolute truth; they are all
relative and temporary, as their continual juxtaposition
proves. Like Walden, Moby Dick constantly challenges the
authority of different languages by relativizing them,
placing them side by side and forcing them to become self-
conscious, to respond to one another as competing
interpretations of reality.

One of Ishmael's most powerful relativizing strategies
is his wide use of doubly-directed discourse, speech, as
Bakhtin says, with a "twofold direction" toward both the
referential object and another discourse (PDP 185). In her
essay "Melville's Realism," a Bakhtinian reading of Moby
Dick, Carolyn Porter has cited this as the chief way in
which the text distinguishes itself from more conventional
nineteenth-century realism and points toward an emerging,
writerly modernism (5-6). In "The Affidavit," for example,
Ishmael exercises the diction of a lawyer in order to annul
what he long-windedly calls "any incredulity which a
profound ignorance of the entire subject may induce in some
minds, as to the natural verity of the main points of this
affair" (199). Armed with "separate citations of items,"

from which "the conclusion aimed at will naturally follow of itself" (199), the narrator outlines his argument point by point, taking care even to itemize his individual pieces of evidence: he himself has encountered certain whales more than once over an interval of three years; the practice of nicknaming notorious whales is commonplace among whalers and cetologists; the number of ships sunk by whales is far higher than those generally reported; all whalers know the potential malice individual Sperm Whales are capable of bearing; and so forth. All of this evidence, Ishmael says, is designed to touch upon "the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery" and thereby prove that the story of Moby Dick is anything but a fable or, "still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" (202).

Such language, as Porter argues, aims to do two things. On the one hand, Ishmael appropriates a certain discourse in order to gain the reader's acceptance of what in the fishery are "plain facts": the diction of the lawyer furnishes him with the authority powerful enough to make "landsmen" willing to credit his story. On the other hand, he parodies and de-authorizes that very same discourse: putting legalistic language to purposes other than those it customarily seeks, he exposes its limitations as an incontestable form of vision. Simultaneously acknowledging two perspectives, that of a reputable if prolix attorney and that of a yarn-spinning old whaleman, the words are released from their normal duties, and the authority normally building itself upon them is consequently destabilized. By

incorporating the genre of the legal brief--or, for example, the orator's speech in "The Advocate" or the taxonomist's in "Cetology"--the text at once undermines and exploits the extra-linguistic power that accompanies it. Voicing the languages of lawyers, orators, and scientists, Ishmael displaces authority from one language to another, a process which both invokes and disperses the authority informing monological discourse. As Porter says, Ishmael "never settles into an authoritative posture," never assumes the despotic stance of Ahab, who is so deaf to other voices that he does not even realize his own language is actually Lear's and Hamlet's (10-13).

The conclusions Porter draws from her observations of Ishmael's doubly-voiced discourse are instructive because they point to the major predicament presented by Melville's text and career as well as a major shortcoming among critics interpreting them. Having dichotomized between Ishmael and Ahab according to their respective stances toward language, she thematizes Ahab as the Bakhtinian poet, "intent upon gaining access to and possession of the fullness, the presence, the object-as-whale"; he is "motivated by a will to power which requires the usurpation of the authority inscribed in a language whose sources he willingly forgets." Ishmael, it follows, corresponds to Bakhtin's novelist, who never presumes to possess the whale, being "so swept around and about ... in the currents of the endless and contradictory words already spoken about it" (13). Speculating on the course her argument would follow, Porter

suggests how Melville's career might be examined in terms of
the gradual displacement of the dialogical resources of _Moby_
Dick by the monological voice which emerges in _Billy Budd_
and (presumably, since she nods approvingly to Bakhtin's
critique of "centripetal," unifying, purifying forms of
language) the later poetry. "From this point of view," she
concludes, "Melville did not become more and more modernist;
he became more and more monological. The question--both a
literary and a historical one--is why?" (14)

Why? Porter's final query betrays a critical
assumption--an ideology, one could say--that dialogic
multiplicity, and all of the values associated with it, are
self-evidently virtuous and universally applicable. She
cannot understand why anyone would desire anything
different, why anyone would long for a single, authoritative
voice or finalized self, because everything that is not
dialogic is implicitly censured as sinister or totalitarian.
The impasse at which she closes her essay is appropriate,
for Melville's prejudices were not those of much
contemporary literary criticism, and as a result his career
provides an edifying foil for our theoretical expectations.
What I am suggesting is that dialogicality and the
dispersion of linguistic authority were not unthinkingly
honored by Melville--that, indeed, they led him into a
debilitating predicament which only a withdrawal from
fiction could alleviate. Melville, writes Donoghue, was
never really the democrat he thought himself, but an
aristocrat (78); indeed, as every biographer has noted, his

upbringing and character was shaped by the sense of a patrician world fallen from its former glory. Amplified to an aesthetic and metaphysical level, this sense of lost authority meant that the plurality of perspectives leaving his narrator swept amidst "the endless and contradictory words already spoken about" Moby Dick ultimately had a vertiginous effect. The kind of paradoxes and contrarieties entertained in <u>Moby Dick</u> shadowed forth, as Ishmael says of the whiteness of the whale, "the heartless voids and immensities of the universe" (192), the underside of a world without authoritative form and authoritative resolutions.

In <u>Moby Dick</u> this wariness toward dialogic multiplicity is incarnated in a single, powerful figure: Pip. If Pip is a minor character in the novel, he carries a major place in its interpretation, for his is a consciousness wholly de-authorized, wholly relativized. His significance is best witnessed by "The Doubloon," when he comes before the gold coin that the other characters, each stable and univocal, have just deciphered. Stubb watches him approach:

> "This way comes Pip--poor boy! would he had died, or I; he's half horrible to me. He too has been watching all these interpreters--myself included--and look now, he comes to read, with that unearthly idiot face. Stand away again and hear him. Hark!"
> "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look."
> "Upon my soul, he's been studying Murray's Grammar! Improving his mind, poor fellow! But
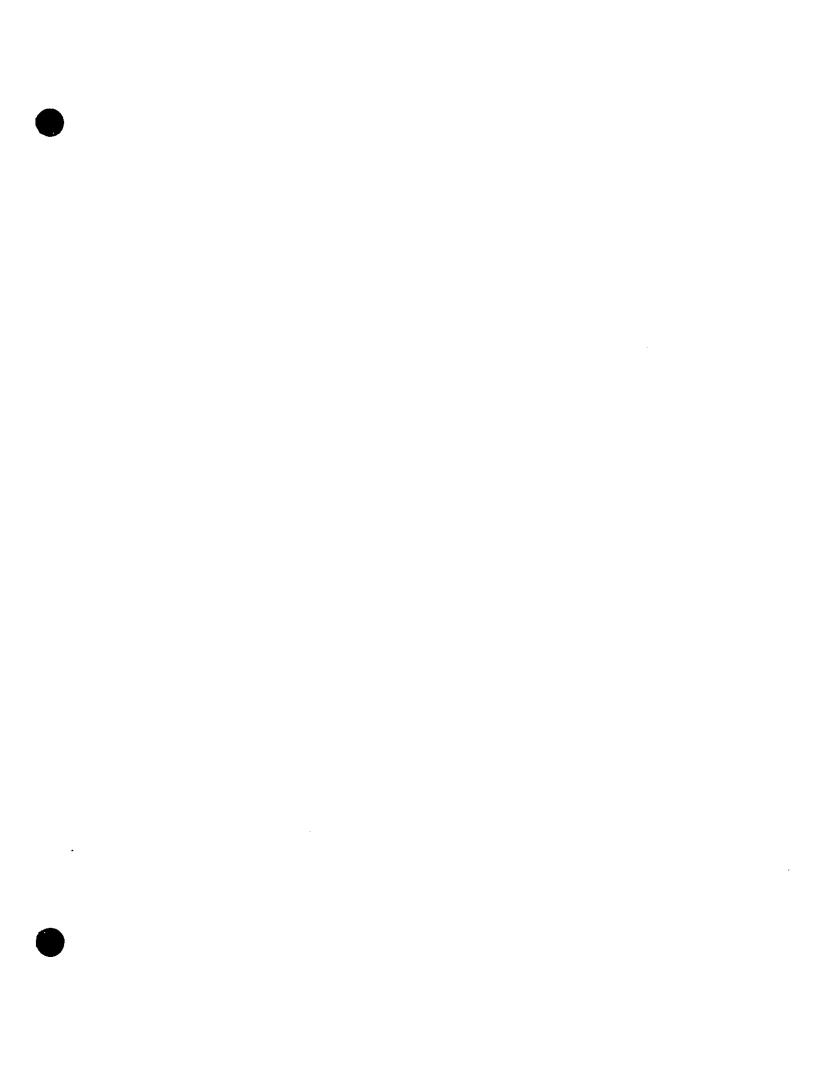
> what's that he says now--hist!"
>   "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look,
> they look."
>   "Why, he's getting it by heart--hist! again."
>   "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look,
> they look." (430)

Pip does not attempt to interpret the peaks and valleys
engraved on the coin, but instead focuses our attention on
the interpretive practice itself (Wolf 175). His single,
repeated statement, juxtaposing different isolated
perspectives withing the frame of a sentence, postulates the
absolute relativity of all voices. There is an "I," but it
is privileged no more than the any of the other pronouns,
carries the same weight as "you" or "he" or "they." Each is
partial and unique to itself, unresolvable with the others;
commas and semi-colons act as the grammatical equivalent to
the limits circumscribing an individual consciousness, the
boundaries beyond which a particular perspective cannot
pass. Pip, we might say, sees all points of view, but as a
consequence his own point of view is emptied of all
definition and significance, is unable to sustain an
individual voice among many contradictory others. Having
seen deeply into the mystery of nature, having seen the
relativity and insignificance of all human perspectives,
having seen "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (411),
he loses whatever chance for a definitive self he had.
Without any authoritative voice, his ego is left stranded,
forever seeking--in what could be read as a brilliant
Melvillian play on the variant meanings of "one"--"one Pip,

who's now been missing long" (474).

Before such a radically de-centered self, Ahab's rigid
unity, destructive and tyrannical as it may be, begins to
look more attractive. And this is the dilemma confronting
Ishmael: the crew member he most resembles is Pip. Both are
homeless and displaced, residing in the area between
perspectives and voices, unable to settle into one
authoritative self. For all his wit and playfulness, Ishmael
is "Ishmael," isolated, dispossessed, and motherless,
agonizingly aware that the only resting point available to
him is "the pondering repose of If" (485). The difference
between his "If" and that of Pip is one of degree rather
than kind. About Pip's time lost at sea, Ishmael remarks
that "the awful lonesomeness is intolerable," that the
"intense concentration of self in the middle of such a
heartless immensity, my God! who can tell?" (411). The
ending of his own story, however, finds him in precisely the
same circumstance: the Pequod sunk, he floats alone "on a
soft and dirge-like main" for "almost one whole day and
night" (411). Like the final chapters of Walden and Sartor,
it is an ending that suggests a text cannot have the final
word or resolve any If, but must continue on, forever
testing new voices. Ishmael's "Epilogue" tempers Ahab's
thunderous, decisive finale as much as Thoreau's
"Conclusion" qualifies "Spring" and the Editor's essays on
dandies and tailors qualify "Natural Supernaturalism."
Melville's anti-climax, though, is more mournful and
sobering than the others. Its last image does not look ahead

to an unfinalizable future but signals the grief brought on
by the past, the displacement resulting from his avoidance
of authoritative postures: the Rachel, "in her retracing
search after her missing children, only found another
orphan" (566). Multiplicity and open-ended dialogue have
wearied Ishmael at the end of the book, left him alone to
wonder: "Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no
more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the
weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father
hidden?" (485).

A theme common to almost all interpretations of dialogue is that "the Other"--other cultures, other perspectives, other modes of vision and understanding--must be entertained if authentic dialogue is to be possible. In contrast to traditional epistemology, writes one critic, dialogue emphasizes process over essence and gives rise to a knowledge that is "shrouded in skepticism," potentially reflecting "accomodations having little to do with categories of knowledge regarded as true and right" (Maranhāo 1). It fosters genuine discussion by valuing other possibilities and alternatives, by exposing, juxtaposing, and clarifying every perspective with others.

Ironically, however, this self-consciousness is frequently lost in dialogue studies themselves, many of which account for dialogue in oddly monologic terms. Earlier, for example, I cited the impasse at which Carolyn Porter was left in her Bakhtinian reading of Melville. Melville, she reasons, was potentially a dialogic, writerly, modern novelist, but instead composed monologic lyric poetry and Billy Budd; why? This concluding question betrays a curious deafness to other voices and potentialities, namely ones that do not value dialogue and open-endedness as much as Porter does herself. Indeed, it implies not only an aesthetic failure on Melville's part-- his art diminished when he gave up fiction--but an ethical

and moral one as well: his search for a unified, authoritative voice was a failure of conduct or betrayal of democracy or evasion of duty.[1] Michael André Bernstein has described the assumptions behind such a critical stance in his reference to the "insistently moralizing" rhetoric of Wayne Booth's introduction to Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics:

> ... Booth makes an occasional gesture at pointing
> out possible limitations in Bakhtin, [but] much
> of his introduction reads more like a profession
> of faith or account of a conversion experience
> than a sustained critical argument. Like all such
> professions it asks to be accepted and seconded
> for reasons that leave little ground for doubts
> or qualifications. (198)

As Bernstein argues, exposing such ideologies means more than reasserting the very open-endedness that the concept of dialogue should have prevented, or to argue against, "as a blatant contradiction in terms, the hypostatization of the dialogic principle so prevalent in current criticism." It means we must fully analyze the consequences of dialogue, examine whether "the resonance of multiple voices" could be "a catastrophic threat as much as a sustaining chorale" (199). Despite its apparent merit, that is, dialogue too may have a potentially damaging underside.

More to the point: the high value attached to dialogue in contemporary criticism is itself highly ideological in that dialogue is commonly assumed, not proven, to be a profitable, or even "natural," condition. Both of the

figures who form the conceptual backdrop of this study, Schlegel and Bakhtin, valued dialogue in art because they envisioned the world (nature, selfhood, language) as becoming, unfinalizable, and always open to other voices-- that is, as a great dialogue. Whether or not we too find such a vision of life agreeable, however, it is important to remember that it is in fact no more imperative or verifiable than that of, say, a medieval Florentine or a seventeenth-century English Puritan. Particular blindnesses and insights accompany each of these forms of rhetoric and modes of vision; many writers have gone about their business without giving any place to dialogue. Indeed, given the tenor of contemporary orthodoxies, Dante and Milton could be said to offer instances of what Herbert Marcuse has described as the resistant imagination: the powerfully imagined worlds of The Divine Comedy or Paradise Lost, so hierarchically determined and unresponsive to dialogue,[2] reveal "tabooed and repressed dimensions" of today's critical customs (19), offer a "reality principle" (10) that contradicts the assumptions held by much of contemporary criticism. As I suggested in chapter three, much the same could be said about Melville's text and career as well.

I recognize the paradox I place myself in by making such a suggestion. My epigraph, after all, is drawn from Emerson's tribute to conversation and, in the final sentences of my introduction I asked that my discussions be read as "individual voices, potentially illuminating and

even persuasive, but always in need of others to complement, clarify, and expand upon them." Evidently, like the "contemporary critics" I have been questioning, I have a prejudice in favour of dialogue, and if this conclusion, inspired by the complications Melville creates for discussions of dialogue, has something of a polemical tone, I do not exempt myself from its reproof.

At the same time, however, I do not think that the split I have reached invalidates the conceptual structure I have tried to build; by now the merits of dialogue as a critical category should be clear. It does, however, suggest how precarious such a concept is, and how sharply focused our use of it should be. What I mean to suggest is that "dialogue," when used to discuss novels and poems, is best employed in a descriptive rather than prescriptive sense, that it is more useful as an account of form and vision than as a standard of behaviour against which we judge an author and text. Studied for its social or political implications, for example, Moby Dick would likely be found wanting by many readers, for, though it is itself heavily dialogic, it is deeply ambivalent towards the final value and import of dialogue. When such considerations are deferred, however, and the text is allowed the freedom and play it deserves, the quality of its dialogic emergence is more fully understood: we let it struggle and ask its questions about dialogue without answering them in advance, according to our own set of rules. We allow its uncertainties to become our own, at least for the duration

of the reading.[3]

When "dialogue" is retained primarily as an aesthetic category, we see that the weaknesses of Melville's later career arise less out of any putative political or moral failure than from a distrust for what was the very source of his artistic brilliance. Moby Dick suggests that his faculties were most dynamic and original when when the cacaphonous voices within his mind were allowed to engage in conversation, when he resisted suppressing his inner dialogue for the sake of peace and sanity. Next to it, his verse appears clumsy and conventional. Though he tried to force his mind to conform to a single genre, a single way of discussing and viewing the world, the awkwardness of his poetry betrayed the difficulties he obviously had.

Similar things could be said about Carlyle and Thoreau. Thoreau wrote a number of poems, both before and after the writing of Walden, but none of them, it is generally agreed, are as enduring or accomplished as his works of prose. His mind tended to think dialogically, and was thus more suited to the expansive, processual qualities of prose narrative than the brief, singular bursts of lyric poetry. Similarly, dialogue for Carlyle was only a temporary mode, workable before his social and political stances grew defined and, in time, rigid. This progression toward a more univocal voice may have been politically more potent, and may have solidified his position as the Victorian cultural prophet, but artistically it entailed something of a reduction. As George Levine has said,

Carlyle never gave up the device of a spokesman, but his fictions grew increasingly transparent: as a result he "willed the certitude of his fictions to be his own and was no longer, as he was in Sartor, his own best critic" (78). The certitudes of history and cultural criticism brought the strong, easy attitudes and massive commitments that lyric poetry brought for Melville. True dialogue--the kind that concludes there are no definitive conclusions--was only a moment for Carlyle, but it resulted in the most sustained work of art he produced.

One of the most valuable aspects, then, of the dialogues in Walden, Sartor, and Moby Dick is that they force us to recognize how fragile dialogic acts actually are, even when they seem most flourishing and healthy and natural. Thoreau, Carlyle, and Melville are great dialogists in the sense that their art is at its most penetrating and exciting when it is developed as conversation, as voices interacting and interanimating one another without synthesizing resolution. And yet these same writers--like Schlegel, who eventually converted to Roman Catholicism--reveal how difficult it is to maintain such a perspective, how other (non-ironic, non-dialogic) modes of vision are equally possible. Individually, the works exploit the possibilities of dialogue, offering visions of multiplicity and becoming through the play of heterogeneous voices; set within their authors' respective careers, however, they appear as delicate moments, sustained only in the face of strong impulses in the other direction. Games

of circles, indeed: each text, to paraphrase Emerson, strikes a new light and pushes further the concept of dialogue, representing both the oppressions as well as the emancipations it can bring.

Introduction: Schlegel's Irony and Bakhtin's Dialogism

1. One of my original ambitions for this thesis was the topic of Anglo-American literary relations, but as I proceeded I realized such concerns were far too broad for my relatively modest assignment. The question of literary nationalism likely plays some role in what I have to say, but rather than sprinkling my chapters with hasty and superficial observations, I decided to wait for the future to give such matters the consideration they deserve. On the relation between nineteenth-century British and American literature, see Weisbuch and Chai.

2. On _Sartor_, see Abrams; on _Walden_, see Anderson; on _Moby Dick_, see Howard and Thompson.

3. Cf. Hillis Miller's "Tradition and Difference."

4. On Byron as a romantic ironist, see Mellor and Furst. For Melville's familiarity with the Schlegel brothers and his boyhood admiration of Byron, see Sealts; for Thoreau's knowledge of Byron and his college reading of Schlegel, see Sattelmeyer.

5. The only critic I am aware of who has noted the connection between the two men is Tzvetan Todorov, whose commentary I discuss briefly later in the introduction.

6. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these concepts is the notion of "polyphony," which many have misinterpreted as a synonym for heteroglossia or dialogue. The best corrective to this misunderstanding comes in chapter six of Morson's and Emerson's joint study. "Polyphony," in their view, refers to a particular type of relation between author and character, and characterizes only the

novels of Dostoevsky, not the novel as a genre. Dialogue, as I understand Bakhtin, is the foundation of the novel as a genre, and "polyphony" is the reason Dostoevsky is the greatest of all novelists. In the present study, I am interested only in the former. That dialogue and heteroglossia can exist without polyphony is supported by Bakhtin's own appreciative discussions of pre-Dostoevskian authors--including many of the ones commonly associated with irony, such as Cervantes, Sterne, and Byron.

7. It goes without saying that this summary of the changes in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century is a gross simplification. For a fuller introduction to these changes and their relation to irony, see chapter one of Mellor's ERI and Furst's Fictions of Romantic Irony.

8. An ideal discussion of irony would include not only such figures as Tieck and Solgar, but Kant, Fichte, and Schiller, who provided most of the categories for Schlegel's thought. For reasons of space, I have restricted my discussion to Schlegel's early work, in particular the Lyceum aphorisms, the Athanaeum aphorisms, and the Dialogue on Poetry. I am well aware of the limitations this selection entails. Gary Handwerk, for example, has shown that Schlegel's later writings are equally valuable to an understanding of irony, in particular the form his study designates "ethical irony." Indeed, if Handwerk's account is accurate, Schlegel's later work, with its emphasis on ethics and intersubjective truth, would be as compatible with Bakhtinian vocabulary as his early work. Such a study would be interesting and important, but would involve an entirely different cluster of interests--ethics and politics, for example--than those I focus on here. I have chosen to restrict my discussion to Schlegel's early texts in part because they seem the most illuminating for

a study of Carlyle, Melville, and Thoreau.

Having restricted myself to this period of Schlegel's thought, however, I must emphasize that the following account of irony does not in any way pretend to be exhaustive. For more thorough overviews, see Mellor, Furst, Garber, Hamlin, Wessel, Behler, and Eichner.

9. See, for example, Glicksberg and Muecke, whose considerations of irony are tinged with a degree of _angst_ not found in the early Schlegel.

10. Aphorisms from the _Lyceum_ (_L_), _Athanaeum_ (_A_), and _Selected Ideas_ (_SI_) are followed by the fragment number; references to the _Dialogue on Poetry_ (_DP_) are to the page number.

11. One could perhaps extend the comparison and suggest that the _Lyceum_ and _Athanaeum_ fragments, when grouped together, provide another model of Schlegel's novel, the white spaces between them on the page representing the irreducible gaps between perspectives and moments in time.

12. "Reconstruct" is a term from Wayne C. Booth's _Rhetoric of Irony_, which has often been criticized for ignoring Schlegel among his otherwise assiduous classifications (see Furst, Mellor, and Haney).

13. Bakhtin's discussion of the Platonic dialogue can be found in "Novel and Epic," 21-26, and _PDP_, 107-13. Cf. Nietzsche's view of Platonic dialogue as a symptom of Greece's fall into dialectics and empty logic, 86-93.

14. This quotation, from Schlegel's _Athanaeum_ number 16, is Todorov's translation, and differs slightly from the one offered by Behler and Struc: "Other types of poetry are completed and can now be entirely analyzed. The

Romantic type of poetry is still becoming...."

15. In the introduction to his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin traces how the category of the grotesque was brought back by the Romantics, including Schlegel, in reaction to Enlightenment rationality. Though he praises this revitalization, he does suggest that the Romantics added an element of gloom and terror alien to the fearless laughter of Rabelesian carnival (39).

16. Mecke's claims for Bakhtin and the temporal element of narrative may seem unusual at first, since one of the things Bakhtin praises most about Dostoevsky is his portrayal of "simultaneity" (PDP 28). Outside of PDP, however, Bakhtin lauded different forms of multiplicity, in particular Goe'.ie's method of representing emergence over long periods of time. For discussions of spatial versus temporal multiplicity, see Bakhtin's Bildungsroman essay and Caryl Emerson's "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin."

17. In one of Bakhtin's only other direct references to Schlegel, there is a similar desire to expand upon a Schlegelian insight. In "Epic and Novel," he cites the Lyceum's description of the novel as "the Socratic dialogues of our time" before giving his own version of the serio-comic dialogues and their role in the development of the novel (22).

18. Bakhtin's theory of selfhood has been the source of some contention, namely because the authorship of Freudianism: A Marxist Critique, in which the phrase "inner speech" appears as a description of individual psychology, has been one of the biggest questions of Bakhtin scholarship. Indeed, at the beginning of their chapter on psychology, Morson and Emerson say that the topic of selfhood, tied up as it is in the "disputed texts," was "perhaps the

most difficult part" of writing their study (172). Having said this, however, they go on to give a solid account of the topic, including the term "inner speech," and I feel confident following their lead when they take "Discourse in the Novel," pp. 337-52, as the key text for an understanding of the Bakhtinian self.

Chapter One: Thoreau's Walden, Walden's Thoreaus

1. Though he does, of course, employ a number of fictional devices. Lawrence Buell, suggesting that Walden is the closest the Transcendentalists came to a major work of prose fiction, has surveyed some of the most important of them, including the creation of dramatic encounters and the characterization of the speaker. See 296 ff.

2. The image of Thoreau as Emerson's uncritical disciple, widespread in the nineteenth century, has not been entirely laid to rest. In addition to Melville's famously derisive portrait of them in The Confidence Man, unflattering nineteenth-century evaluations can be found in James Russell Lowell's "Thoreau" and two by Henry James: Hawthorne, p. 96-7, and "Ralph Waldo Emerson," p. 264. In the twentieth century, Sherman Paul's The Shores of America has been most responsible for the image of Thoreau as a strict Emersonian; Paul, however, tends to see their relation as a boon to Thoreau more than evidence of his lack of originality.

3. See Baym, "Thoreau's View of Science," 222-4, for a discussion of Emerson and Science.

4. I am grateful to Sue Elmslie, a doctoral candidate at McGill University, for the phrase "extended play," which she used independently of me in a seminar paper to characterize Walden.

5. Henry Golemba has also designated the voice of "Economy" as "the primary voice" which, as the text progresses, comes to be privileged as no more than (in his words) "the first in a choral symphony of voices" (244). Golemba, however, emphasizes the indeterminacy of these voices less than he proposes. Relying on a theory of parody in which the parodied discourse is actually reinforced, he claims that Thoreau employs a strategy in which he was able to sound free and undogmatic while simultaneously remaining true to his profoundest beliefs, i.e., the ideas announced in "Economy."

6. For an example of such an argument, see Schueller, "Carnival Rhetoric and Extra-Vagance in Thoreau's Walden," from which most of the fashionable critical terms of the last two sentences have been drawn. Schueller suggests that Thoreau begins by depriving "traditional language of its socio-ideological signification" (41), which according to her is a "profoundly democratic" (i.e., unquestionably good) impulse, part and parcel of his effort to champion "a metaphysics of difference" (33). Though plurivocity is Thoreau's aim, however, he effort finally fails because, while he insists that "human life is and should be variously interpretable, he felt compelled to create his own unified vision" (44).

7. Sharon Cameron has argued that, after 1851, Thoreau began to regard his journal as his chief artistic endeavor, "an autonomous composition" (25).

Chapter Two: Carlyle's Sartor Resartus: Order Out of Chaos

1. Quoted in Brookes, p. 48. That Brookes also uses this for an epigraph to a chapter is appropriate, since, as I will suggest, it was partly his reading that fomented my own

argument. Indeed, the source of my second epigraph, Nabokov's <u>Pale Fire</u>, hints at the different directions Brookes and I take Frothingham's serene and measured appraisal.

2. For an overview of Carlyle and fiction, see Moore.

3. The concept of character that follows is particularly indebted to Caryl Emerson's "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin," an invaluable critique of Bakhtin's (in)famous distinction between the "monologic" Tolstoy and the "dialogic" Dostoevsky. See also Bakhtin's <u>Bildungsroman</u> essay and chapters two and three of <u>PDP</u>.

4. Bakhtin notes an analogous situation in <u>PDP</u>: "In Dostoevsky's multi-voiced novels, there is significantly less language differentiation, that is, fewer language styles, territorial and social dialects, professional jargons, and so forth, than in the work of many writer-monologists" (182). What is more important than stylistic differentiation, he suggests, are the angles at which different voices are juxtaposed.

5. Cf. Bakhtin's observations in "Epic and Novel," pp. 61 ff., on the polyglossia and linguistic self-consciousness of the Roman literary world.

6. Peterson ascribes this to a psychological impulse in the Editor: he is "psychologically unable to accept the chaos of the paper bags" (32). A better interpretation, I think, would assign it to the professional and social duties inherent in the position of Editor: he must organize it according to accepted, "centripetal" norms.

7. Janice Haney has argued Teufelsdröckh's "revolution" marks the movement away from early Romantic preoccupations with the self to the mix of social and

private concern in Victorian Romanticism.

8. Dostoevsky's review of <u>Anna Karenina</u> can be found in <u>Critical Essays on Tolstoy</u>, ed. Wasiolek. Chris R. Vanden-Bossche argues this point in narratological terms. In creating his two characters, Carlyle embodies the two chief "desires" of the narrative writer, the desire for order and closure (the Editor) and the desire for continued narrative and openness (Teufelsdröckh).

Chapter Three: <u>Moby Dick</u> and the Horizons of Dialogue

1. See, for example, Baym's "Melville's Quarrel With Fiction."

2. I have drawn the word "stereotypical" from Brian Wolf (174), though he offers it in passing and without the dubious connotations I give it here.

3. Brodhead's chapter on <u>Moby Dick</u> offers the best account of the text's competing narrative schemes and the visions informing them.

4. These characterizations are drawn from Seelye, pp. 4-5. Seelye's study is notable in the present context because it is one of the few dealing with Melville as a Romantic ironist. Most of his argument is based upon a dichotomy between what he sees as the "light" (philanthropic, relativistic) Ishmael and the "dark" (misanthropic, absolutist) Ahab, with the irony of the text springing from the tension between these poles. Such a dichotomy seem to me too skeletal and, as I shall suggest, neglects Ishmael's darker aspects and the ways his consciousness is itself deeply ironic.

5. Cf. Guetti and Brodtkorp, whose examination of Ishmael's

language (the latter from a phenomenological perspective)
lead them to some of the same conclusions.

Conclusion

1. As I suggested in a footnote to the Thoreau chapter,
   Malini Schueller's essay on <u>Walden</u> is another instance of
   dialogue as ideology. Indeed, to mention these two essays
   in the same note is perhaps unfair to Porter; while her
   study makes a number of valuable insights into <u>Moby
   Dick</u>, Schueller's seems to me genuinely doctrinaire and
   opportunistic in its use of Bakhtinian theory.

2. In its portrayal of Satan and his legions, for example,
   Milton's poem betrays a profound wariness towards the
   grotesque, a category whose liminality, as I suggested in
   the introduction, is intensely dialogic and which,
   unsurprisingly, captured the attention of both Schlegel
   and Bakhtin.

3. What I have in mind, of course, is Schiller's classic
   definition of art as "play." Such an invocation entangles
   me, again, in a number of knotty paradoxes, many of which
   have been exposed and attacked by contemporary critics
   who devalue the aesthetic as a political and social
   opiate. Still, defenses of art as "free space" do exist:
   see George Levine's introduction to <u>Aesthetics and
   Ideology</u> and the essays collected in Denis Donoghue's <u>The
   Old Moderns</u>, to name only two of the texts that have
   most influenced my own thinking.

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