CHAPTER I

Polyphony

Polyphony, a musical term, deriving from the Greek polys “many” and phonos “sound” used of music in which the parts are independent of each other though forming an acceptable harmony. It is thus a synonym of counterpoint though the term is generally associated with the technique of polyphonic music. The term polyphony is used of vocal works of the 16th century, e.g. a polyphonic chanson, madrigal, or motet as opposed to homophony used of music in which the conception is predominantly harmonic. (Benton 209)

Bakhtin adopts the term polyphony, literally meaning many voices for defining the new aesthetics in Dostoevsky’s novels and he says that this comparison of the Dostoevskian novels to polyphony is intended as a graphic analogy. For him the image of polyphony and counterpoint simply indicates the new problems, which arise when the structure of the novel goes beyond the bounds of ordinary monological unity, just as new problems arose in music when the bounds of the single voice were exceeded. But music and the novel are too unlike for there to be more than a figurative analogy, simple metaphor, between them. But for the lack of a more appropriate designation he says he turns this metaphor into the term “polyphonic novel” (Problems 18).

For Kundera “Polyphony in music is the simultaneous presentation of two or more voices (melodic lines) that are perfectly bound together but still keep their relative independence.” And in novel it is the “opposite” of “unilinear composition” (sic) (The Art 74).

As regards the relation between polyphony and dialog Bakhtin has this to say: “The
polyphonic novel as a whole is thoroughly dialogical [sic]. Dialogical relationships obtain between all the elements of its structure, i.e. the elements are contrapuntally counterposed.” But for Bakhtin dialogical relationships constitute a much more far-reaching phenomenon than merely the relationships between speeches in a literary composition. For him they are an almost universal phenomenon, which permeates all of human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life, and in general, everything that has meaning and significance (Problems 34). “The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction” (Dialogic Imagination 280).

Kundera agrees that there are only “two archetype-forms” in his novels, the predominant of which is the “polyphonic composition that brings heterogeneous elements together with an architecture based on the number seven” and the other being “farcical, homogeneous, theatrical composition that verges on the improbable.” Almost all his novels with the exception of Farewell Party belong to the first group of polyphonic composition (The Art 96).

The term “dialogue” or “dialog” used by Bakhtin is different from the dialogue between characters, which is an important feature of drama. He explains the second term as the “dialog expressed within a work’s composition, broken down into the speeches of characters.” The first term comprises the second. Bakhtin considers the dialogue between characters as one of the “artistic-verbal phenomena” like stylization, parody and Skaz. The single trait common to all these phenomena, for Bakhtin, is their “double-directedness.” That is “it is directed both toward the object of speech, like an ordinary word, and toward another word, toward another person’s speech” (Problems 153).
Dialogue in the narrow sense of the word, is only one – though an important one – of the forms of verbal communication. “But dialogue can also be understood in a broader sense, meaning not only direct face-to-face vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever.” A book for Bakhtin is a “verbal performance in print” and therefore an element of verbal communication. Apart from something discussable in actual, real-life dialogue it is extended for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness and for organised, printed reaction in the various forms devised by the particular sphere of verbal communication in question: book reviews, critical surveys, defining influence on subsequent works and so on (Morris 58).

Besides, this sort of a verbal performance inevitably orients itself to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors. It inevitably takes its point of departure from some particular state of affairs involving a scientific problem or a literary style. Thus the printed verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological colloquy of large scale: it responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support and so on. Any utterance however weighty and complete it may be “is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication (sic)” (Morris 59). Kundera has always felt himself “in dialogue with those who preceded . . . [him and] with those still to come” (Testaments Betrayed 15-16).

Dialogue is generally accepted as the basic trope in all of Bakhtin’s thought. There is no existence, no meaning, no word or thought that does not enter into dialogue or dialogic relations with the other that does not exhibit intertextuality in both time and space. Bakhtinian theory is a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge in modern
epistemologies, which seeks to grasp human behaviour through the use humans make of language. Bakhtin with his dialogic concept of language, which he proposes as fundamental, occupies a unique place among these.

“Dialogue is an obvious master key to the assumptions that guided Bakhtin’s work throughout his whole career: dialogue is present in one way or another throughout the notebooks he kept from his youth to his death at the age of 80.” As becoming increasingly evident Bakhtin’s lifelong meditation on dialogue not only holds a unique position in literary theory but that the dialogism is also implicated in the history of modern thinking about thinking (Holquist 15).

Dialogism is accepted as part of a major tendency in European thought to reconceptualize epistemology the better to accord with the new versions of mind and the revolutionary models of the world that began to emerge in the natural sciences in the nineteenth century. It is seen as an attempt to frame a theory of knowledge for an age when relativity dominates physics and cosmology and thus when non-coincidence of one kind or another – of sign to its referent, of the subject to itself – raises troubling new questions about the very existence of mind. Bakhtin’s thought is an investigation on how we know, an investigation based on “dialogue” precisely because, unlike many other theories of knowing, the site of knowledge it posits is never unitary. Describing “dialogism” by a cumbersome term “meditation on knowledge” Holquist says he is encouraged to do this because from his earliest work Bakhtin is highly critical of what he calls “epistemologism.” Because for him a theory of knowledge changes into mere epistemologism when there is posited a unitary and unique consciousness devoid of another consciousness outside itself (Holquist 18).

In dialogism the very capacity to have consciousness is based on “otherness.” To be
accurate it is the differential relation between a centre and all that is not that centre. Centre has now become a concept that has been successfully deconstructed and attacked as the illusion of presence. But “centre” in Bakhtin’s thought is to be correctly defined. Here it is a “relative” rather than an absolute term and as such, one with no claim to absolute privilege, least of all one with transcendent ambitions (Holquist 18).

For Bakhtin self is dialogic, a relation. Self is a concept that is, of late, very much being questioned as the concept of “centre.” And because it is so fundamental a relation, dialogue can help us understand how other relationships work even in those binarisms like signifier/signified, speech/writing, nature/culture. Apart from anything else self/other is a relation of simultaneity. Simultaneity deals with ratios of same and different in space and time and hence Bakhtin was always concerned with space/time. Bakhtin’s thought was considerably influenced by new developments in physics after the collapse of the old Newtonian cosmos. It was a dream of unity in physics that could serve as a proper setting for a dream of unity in Newton’s theology and this in turn influenced philosophy in the absolute oneness of consciousness in Hegelian dialectic. Dialog in contrast to this knows no sublation. Bakhtin’s emphasis is upon differences that cannot be overcome: separateness and simultaneity are basic conditions of existence. The physics suitable to such a universe was post-Newtonian. Bakhtin grew up in the middle of raging debates over the concepts of space and time. Of the scientists and philosophers then, Einstein is most helpful in grasping Bakhtin’s thought. Though it is not direct influence, dialogism is a version of relativity theory.

Michael Holquist relates relativity theory to dialogism in his book Dialogism. Einstein divised many just-so stories or thought experiments to avoid physical limits on experimentation. Holquist sees parallels between these experiments and Bakhtin’s attempts
to use the situation of dialogue as a way of overcoming traditional limitations of ideas of the subject. Both bank upon a “philosophical optics,” a conceptual means for seeing processes invisible to any other lens. More particularly, both resort to experiments with seeing in order to mediate on the necessity of the other. Motion, it is accepted has only a relative meaning. That is, one body’s motion has meaning only in relation to another body or – since it is a mutual relationship – has meaning only in dialogue with another body (Holquist 21).

Dialogism emphasizes that all meaning is relative in the sense that it is produced as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space where bodies may be considered as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to physical bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies). In Bakhtin as in Einstein the position of the observer is fundamental.

For Kundera the spirit of the novel is profoundly linked to the relativity of the world (Fuentes, “The Other K” 262). Kundera sees novel as a model of the Western world “grounded in the relativism and ambiguity of things human.” For him novel is “incompatible with the totalitarian universe.” This incompatibility is deeper than the one that divides a dissident from an apparatchik or a human rights campaigner from a torturer because he considers it “not only political or moral but ontological.” “Totalitarian Truth [sic] excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate” what he “would call the spirit of the novel” (sic) (The Art 14).

For Kundera man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished because he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are based on this desire. They can cope with the novel only by translating its
language of relativity and ambiguity into their own apodictic and dogmatic discourse. They 
require that some one be right: either Anna Karenina is the victim of a narrow-minded 
tyrant, or Karenin is the victim of an immoral woman; either K. is an innocent man crushed 
by an unjust court, or the court represents divine justice and K. is guilty. “This ‘either-or’ 
encapsulates an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to 
look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge [sic]. This inability makes the novel’s 
wisdom (the wisdom of uncertainty) hard to accept and understand” (The Art 7).

Cognitive time/space is the arena in which all perception unfolds. Dialogism, like 
relativity, takes it for granted that nothing can be perceived except in relation to something 
else. The mind is structured so that the world is always perceived according to this contrast. 
More precisely, what distinguishes a figure from other is the opposition between a time and 
a space that our consciousness uses to model its own limits and the entirely different 
temporal and spatial categories employed by the same consciousness to model the limits of 
other persons’ and things’ (Holquist 22).

At a basic level therefore Michael Holquist sees dialogism not just as a dualism but a 
necessary multiplicity in human perception. For Bakhtin there is no one meaning sought 
after: the world is a vast congeries of contesting meanings, a heteroglossia that no single 
term capable of unifying its diversifying energies is possible. As Bakhtin sees the world as 
activity so he defines existence as an event. Seeming contradictory, he defines existence as 
“the unique and unified event of being,” a refrain in Bakhtin’s early work (Holquist 24).

The above requires an explanation. The activity of the world appears to each of us as 
a series of events that uniquely occur in the site I, and only I, occupy in the world. If ‘A’ 
cuts his finger with a knife, an “other” may be intellectually aware that ‘A’ is in pain and
may deeply empathise with him. But the pain happens to ‘A’ alone, it is addressed to where ‘A’ is; not to the other. One way in which the uniqueness of one’s place in life may be defined is by the uniqueness of the death that will be her/his. We shall all die and a person cannot die in other’s place (Holquist 24). The following extract from The Book of Laughter and Forgetting shows that the dialogic positions of an individual emerge from the unique position that he occupies in existence. Jan in part 7 – “Border” – meets Passer who is now a cancer patient and the author-narrator has this to say on it: “Long ago, the first time Jan met him, Passer had spoken about mankind’s great hopes, his fist pounding the table, his eyes flashing endless passion. This time he spoke about the hopes of his body rather than the hopes of mankind” (214). That is why Kundera says “... when someone steps on my foot, only I feel the pain.” Therefore for him “The basis of the self is not thought but suffering, which is the most fundamental of all feelings” (Immortality 225).

Nevertheless, the event of existence is “unified”; this is because though it occurs in sites, which are unique, those sites are not complete in themselves. They are never alone too. They need others to provide the stability demanded by the structure of perception if what occurs is to have meaning. In Bakhtin’s philosophical writings the word “event” is almost never used alone, but always in conjunction with the word “being.” Bakhtin insists on being as an “event.” The obligatory grouping of these words thus is a syntactic combination that points to the mutuality of their meaning. It also indicates the etymological relations of the two words. The Russian word for “event,” sobytie is a word having both a root and a stem: it is formed from the word for being – bytie by adding prefix implying sharedness “so-, co-”. “ ‘Being’ for Bakhtin then is, not just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always co-being” (Holquist 25). Consequently Bakhtin regards the character as an event and an object that can be filled into a predetermined
category, a view formalist approach might suggest. Therefore, Bakhtin always examines the relation between author and the hero in terms of a dialogue between one consciousness and another. The above concept of the character is an important premise upon which almost all the novels of Kundera are written.

**Selfhood as Authorship**

Bakhtin states that for Dostoevsky dialogue begins at the same point where consciousness begins (Problems 34). According to dialogism selfhood is authored. The signifier “tree” signifies tree and most nouns work on similar lines. This is not the case with the pronoun for the self, for what “I” refers to cannot be seen, at least in the same way that the word “tree” enables us to see a tree. Existence is like language. The single word “I” stands in language very much as the single eye of the fates as used in Greek mythology. The three old women shared the same organ and if they did not, they could not see. In order to have one’s own vision, each must use the means by which others see. In dialogism this sharedness is indeed the nature of self. For in order to see ourselves, we must share the vision of others. Dialogism therefore shows how a person gets his self from the other. Only the other’s categories will let a person be an object of his own perception. As Holquist puts it, “I see my self as I conceive others might see it. In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside. In other words, I author myself”(28). Paul in Immortality agrees to this: “... our self is a mere illusion, ungraspable, indescribable, misty, while the only reality, all too easily graspable and describable, is our image in the eyes of others” (143).

Kundera’s story, “Dr. Havel after Ten Years” in Laughable Loves can be read as a good illustration of this conception of self in dialogism. Some characters playact attaching themselves to what they consider as important and beautiful women in order to give a boost to their self-importance and their image before the eyes of others. Dr. Havel and the Editor
of the Spa magazine, who decides to exhibit his girl friend, do this. This is what the narrator says on it:

> For he himself was not merely seen by the eyes of his partner, but both of them together were seen and judged by the eyes of others (by the eyes of the world) and it was very important to him that the world should be pleased with his girl, for he knew that through her was judged his choice, his taste, his status, thus he himself. (184)

Besides, this conception of selfhood as dialogically authored – particularly of man in relation with women – is present throughout in Kundera as in another example from the part 1, “Lost Letters” in The Book where breaking up with Zdena filled Mirek with a feeling of boundless freedom and “soon he married a woman whose beauty gave his self-esteem a big boost” (10).

Along Bakhtinian lines self has been conceived as a multiple phenomenon of essentially three elements: “a center, a not-center and the relation between them.” Holquist calls dialogism a form of architectonics, the general science of ordering parts into a whole. A relation always involves ratio and proportion. Bakhtin also emphasizes that a relation is never static, but always in the process of being made or unmade. So much as a relation involves the “construction of ratios,” it is aesthetic in almost the same way that a statue or a building can be judged in terms of how its parts have been constructed with respect to each other (Holquist 29).

Here also Bakhtin is drawing attention to the importance of authoring. Sharing existence as an event means among other things that we are – we cannot choose not to be – in dialogue, not only with other human beings, but also with the world we inhabit. “The
world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, that is to the degree that we can respond to addressivity. We are responsible, in the sense that we are compelled to respond, we cannot choose but give the world an answer” (Holquist 30). All of us occupy a unique place in existence and this uniqueness one occupies in existence is answerability. “To be means to communicate dialogically. When the dialog is finished, all is finished. Therefore the dialog, in essence, cannot and must not come to an end” (Problems 213). Kundera seems to suggest this fact when he says in The Book that “All man’s life among men is nothing more than a battle for the ears of others” (80).

“Bakhtin’s metaphor for the unity of the two elements constituting the relation of self and other is ‘dialogue’, the simultaneous unity of differences in the event of utterance.” Bakhtin illustrates this by his formulation of the surplus of seeing. If two people face each other although they share an external place and time each perceive or see something that the other does not. Simply put, if we envisage A and B facing each other, A sees things about B (such as basically the face) and the world (such as the tree behind B’s back) which are out of B’s sight. Same in the case with B. He sees things which A cannot see. In addition to the things they see jointly there are aspects of their situation each of them can see only on their own, i.e. only from the unique place each of them occupies in the situation. The aspect of the situation that A sees but B cannot is A’s “surplus of seeing” and likewise of B too. A knows that B has a surplus and B knows it as well. By adding the surplus that has been “given” to A, A can construct an image that includes the whole of him and the room, including those things that he cannot physically see. In other words, he is able to “conceive” or construct a whole out of the different situations they are in together. That is in such a way one can author a unified version of the event of a joint existence with other with his/her unique place in it by combining things he/she sees which are different from
Kundera’s first novel *The Joke* is a brilliant illustration of this phenomenon, presenting the same story though the monologues of four characters: Ludvik, Helena, Jaroslav, and Kostka.

**Language as Dialogue**

Dialogism begins by assuming existence as an event, the event of being responsible for the particular situation existence assumes as it emerges in the unique place a person occupies in it. Existence is addressed to a person in a flux of messages in the same way stimuli from the natural environment come to individual organisms. Some of the potential messages come to the individual in the form of primitive physiological stimuli, some in the form of natural language and some in social codes, or ideologies. As long as a person is in existence he/she must respond to all the stimuli either by ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing meaning out of such utterances (Holquist 47).

Bakhtin translates Dostoevsky’s dictum that the heart of man is a battleground between good and evil into the proposition that the mind of man is a theatre in which the war between the centripetal impulses of cognition and the centrifugal forces of the world is fought out. One can make sense of the world only by reducing the number of its meanings – which are potentially infinite – to a restricted set. A helpful analogy here is the way a given natural language selects out of all possible noises a limited number of sounds it will process as being significant (Holquist 48). The inescapable state as a human being in which a person has “no alibi for” his “existence” he must engage in a constant dialogue with the world as it is given to him. This particular condition is what Bakhtin calls addressivity. Only in this condition can he give his own life meaning and value (Morris 245).

Addressivity means, “the event of constantly responding to utterances from different
worlds,” a person passes through (Holquist 48).

Addressivity suggests not only that consciousness is always consciousness of something, but that existence itself is always the existence of something. Dialogism opposes the Heideggerian distinction between being as such (das Sein) and a particular being (ein Seiende). A phenomenon like thirst does not exist in the natural world; it happens to a person and lack of water means nothing without the response of thirst. So mentally nothing means anything until it achieves a response. Simply put, addressivity is expressivity. What we usually call life is only an activity which a person performs as an answer or response to the world. “When I cease to respond, when there are – as we say so accurately in English – no signs of life, I am dead” (Holquist 48-49).

In dialogism, life is expression. Expression means to make meaning, and meaning comes about only through the medium of signs. This is true for all levels of existence, something exists only if it means. Utterance is a concept that assumes importance when language is conceived as dialogue. On a basic level utterance is any unit of language, from a single word to an entire text. More importantly, however, an utterance for Bakhtin is not so much a purely linguistic concept, as the locus of encounter between one self-consciousness/mind and the world with all its socio-historical meaning; the utterance is always an answer to a previous utterance, and always expects an answer in the future (Morris 251). Bakhtin’s concept of utterance is different from Saussurian concept of “speech” (parole) in which apparently willed performance is a key aspect. Utterance as it is used in dialogism is not the completely free act of choice Saussure posited. The Bakhtinian utterance is dialogic precisely in the degree to which every aspect of it is a give-and-take between the local need of a particular speaker to communicate a specific meaning, and the global requirements of language as a generalizing system. Though there is some degree of
relative freedom in the utterance, it is always gained with the background of several types of pre-existing restraints. Of these restraints some had already been identified by linguists like Jakobson and some by Bakhtin himself (Holquist 60).

One of the constraints is that “an utterance is never in itself originary: an utterance is always an answer” (Holquist 60). It is an answer to another utterance that precedes it. It therefore is always conditioned by, and in turn qualifies, the prior utterance to a greater or lesser degree. Before being any specific thing an utterance expresses the general condition of each speaker’s addressivity making it necessary for a person to answer for the particular place he/she occupies. This means discourse of any kind is segmented not only by words and sentences, but also by protocols that establish whose turn it is to make the next utterance.

It is this in-between-ness of all utterances which affirms that communication can take place only in society, for the rules that determine precedence in speaking develop out of group practice. The norms that rule the utterance are similar to other social norms, such as those found in administrative and judicial systems.

These norms primarily lie in the individual minds of particular people in particular groups. In dialogism the “I” of such individual minds is always assumed to be a function of the “We” that is their particular group.

An utterance therefore is steeped in society. It is thus a border phenomenon between what is said and what is not said. The simultaneity of the said and the unsaid is most obvious in the area of intonation. Intonation is the immediate interface between said and unsaid and as Bakhtin says in “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art” in *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*. It pumps energy from an actual life situation into verbal discourse and
endows anything linguistically stable with living historical momentum and uniqueness (Holquist 61).

Intonation in utterance is a clear indication of the other’s presence, implying a kind of portrait in sound of the addressee to whom the speaker imagines she/he is speaking. A common example of this phenomenon is found in telephonic conversation when someone talks to another whose identity we do not know, but whose relation to the speaker we can guess from her/his speech patterns. This is why Holquist calls intonation as a “material expression of the shaping role the other plays in the speech production of any individual self” (Holquist 61).

Bakhtin uses the term “genre” as the particular way by which consciousness models experience. In a sense Bakhtin’s use of the term “genre” broadly corresponds to artistic genres. Besides, Bakhtin’s examples of “genre” suggest that for him the term was reasonably fluid. He, for instance, speaks of “serious” genres like epic and tragedy, “serio-comical” genres like Menippean satire and the Socratic dialogue, and even “inserted” genres like letters and found manuscripts. Bakhtin also makes a distinction between “pure” genres and “carnivalised” genres. Among the various genres, a special place is reserved for the novel, since it is the genre which most forcefully resists canonization. Indeed, the other genres can themselves be “novelised,” a process by which they acquire “novelness” (Morris 248).

Bakhtin also speaks about “speech genres.” He uses this term in the specific sense to describe the broad set of linguistic conventions which speakers by and large tacitly agree upon as operative for any discursive context (written or spoken). “Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own
The richness and diversity of speech genres for Bakhtin are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible. Each sphere of human activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres which differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. The extreme heterogeneity of speech genres include short rejoinders of daily dialogue, everyday narration, writing (in all its various forms), the brief standard military command, the fairly variegated repertoire of business documents and the diverse world of commentary (in the broad sense of the word: social, political).

Bakhtin then makes a distinction between primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres which to him is very significant. Primary speech genres are also known as “everyday genres,” meaning everyday life. These include talking about weather or ordering food. Secondary (complex) speech genres – novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth – arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical and so on. And while in formation, they absorb and digest various (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. These primary genres are transformed and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. As example Bakhtin points out that rejoinders of everyday dialogue or letters found in a novel retain their form and their everyday significance only on the plane of the novel’s content. They enter into actual reality only through the novel as a whole, that is, as a literary artistic event and not as everyday life. “The novel as a whole is an utterance just as rejoinders in everyday dialogue or private letters are (they do have a common nature), but unlike these,
the novel is a secondary (complex) utterance . . .” (Morris 82).

The deciding factor in the demarcation of boundaries of each concrete utterance as a unit of speech communication is the “change of speaking subjects, that is, a change of speakers.” Any utterance – from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise – has an absolute beginning and an absolute end. The beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and the end is followed by the responsive utterances of others. The speaker ends the utterance as Bakthin says in order to relinquish floor for the other or to make room for the other’s active responsive understanding. One can understand the change of speaking subjects most simply and clearly in actual dialogue. “Because of its simplicity and clarity, dialogue is a classic form of speech communication” (Morris 82).

The assimilation of language takes place through utterances. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances. Further speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do. We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing other’s speech, we guess its genre from the very first words: we predict a certain length (that is, the approximate length of the speech whole) and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole, which is only later differentiated during the speech process. In the absence of speech genres and without its mastery we would have to “originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time” and the speech communication itself would be impossible in such a case (Morris 84).

Any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion. It is the active position of the speaker in one referentially semantic sphere or another. Therefore each utterance is
characterized primarily by a particular referentially semantic content. The choice of linguistic means and speech genre is determined by the referentially semantic assignments (plan) of the speech subject (or author). This, says Bakhtin, is the first aspect of the utterance that determines its compositional and stylistic features. The second aspect of the utterance that determines its makeup is the expressive act which is “the speaker’s subjective emotional evaluation of the referential semantic content of his utterance.” No absolutely neutral utterance is possible (Morris 84-85).

The sentence as a unit of language is neutral and has no expressive aspect. It acquires expressive aspect only in an utterance. Bakhtin illustrates this:

A sentence like ‘He died’ obviously embodies a certain expressiveness, and a sentence like ‘What joy!’ does so to an even greater degree. But in fact we perceive sentences of this kind as entire utterances, and in a typical situation, that is, as kinds of speech genres that embody typical expression. As sentences they lack this expressiveness and are neutral. Depending on the context of the utterance, the sentence ‘He died’ can also reflect a positive, joyful, even a rejoicing expression. And the sentence ‘What joy!’ in the context of the particular utterance can assume an ironic or bitterly sarcastic tone . . . (Morris 85)

Bakhtin then goes on to describe what he calls the “complicated” process involved in the “expressiveness” of an utterance. “Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account.” After all, as regards a given question, in a given matter the utterance occupies a particular definite position, in a given sphere of communication. It is therefore impossible to determine its
Bakhtin concludes stating that however monological the utterance may be as in a scientific or philosophical treatise, however much it may concentrate on its own subject, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition. The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself—philosophical, scientific and artistic— is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought (Morris 86).

An important feature of the utterance is its “addressivity,” the quality of being directed to a person. The composition and style of the utterance depends on those to whom the utterance is addressed. Therefore “Each speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre” (Morris 87).

Novelness as Dialogue

What Bakhtin calls novelty is the study of any cultural activity that treats language as dialogic. The relation between literature and dialogue that Bakhtin points to is not the same as a relation between literature and language. Here lies one of the important differences between Bakhtin and early formalists. The formalist concept of literature was essentially linguistic: the literary text could be a self-contained object because words which constitute it belonged to a unitary, impersonal language code. For Bakhtin contrary to this literary texts are utterances, words that cannot be separated from particular subjects in
specific situations (Holquist 68).

As other kinds of utterances, literary texts depend not only on the activity of the author but also in the peculiar place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed. Words in the literary text are active elements in a dialogic exchange taking place on several different levels at the same time. This is simultaneity. As Holquist explains at the highest level of abstraction this dialogue is between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart and centripetal forces that work to make things cohere. At another level, it is between language at the level of code, that is, the level of prescribed meanings (where “tree” means any “tree”) and language at the level of discourse (where “tree” means this particular tree with all the cultural associations that cling to trees in this time and in this place). In yet another level, simultaneity is a dialogue between the different meanings the same word has at different stages in the history of a particular national language and in various situations within the same historical period. Simultaneity also is found in the dialogue between an author, his characters, and his audience as well as in the dialogue of readers with the characters and their author (Holquist 69).

In chapter 5, “The Word in Dostoevsky” of Problems Bakhtin illustrates the “methodology” of dialogism. By word, Bakhtin means “language in its concrete and living totality, as opposed to language as the specific subject matter of linguistics, which, quite legitimately and necessarily, is detached from certain aspects of the concrete life of the word” (Problems 150). For Bakhtin’s analyses, what he finds of paramount importance are those aspects of the life of the word from which linguistics detaches itself. Therefore he calls his analysis metalinguistic and not linguistic. However metalinguistics cannot ignore linguistics and must utilize its results. Linguistics and metalinguistics study the same
concrete, extremely complex and many sided phenomenon – the word – but from different angles and different viewpoints. They must supplement one another and must not be confused. In practice borders between them are very often violated. What is significant in polyphonic novel is not the presence of specific linguistic styles but the “dialogical angle” at which these styles are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work. Dialogical relationships are a matter of metalinguistics (Problems 150-51).

Dialogical relationships are not reducible to logical or concrete semantic relationships, which are in and of themselves devoid of any dialogical aspect. In order for dialogical relationships to arise among them, they must cloth themselves in the word, become utterances, and become the positions of various subjects, expressed in the word (Problems 151). For example in the following two statements – “Life is good” and “Life is bad” – there exists no dialogical relationship. But if the two judgements are divided between two different utterances of two different subjects, then dialogical relationships arise between them. Even if the same statement “Life is good” is repeated in two utterances of two different subjects, dialogical relationships arise between them suggesting agreement, corroboration, etc.. In short in order to become dialogical, logical and concrete semantic relationships must be embodied. They must enter into a different sphere of existence: they must become a word. That is, it must become an utterance, and have an author, the creator of the given utterance, whose position is expressed. Dialogical relationships are possible not only between (relatively) entire utterances, the dialogic approach can be applied to any meaningful part of an utterance, even to an individual word, if that word is perceived not as an impersonal word of language, but as the sign of another person’s semantic position, as the representative of another person’s utterance. That is, if another person’s voice is heard in that word. Thus dialogical relationships can penetrate an utterance, or even an individual
word, so long as two voices collide within it (Problems 152).

Finally for Bakhtin, “it is possible to have dialogical relationships to one of our own utterances, to its individual parts, and to an individual word within it, if we in some way separate ourselves from them, if we speak with an inner reservation, if we maintain distance from them,” as if limiting or dividing our authorship into two (Problems 153). The chief subject matter of his investigation, “its chief hero” is the “double-voiced word” which for him should become one of the chief objects of study for metalinguistics (Problems 153).

Bakhtin makes a preliminary differentiation between three types of words. What he calls “the first type of word” is the direct, linear, object-oriented word, which denominates, informs, expresses or represents and is intended for direct, object-oriented comprehension. Also there is the “second type” the represented or objectivized word of which the most typical and widespread form is the “direct speech of characters.” Bakhtin here equivocates by including dialog – speech of characters – in both single-directed and double-directed word. The word of the “third type” (double-voiced word or double-directed word) is one in which the word, itself contained a deliberate, reference to another person’s word (Problems 155). In words of the first and of the second types there is in fact only a single voice. These are “single-voiced words” (Problems 156).

For Bakhtin the double-voiced words are present in skaz, dialog, stylization, parody and hidden polemic. A single common trait of all these phenomena, despite their differences is their “double-directedness – it is directed both toward the object of speech, like an ordinary word, and toward another word, toward another person’s speech.” This double-directedness is less obvious in skaz and in the dialog than the other three (Problems 153).
Skaz refers to a narration that imitates the form of an individual oral narrator. The Russian term derived from ‘skazat’ which means to tell, say, etc. has no equivalent in English (Morris 90). David Lodge in his The Art of Fiction defines it as a kind of novel or story which has the characteristics of the spoken rather than the written word in which the narrator is a character who refers to himself (or herself) as “I” and addresses the reader as “you” (18). Dialog, the subdivision Bakhtin here uses means the dialog expressed within a work’s composition, broken down into the speeches of characters (Problems 153).

Skaz may sometimes have only a single direction – towards its object. A speech in a dialog may also strive for direct, object-oriented significance. However mostly both skaz and the speech in a dialog are oriented towards another person’s speech. Skaz stylizes that speech and the dialog speech takes into account, replies to it, or anticipates it.

Dialogism brings a totally new approach to speech and the word while the usual approach regarded word within the bounds of a single monological context. But an author can make use of another person’s word for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has its own orientation, such a word, by virtue of its task, must be perceived as belonging to another person. Then two semantic orientations, two voices are present in a single word. The parodistic word is of this type, as are stylization and the stylized skaz (Problems 156-57).

Stylization is based on the assumption that a certain style has existed. In other words it assumes that the body of stylistic devices which it reproduces had at some time direct significance, that it expressed an ultimate semantic authority. The stylizer uses another person’s word as another person’s thereby casting a slight shadow of objectivization on that word. Another person’s speech is important to the stylizer precisely as the expression of a
particular point of view. He works with other person’s point of view and as a result it becomes conditional. “The conditional word is always a double-voiced word.” Imitation does not make the imitated form conditional, since it takes it seriously, it makes its own, it seeks to master another person’s word. Here the voices merge completely and thus differs imitation from stylization (Problems 157).

Analogous to stylization is the narrator’s story, which acts as a compositional surrogate for the author’s word. The narrator’s story can be developed in the forms of the literary word or in the forms of the spoken word – Skaz in the simple sense of tale. Here also, another person’s verbal manner is used by the author as a point of view, a position, which he needs in order to tell the story. For the author not only the narrator’s individual and typical manner of thinking, experiencing and speaking is important, but above all his manner of seeing and depicting: therein lies his immediate purpose as narrator, as surrogate for the author.

In parody as in stylization, the author speaks through another person’s word, but in contrast to stylization he introduces a semantic direction into that word which is diametrically opposed to its original direction. “The second voice, which has made its home in the other person’s word, collides in a hostile fashion with the original owner and forces him to serve purposes diametrically opposed to his own.” The word becomes the arena of conflict between two voices. Hence the merging of voices, as can occur in stylization or in the narrator’s story is impossible in the parody. The voices here are not only detached and distanced, but are hostilely counterposed. Therefore the deliberate perceptibility of the other person’s word in the parody must be particularly sharp and distinct (Problems 160).

Then Bakhtin discusses the last variety of the third type of word. In stylization and
in parody, the other two varieties of the third type, the author makes use of another person’s words for the expression of his own intentions. In the third variety the other person’s word remains beyond the bounds of author’s speech but the author’s speech takes it into consideration and relates to it. Here the other person’s word is not reproduced with a new interpretation, but it influences and in one way or another determines the author’s word while itself remaining outside it. Such is the word in the hidden polemic and in the majority of cases in the dialog speech. The other person’s word is not reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of the speech would be completely different if this reaction to the implied word were not present. Bakhtin also calls this the phenomenon of “hidden dialogicality” (Problems 163).

In contrast to poetic style prose and especially the novel is completely alien to direct object-oriented authorial word. For the prose artist the world is full of the words of other people, among which he orients himself and for the specific characteristics of which he must have a keen ear. Stylistics should be based more on metalinguistics, than on linguistics, which studies word within the system of dialogical intercourse, that is, within the sphere of the genuine life of the word. The word is not a thing, but rather the eternally mobile, eternally changing medium of dialogical intercourse. It never coincides with a single consciousness as a single voice. The life of the word is in its transferral from one mouth to another, one context to another, one social collective to another, and one generation to another. In the process the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly free itself from the dominion of the contexts of which it has been a part (Problems 167). Kundera is informed by and makes use of Bakhtin’s characterisation of dialogism of words. For him theme is an existential inquiry which in turn is “the examination of certain words, theme words.” “A novel is based primarily on certain fundamental words” (The Art 84).
When each member of a collective of speakers takes possession of a word it is not a neutral word of language, free from the aspirations and valuations of others, uninhabited by foreign voices. He/she receives the word from the voice of another, and the word is filled with that voice. The word arrives in his context from another context which is saturated with other people’s interpretations. His own thought finds the word already inhabited. When one’s own personal “final” word does not exist, then every creative plan, every thought, feeling and experience must be refracted through the medium of another person’s word, style and manner with which it is impossible to directly merge without reservation, distance and refraction. “The hetero-directed double-voiced words clearly predominates” polyphonic works. In such works words “take an intense sideward glance at another person’s word” (Problems 167). As Qian Zhongwen points out the formation of the polyphonic novel Bakhtin asserts is due to the emergence of polyphony (781).