

Race and Postcolonialism, 2

Edward Said, "Orientalism"

A Lecture by Jayson Sae-Saue

We started off with the educational and ethnic background of Said. He was born in Jerusalem, Palestine in 1935 and is of Palestinian heritage. Said was educated in both British and American colonial schools in Cairo, before graduating from Princeton in 1957 and receiving his PhD from Harvard in 1964. His nationality, heritage, and education define him as the subaltern discussed in class last week. Said says he always experienced his identity as complicated, as a US citizen as well as a Palestinian, as an "Oriental" as well as a Western scholar educated in British tradition (Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism). His consciousness is split between two perspectives (subaltern), which provides for an interesting analysis of the western interpretation of the Orient. He is deeply read in western history and literature, which undoubtedly imprinted in him western intellectuality, tradition and morality. Palestinian lineage creates the dichotomized voice, and internal tension, which Said constantly attempts to negotiate. We discussed what this pluralistic "voice" divided between continents would represent, and if it would even be possible to project. Remember the French Feminists we read earlier in the year encountered a similar dilemma. A major feminist concern is whether or not a truly "feminine" voice could be presented in a masculine symbolic order.

Before we engaged the discussion into the introduction directly, I asked what comes to mind when you think of "oriental"? (Bear in mind that Said includes what we commonly refer to as the Middle East in his discussion of Orientalism.) After the initial reticence, the following ideas *poured* forth: Opium Smokers, Fundamentalist, Pornography, Honor, Inscrutable, Mysterious, Cruelty, Exotic, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism etc. I then asked how many of us have ever been to the Middle or Far East. Three people raised their hands. How is it then that we have such a multitude of conceptions and ideas concerning the Orient? Answer: Orientalism. We are taught about the East in academic arenas, political forums, stable social institutions, through the media, our parents etc. Orientalism is the discourse, which concerns itself with the Orient. Orientalism is a discursive "reality" in which the actual Orient is absent, and rather is *presented* by the West. The Orient becomes a political, social, and academic construction. This discourse is homogenizing, it creates impressions, and representations of a collective whole, in which any dimension of individuality is sacrificed. It creates dialogue utilizing binaries such as Us/Them, or We/Them.

Said writes, "By virtue of the fact that the poet, scholar, and politician speaks for, or writes about the Orient indicates the Orient is absent, and that the Orientalist is outside the orient... Poets make the Orient speak, and renders its mysteries plain to the West."

Said is making the distinction between discursive reality created in the West and the brute reality of the East which remains beyond western comprehension.

Said claims Orientalism is the West's way of coming to terms with the experience of the Other. Remember the binary Self/Other Lacan introduced us to earlier in the course. According to Lacan, we construct a notion of self only in juxtaposition and recognition of "Otherness." Said adopts the same logic and applies it on a global scale. He claims the West develops a sense of identity only through its divergence and juxtaposition to the East. The West casts vices, which it cannot acknowledge, onto the Other. Such vices include drunkenness, greed, trickery, sloth, sensuality, cruelty, laziness, decadence etc. In defining the Other, the West is actually creating boundaries which help it define itself. For example, Westerners are "cerebral" only because Orientals are "sensual", "corporal", or "bodily". Said says that the Orientalism reveals more about the West and its own fantasies than it does about the actual people, culture, and history of the East. The East becomes a repository for the repressed qualities, which Westerners deny. This should remind you of Freudian concepts of repression. In fact, the terminology Said employ's (repression, displacement et. cetera) presents the East as the "id" of western consciousness. We see Said embarking on a psychoanalytic study of Western culture and history.

The East is not only a myth but also a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient. The fact that it can create race through discourse is possible because of authority. There is an inherent relationship between power and knowledge. This power-knowledge formation is the material referent behind the authority of Orientalism and Said's argument. Orientalism as a discursive reality is not only imaginative in the West's way of contrasting images, ideas, experiences, and personalities. It's material as well. Orientalism expresses and represents an ideological mode of discourse supported and perpetuated by social institutions, and political and academic forums. The discursive practice is rooted in Western authority over the Orient in which the innocence of knowledge is sacrificed. One example of the power-knowledge formation is the British and American colonial education chain across the East. Said himself was a pupil in British and American colonial schools. Children of military personnel stationed across Africa and Asia are still matriculated in such schools, as are colonial subjects. An example of the power-knowledge relationship is provided in a later chapter in the book with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Said points out that Napoleon brought with him not only soldiers, but also scholars. The Western historian, philologist, linguist, and others involved in French erudition, followed the warrior. Here we see knowledge is in fact not innocent, but rather a reflection of power. Said claims that ideologies adopted from nationalism, academia, family et. cetera create cultural hegemony, or consent with respect to Orientalism. Napoleon brought not only the sword, but also the "book". Said's argument refers to Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci, and his essay *The Rise of The Intellectual*. Think of Althusser's concept of ISA's here. Ideology, hegemony and consent are what give Orientalism its durability.

Orientalism qualifies and exists in three arenas of discourse, all interdependent.

1. In Academia. According to Said, anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient is an Orientalist.

2. In Ontological and Epistemological distinctions- this is very simply differentiating between the “Orient” and “Occident”. Said says that a large mass of writers whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and political administrations have accepted basic distinctions between the East and West as a starting point for production. “For if it is true that no production of knowledge in a human science can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject, it also must be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstance of his reality: That is he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. This resonates very heavily with Althusser’s argument that humans are “always-already subjects.” Said claims European and American ideologies render “pure” and neutral Western analysis of the East impossible.

3. In corporate institution and environment- this is basically colonialism, most specifically British and French imperialism in the East. Said says there is an enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage the East politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively. The Orient never has agency, and never is a free subject, but rather is always constructed under impositions of power, both ideological and repressive. Again think of Napoleon’s 1798 invasion of Egypt . Orientalism includes not just physical power, but also what Said terms power cultural, power moral, and power intellectual. It was here Andy asked why doesn’t Said admit to the Orient’s capability of a creative Western discourse. Again, the power-knowledge formation is what gives the West leverage in any discourse. Think of any blockbuster movie, which deals with the East. Such Hollywood films are screened all across the globe. I remember living in Mexico and seeing *The Karate Kid*, and renting *Sixteen Candles* while living in Sweden . While living in Spain , I recognized movie theater agendas were replete with American titles. Eastern films remained absent apart from independent film clubs. Popular film is an example of Western corporate authority over the East.

We then illustrated some examples of the Orient as a construct. Said cites Giambattista Vico, “that men must take seriously, that what they know is what they have made, and extend it to geography.” We looked at the concept of time with the aid of a map of England . Greenwich Mean Time, or “real” time is based on the division of hemispheres and regulates time all over the world. Zero degrees longitude runs just to the east of London and divides the Occident from the Orient. The map demonstrates the east is a man-made concept reflecting colonial authority. Said’s argument rests on postmodern notions of the map preceding the territory. This notion is later illustrated in *The Precession of the Simulacra* (1981) by postmodernist Jean Baudrillard. (Also the title of a great J Church record on Jade Tree Records-one of my high school indie-rock favorites). Baudrillard argues that the signs has taken priority over the signified. He writes, “It is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting away.” The map dictates the

territory and the global division between the East and the West, and not the territory, which determines the map. According to Said, the Orient gets lost in Orientalism; it becomes nothing more than a signifier (remember its signified is arbitrary). The East emerges as a constructed image created in the West. East/West distinctions are man made, both in identity and geography.

How does this happen? Again, the power-knowledge formation. Political powers and institutional support perpetuate myth. The West can represent the Orient without any resistance from the East, political or otherwise. It's also a result of tradition. Orientalism is arguably in its third century! We do not remember a time when the Orient was anything but a discursive reality. The legacy has been internalized into Western consciousness and consent. Traces of Orientalism can even be traced back to the Roman orator Cicero and his study of "Asiatic" rhetoric, which he classified as deceptive and circumlocution. (I mentioned in class Cicero wrote in the fifth century, when in actuality he wrote before the birth of Christ!).

Race and Postcolonialism, 2

Homi Bhaba, "The Location of Culture"

Let's start today by asking the question Jayson didn't ask in his lecture on Orientalism: what is race? But let me ask that differently: how do you know what race someone is? We listed on the board a lot of characteristics, including skin color, eye color, eye shape, hair texture; we then noted that all of these characteristics serve as *signifiers* which then get connected to certain *signifieds*, so that a particular eye shape gets associated with a level of intelligence, or a hair texture with an athletic ability. Race is, in short, a means of identifying people by connecting their bodily configurations, the way they look, with culturally constructed notions of identity; it's a way of connecting the signifiers of a physical body with the signifieds of cultural ideas about what a person can or cannot or is likely to do. These days we call this "racial profiling" or "stereotyping," and we usually want to find alternatives to labeling people on the basis of assumptions about the racial signifiers they present.

Now on to a tougher question: what is "ethnicity"? We often use the phrase "race and/or ethnicity"—so what's the difference? Again, we listed on the board some characteristics, which tended to be cultural practices or beliefs, ideologies, rather than physical signs. Ethnicity is a less definite category than race, in part because the signifiers of ethnicity are less fixed, less obvious, than those of race. But in some ways ethnicity is a more important category, in our contemporary world, than race. Think about the idea of "ethnic" peoples outside of the United States: the wars in eastern Europe, particularly Bosnia and Serbia, over what ethnicity was the dominant one led to a practice labeled "ethnic cleansing", which involved killing all the people belonging to the wrong ethnicity. This practice has a lot in common with the Nazi genocide of the Jews as an "unclean" ethnicity, and a lot in common with the wars between Tutsi and Hutu in Africa and, perhaps most relevant, the war between the ethnic Pashtus of Afghanistan and the other ethnic groups which inhabit that country.

And now another question: how do you know what nationality someone is? Is this the same as race or ethnicity? Certainly in the case of the United States, it's really tough to define what makes anyone "American"—it's not being born here, because you can become a naturalized citizen; it's not living here, because some people live here who aren't citizens, and some American citizens live in other countries. It's not speaking English, because Americans speak all kinds of different languages. So what is it? I'm not looking for a concrete answer here; in fact, our country since Sept. 11 has been searching hard for some answer to what defines an "American." But what I'm interested in here is how one defines *any* national identity, or racial identity, or ethnic identity—how do you know what group you belong to?

And I'm asking this because this is a central question in postcolonial theory, and a central question for Homi Bhaba's essay on "The Location of Culture." But before we get to that, let me review for a minute some ideas we've had this semester about the idea of identity.

In the humanist model, "identity" was a pretty easy concept: everyone has a unique identity, a core self which is consistent over time, and which defines the idea of your self. You can name that identity by stating its characteristics: I AM a certain sex, a certain race, a certain age, a certain religion, a certain job or career, a certain family member, etc. I would say I AM a woman, a caucasian, a 43 year old, an Episcopalian, an English professor, a mother of two. This doesn't name all that I am, of course, but these words start to provide a framework within which I exist. From a poststructuralist perspective, I am constructed as a subject by all of these discourses: I am a subject within an ideology of gender; I am a subject within an ideology of race; I am a subject within an ideology of age; I am a subject within an ideology of education and work; I am a subject within an ideology of reproduction. My ideas about who I am, about what my sex, race, age, etc. mean, come from my position within these ideologies: my sense of self is thus constructed by the ideologies and discourses I inhabit.

This is a pretty bleak world view, a pretty deterministic one—"I", my self, my identity, is merely the product of all the discourses and ideologies that construct me, that interpellate me. But the saving grace is this: I am constructed by multiple discourses, multiple ideologies, all at the same time; there might be 20 or 200 discourses that claim me as a subject. And not all these subject positions are identical: as a mother, I might believe one thing, as a professor I might believe something entirely opposite or contradictory. What this means is that my subjectivity, my identity, is multiple; it is also "overdetermined," meaning that my identity is determined, not by just one discourse or ideology, but by innumerable ones. This overdetermination—the fact that I can think contradictory thoughts at the same time, the fact that I could simultaneously be determined by my belief in feminism and my belief in Episcopalian doctrine—means that there's no predicting what I will think, say, believe, or do in any specific situation or in relation to any specific idea or issue. At any moment, I can speak from any of my multiple subject positions. And that starts to look almost like having the "free will" and "creative uniqueness" we valued so much in the humanist model.

So if you start thinking of selfhood, not just as constructed, but as multiply constructed, then you have infinite possibilities for what constitutes a self or an identity. And you have the idea of selves who do not inhabit unified or stable positions or categories. For example, someone with an African-American father and a caucasian mother is neither one "race" or the other, but a mixture of both. Poststructuralist theories of race and ethnicity refer to such people as occupying a *hybrid* position. Such hybridity is inherently deconstructive, as it breaks down any possibility of a stable binary opposition. If race is divided as white/black, or white/non-white, then someone of white and non-white parentage deconstructs and destabilizes these categories.

The idea of hybridity works for all kinds of subject positions: any place where you can cross categories, inhabit two subject positions at once, or find the space between defined subject positions, is a place of hybridity. For gender, an example might be transsexuals; for race, bi- or multiracial people; for religion, people who practice more than one spiritual discipline, or a bricolage of several. And this is where Homi Bhaba wants us to look, in order to think differently about national identities and national boundaries. He begins his essay by talking about “ethnocentric” ideas, ideas that focus on particular definitions of selfhood by referring to a unified and unitary set of beliefs, practices, and configurations; he wants to challenge those ethnocentric ideas with the idea of dissonant and dissident and dislocated voices, people whose identities are excluded from these fixed and supposedly stable categories. He names specifically women, the colonized, minority groups, and bearers of “policed sexualities” as those voices. His article, however, focuses on another kind of hybridity, or challenge to stable categories of national identity: the identity of the migrant, the homeless, the refugee, the displaced indigenous peoples.

Bhaba then asks us to think about national identity, and argues that the idea of a homogeneous, stable concept of belonging to a nation is under profound redefinition; he cites the Serbian “ethnic cleansing” as a horrific example of how far a nation is willing to go, in killing its inhabitants, to produce a unified national identity. The effort to make a defined and unified nation is countered, according to Bhaba, by recognizing the idea of hybridity. He talks about “imagined communities” as the idea of what communities we belong to: our identity is shaped by the “imagined communities” we claim as our own. A nationality is such an “imagined community.” You can see this every day as we (meaning citizens and residents of the United States) struggle to say what it is to be “American” and to define ourselves as “united,” as an imagined community, in the face of the Sept. 11 events. Hybridity or transnationalism is a challenge to that idea of a unified “imaginary community;” hybridity brings up the idea that you might belong to many communities or cultures at once, and transnationalism brings up the idea that identity may not be determined by national boundaries, either political or geographic.

Bhaba is talking about the 20th century world, and more specifically the geopolitical world that was created after WWII, when “nations” were carved out of territories that had previously been colonial provinces or tribal or ethnic homelands. An example of this is Israel. Israel was created as a state after the Holocaust, and was mapped out on land that had been British Palestine: a territory that had been inhabited by people we now call Palestinians, who had been colonized by the British, suddenly became the state of Israel. That’s what the disputes are about in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict: what “nation” or “imagined community” do these disputed lands belong to? The idea of a nation, according to Bhaba, is a fiction, an “imagined community,” an entity created to forge a new sense of identity, to unite peoples who may have had in common only the fact that they inhabited the same general geographical region.

Again, you can see the problems with “nationhood” all over the globe, particularly in what the West calls the “third world.” A good example is the Arab states, which were, prior to WWII, inhabited by people who practiced the Islamic religion and

who were identified as ethnic or racial “Arabs,” but who imagined themselves belonging to various nomadic tribal communities. In the early twentieth century, these Arab tribes worked together to resist British colonial rule (this is what Lawrence of Arabia is about). Eventually the Arab tribes managed to kick out the British, but in order to do so they had to form a “nation,” like Saudi Arabia, out of all the various indigenous tribes. These tribes, which had existed for centuries, had their own histories and practices and conflicts with each other; uniting them into one coherent thing called a “nation” has proved to be difficult—as we see with Afghanistan. Bhaba’s question, then, is what holds a “nation” together, when “nations” are imagined communities of widely disparate and different peoples? One of the questions arising from the conflict in Afghanistan right now is, who will speak for the “nation” of Afghanistan? Is the Taliban the legitimate ruling government? If not (and it seems like they won’t be) then who is? Who runs the “nation” and makes global geopolitical decisions for it?

Mikhail Bakhtin

Bakhtin was not exactly a Marxist, but a theorist writing in Soviet Union starting in the 1920s, and thus he was very much aware of Marxist theories and doctrines, and how they were being implemented. He was also associated with the school known as Russian Formalism, a kind of precursor to our own American movement (in the 1940s and 50s) called New Criticism. (Peter Barry, in *Beginning Theory*, has a good explanation of Russian Formalism). Bakhtin got in trouble with Soviet regime, was exiled, and did a lot of his best work in exile; because of his political conflicts with the Soviet Union, as well as the problem of translation, and of Western cultures getting access to his texts, Bakhtin's works weren't published (or translated) till the 1970s (after the end of Stalinism).

Bakhtin shares with Marxist theorists an interest in the historical and social world, an interest in how human beings act and think (in other words, an interest in the formation of the subject), and an interest in language as the means in which ideologies get articulated. For Bakhtin, as for Althusser, language itself (both structurally and in terms of content) is always ideological. (Bakhtin is also associated with the work of V.N. Volosinov, whose work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* looks more directly at how language operates ideologically).

Language, for Bakhtin, is also always material. He would argue against Saussure and structuralist views of language which look only at the shape (or structure), and instead would argue that you always have to examine how people use language--how language as a material practice is always constituted by and through subjects. (This is also Althusser's second thesis in *"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"*).

Bakhtin's theories focus primarily on the concept of DIALOGUE, and on the notion that language--any form of speech or writing--is always a dialogue. This notion of dialogue is not the same as the Marxist notion of DIALECTIC, though it's similar in focusing on the idea of the social nature of dialogue, and the idea of struggle inherent in it. Dialogue consists of three elements: a speaker, a listener/respondent, and a relation between the two. Language (and what language says--ideas, characters, forms of truth, e.g.) are always thus the product of the interactions between (at least) two people. Bakhtin contrasts that notion of dialogue to the idea of MONOLOGUE, or the monologic, which are utterances by a single person or entity.

"Discourse in the Novel" is an excerpt from a longer essay with that title, found in Bakhtin's book *The Dialogic Imagination*. In this essay Bakhtin focuses on the question of literary forms or genres as examples of dialogic form. He focuses particularly on the contrast between poetry and novels. He says that poetry, historically, has always been the privileged form (and you can think of this in terms of a binary opposition, poetry/fiction, where poetry is the valued term). We have seen a version of this privileging--or at least of the distinctions between poetry and prose--throughout this semester, as a number of theorists who value the idea of play, plurality, or multiplicity in language point to poetry

as a place where language is more free, where the signifier and signified are the most disconnected.

Bakhtin differs from Saussure, and from the tradition which emerges from Saussure, and which values the separation of signifier and signified more than the connection between the two. He was aware of Saussurean linguistics, and of structuralist theories in general, but Bakhtin (unlike just about all the other theorists we've read so far, including Althusser) is not using a structuralist view of language.

Bakhtin begins his essay by posing a problem: if poetry is the more privileged literary form in Western culture (and in structuralist and poststructuralist theory), then what can you say about how language or discourse operate in NOVELS? Clearly language operates differently, or is used differently, in fiction and in prose than in poetry; these genres have a different conception of how meaning is created than does poetry.

One answer to this question is that you can't--or shouldn't talk about novels at all. For the French feminists (especially Cixous), novels are part of a realist mode of representation, which is based on trying to connect linguistic signifiers to their referents, to "real" signifieds; this, in Cixous' view, links fiction and realism to the attempt to make linear, fixed meaning (where one signifier is associated clearly with one and only one signified), which is what the French feminists call masculine, or phallogocentric, writing.

From this perspective, any form of representational language--any prose discourse, and any forms of fiction--are part of the effort to make language stable, unitary, and determinant. And that's bad. From another perspective, however, there's no comparison between what novels do and what poetry does. Poetry is meant to be an art form, to be (and to create) something beautiful; fiction, on the other hand, is a kind of rhetoric, a literary form meant to persuade or to present an argument, not to produce an aesthetic effect. These definitions come largely from historical trends: the novel does come from the prose traditions of persuasion. Poetry is not without its didactic function, certainly; as many critics from Sir Philip Sidney on have noted, the purpose of art is "to delight and to instruct." But generally poetry has been associated with the aesthetic function ("delight") and novels with the didactic function ("instruct").

Bakhtin starts with this division between poetry and prose fiction, and their social functions, in order to reconceptualize the idea of the way stylistics has privileged poetry. He says that rhetoric--the art of using language to persuade or convince people--has always been subordinated (in Western culture) to poetry, because rhetoric has a social purpose: it does something. Poetry, despite Sidney's claim to the contrary, has always functioned almost exclusively on an aesthetic level. Poetry is like a painting that hangs on the wall; prose is like a piece of kitchen machinery, in Bakhtin's view.

Because it does something, Bakhtin says, fiction, as a subset of rhetoric, has positive qualities. First of all, it is a socially and historically specific form of language use. A novel, Bakhtin argues, has more in common at any particular historical moment with other existing forms of rhetoric--with the languages used in journalism, in ethics, in

religion, in politics, in economics--than poetry does. In fact, Bakhtin says, the novel is more oriented toward the social/historical forms of rhetoric than toward the particular artistic or aesthetic ideas present at any particular moment, while poetry focuses primarily on aesthetic concerns and only secondarily (if at all) on other aspects of social existence.

Bakhtin says (on p. 666) that ideas about language have always postulated a unitary speaker, a speaker who has an unmediated relation to "his unitary and singular 'own' language." This speaker (kind of like Derrida's "engineer") says "I produce unique meaning in my own speech; my speech comes from me alone." Bakhtin says this way of thinking about language uses two poles: language as a system, and the individual who speaks it. Both poles, however, produce what Bakhtin calls MONOLOGIC language -- language that seems to come from a single, unified source.

Bakhtin opposes monologic language to HETEROGLOSSIA, which is the idea of a multiplicity of languages all in operation in a culture. Heteroglossia might be defined as the collection of all the forms of social speech, or rhetorical modes, that people use in the course of their daily lives. (Bakhtin calls these "socio-ideological languages" and describes them on p. 668a). A good example of heteroglossia would be all the different languages you use in the course of a day. You talk to your friends in one way, to your professor in another way, to your parents in a third way, to a waiter in a restaurant in a fourth way, etc.

For instance, I once returned a call from a student (who was asking for an extension on a paper) and got his answering machine; the message said "Hey, dudes and dudettes, I'm not here cuz I'm takin' the day off to hit the slopes, so catch you later." The language here was clearly not directed at a student-teacher communication. Rather, the terminology, assumptions, and mode of expressivity were all geared toward a very specific audience. This example shows one kind of language at use--one part of the heteroglossia this student/speaker could have chosen to use. It also shows a fundamentally DIALOGIC utterance--one oriented toward a particular kind of listener/audience, and implying a particular relationship between the speaker and the ;listeners.

Bakhtin says (on pp. 667 and 668) that there are actually two forces in operation whenever language is used: centripetal force and centrifugal force. Centripetal force (and he gets this term/idea from physics) tends to push things toward a central point; centrifugal force tends to push things away from a central point and out in all directions. Bakhtin says that monologic language (monologia) operates according to centripetal force: the speaker of monologic language is trying to push all the elements of language, all of its various rhetorical modes (the journalistic, the religious, the political, the economic, the academic, the personal) into one single form or utterance, coming from one central point. The centripetal force of monologia is trying to get rid of differences among languages (or rhetorical modes) in order to present one unified language. Monologia is a system of norms, of one standard language, or an "official" language, a standard language that everyone would have to speak (and which would then be enforced by various mechanisms, such as Althusser's RSAs and ISAs).

Heteroglossia, on the other hand, tends to move language toward multiplicity--not, as with the other poststructuralist theorists, in terms of multiplicity of meaning for individual words or phrases, by disconnecting the signifier and the signified, but by including a wide variety of different ways of speaking, different rhetorical strategies and vocabularies.

Both heteroglossia and monologia, both the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language, Bakhtin says, are always at work in any utterance. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (668a). Language, in this sense, is always both anonymous and social, something formed beyond any individual, but also concrete, filled with specific content which is shaped by the speaking subject.

Poetic language, Bakhtin argues, has been conceptualized historically as centripetal, and novelistic language as centrifugal. Novelistic language is dialogic and heteroglossic, Bakhtin says, and as such it exists as a site of struggle to overcome (or at least to parody) the univocal, monologic utterances that characterize official centralized language.

Bakhtin wants to find alternatives to a strict formalist or structuralist approach, because these ways of looking at literature tend to examine a literary work "as if it were a hermetic and self-sufficient whole, whose elements constitute a closed system presuming nothing beyond themselves, no other utterances" (668b).

In the section on discourse in poetry and discourse in the novel (which starts on p. 669), Bakhtin argues that poetry is fundamentally monologic, and operates as if it were a "hermetic and self-sufficient whole" (which is why formalist critics, like the American New Critics, mostly studied poetry, not fiction). The poetic word, according to Bakhtin, acknowledges only itself, its object (what it represents), and its own unitary and singular language (p. 670a); the word in poetry encounters only the problem of its relation to an object, not its relation to another's word. In other words, words used poetically refer to language itself, to idea of centralized/unitary poetic language, and perhaps to an object represented--but not to non-poetic language, to other languages in the culture.

poetic word--Bakhtin calls it "autotelic" (which means coming from itself, referring to itself), or image-as-trope--has meaning only in itself, or in relation to an object (as signifier or in relation to a signified) and nowhere else. As Bakhtin puts it, all the activity of the poetic word is exhausted by the relation between word and object; poetry is therefor the use of words without reference to history. "it presumes nothing beyond the borders of its own context (except, of course, what can be found in the treasure-house of language itself" (p. 671a). The poetic word means only itself as word, or it can include all its connotative and denotative meanings (the "treasure-house of language); when it refers to an object, that object is cut off from any social or historical specificity. In other words, a poetic word is only a signifier, or when it's connected to a signified, that signified is always an abstraction. So in a poem the word "bottle" will refer only to itself, or to the idea of "bottle," rather than to a specific bottle (like the plastic water bottle here in front of me).

Let's look at how this works in a specific instance. When I write "Two pounds ground beef, seedless grapes, loaf bread" you can read this two ways. We can do a "poetic" reading, where the words refer to abstract ideas, or to other words, or to poetry itself. Such a reading might focus on the first word, "Two," as implying a fundamental duality, but that duality is undermined by the form of the verb "pounds," which is singular. The idea of "pounds" as verb brings up an image of violence, that the "two" in the first word might be in some kind of struggle. That struggle might be against the "ground," the third word, which connotes an image of violence--something being "ground." It also rhymes with "pound"--so the "two" who are also "one" (singular in the verb) are pounding the ground in some kind of anger. What's the ground? The ground of their being, the ground they stand on, the ground that divides them as one/two beings? (Why not?) Then "beef"--well, "beef" can mean meat--the basic substance of human flesh--or it can mean "argument," which fits with the image of the two pounding the ground (or each other) in this fury. The next line gives us the reason for their anger. Not only are they divided, not quite one and not quite two, but they are "seedless"--no offspring, no fertility, no reproduction. This is perhaps the source of the violence in the first line. The idea of the fight is echoed then in the word "grapes," which brings up "sour grapes," feeling resentful for something you can't have, as well as echoing the word "gripe," which, like "beef," gives the idea of a quarrel. "Seedless grapes" is also an oxymoron, a paradox, like "two pounds;" grapes are fruit, hence a symbol of natural abundance, yet they are seedless, sterile. The last line, "loaf bread," reinforces the idea of a fruitless reproduction causing violence; the word "bread" echoes the word "bred," associated with reproduction again, and "loaf" implies laziness or inability, which stands in contrast to the action of "pound"ing in the first line. So the lazy loafers are the ones who have bread/bred, who have engaged successfully in reproduction, while the fighters, who struggle, are the sterile ones--and their sterility is a product of their lack of differentiation, their inability to decide whether they are one or two, the same or different.

Silly, of course. But possible. This, Bakhtin would say, is how poetry is monologic: if we assume these words are a poem, we read them quite differently than if we assume these words are a grocery list. The writer or critic interested in seeing the heteroglossia in language would read these words as embedded in social relations; such a critic would probably read them as a grocery list, as writing with a distinct social purpose, rather than as abstractions.

But Bakhtin would also say that the "poetic" reading of the grocery list also has validity; the words on the page never mean only the object they signify. In poetry, the social meaning is almost entirely erased, but in fiction the social meaning and the abstract meaning (the "autotelic" meaning) are both present. Novelists might show someone writing this grocery list, and on one level that list would simply be an itemization of foods the character will buy, but there might also be a symbolic level, where these particular foods have significance or resonance beyond the merely literal. As Bakhtin says, (p. 671) the prose artist "elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogized overtones."

On pp. 672(c)673, Bakhtin discusses further the idea of dialogue, or the dialogic, arguing that all words or utterances are directed toward an answer, a response. In everyday speech, words are understood by being taken into the listener's own conceptual system, filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and being related to these; the understanding of an utterance is thus inseparable from the listener's response to it. All speech is thus oriented toward what Bakhtin calls the "conceptual horizon" of listener; this horizon is comprised of the various social languages the listener inhabits/uses. Dialogism is an orientation toward the interaction between the various languages of a speaker and the languages of a listener. This is why Bakhtin says (on p. 673b) that "discourse lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context."

On 674a, Bakhtin argues that the sense of boundedness, historicity, and social determination found in dialogic notions of language is alien to poetic style. The writer of prose (675a) is always attuned to his/her own language(s) and alien languages (i.e. the languages of listeners), and uses heteroglossia-- employs a variety of languages--to always be entering into dialogue with readers. The fiction writer is always directing his/her "speech" (i.e. writing) toward the possible responses of readers, and is always trying to find more things to say, more ways to say it, so that readers can understand the message(s).

This diversity of voices which is heteroglossia is the fundamental characteristic of prose writers, and of the novel as a genre.

A good example of a heteroglossic novel is Melville's *Moby Dick*, which uses a huge variety of (socio-ideological) languages: the language of the whaling industry, the language of Calvinist religion, the language of the domestic/sentimental novel, the language of Shakespearean drama, the language of platonic philosophy, the language of democracy, etc. In using all these languages, Melville hopes to increase the potential size of his readership, as the novel probably contains some kind of language which every reader has as part of his/her existing vocabulary or "horizon."