

Dialectic And The “Two Forces Of One Power”: Reading Coleridge, Polanyi, And Bakhtin In A New Key

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Abstract Key words: polarity, tri-unity, complementarity, indwelling, dialogic imagination, polyphonic novel, monologic discourse.

The focus of this essay is to read the nineteenth-century theories of poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge against the twentieth century theories of chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, and Russian philologist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin, showing their intellectual similarities and contrasts. My purpose in this essay is to redeem Coleridge’s thought for rhetorical theory by linking him to modern thinkers who are respected within the field.

I. Introduction

Descartes, speaking as a naturalist, and in imitation of Archimedes, said, give me matter and motion and I will construct you the universe. We must of course understand him to have meant: I will render the construction of the universe intelligible. In the same sense the transcendental philosopher says: grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you. Every other science presupposes intelligence as already existing and complete: the philosopher contemplates it in its growth, and as it were represents its history to the mind from its birth to its maturity (*Biographia Literaria* 258).

In this passage, Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines his central doctrine, the principle of polarity, as a dynamic and generative interpenetration of opposites. It is this dialectical principle of polarity that embodies the central link between Coleridge’s thought and the philosophic rhetorical tradition developing from Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other writers who are interested, as Suzanne Langer asserts, in asking fresh questions about the nature of truth and rejecting natural philosophy and sophistic rhetoric, which had become commonplace (*Philosophy in a New Key* 18 hereafter *PNK*). The focus of this essay is to read the nineteenth-century theories of poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge against the twentieth century theories of chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, and Russian philologist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin, showing their intellectual similarities and contrasts.

My goal in this essay is to show the parallels within the theories of mind and language expounded by Coleridge, Polanyi, and Bakhtin, all of whom had an intense interest in ethics. All these men were teachers who passionately desired to change positivistic thinking and the discourse theories that resulted from it. For all three men, positivism placed too much emphasis on the external, material world and on human sense perception as being the only basis for knowledge and precise thought. Redeeming Coleridge, classified as a romantic, for rhetorical theory is an important concern since postmodernist rhetoricians have felt free to denigrate or ignore his work while they expound upon theorists like Polanyi and Bakhtin for their originality.¹ Although this essay focuses primarily on the parallels in the underlying use of polarity

of these three men, one can clearly see how this polar thinking takes different forms within each individual theory.

II. Coleridge and Polarity

The development of dialectic runs from the dialogues in Plato through a fundamental dialectical epistemology in Aristotle and ultimately through the thought of several modern European philosophers. The new key that Coleridge sounds is to claim for this dialectical principle the title and terminology of “polarity” and to propose it as the basis for all of life. In *The Friend*, for instance, Coleridge connects polarity to ancient Greek philosophy:

Every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation: and all opposition is a tendency to re-union. This is the universal law of polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus . . . The principle may be thus expressed. The identity of thesis and antithesis is the substance of all being; their opposition the condition of all existence or being manifested: and every thing or phenomenon is the exponent of a synthesis as long as the opposite energies are retained in that synthesis (*The Friend* I, 94).

Although Coleridge states emphatically that polarity is a principle that can be comprehended only by the imagination, he does use the analogy of electrical poles in order to explain it. In using this analogy, Coleridge points to several important features: the magnetic field, which is created by the combination of an opposition and an attraction between the two poles; polar predominance, which allows the energy field to predominate at either one pole or its opposite; and tri-unity, which names the unified relationship between the poles and the field between.

Setting Coleridge’s doctrine of polarity within its European context and asserting its “continual rebirth in differing epochs” (from the pre-Socratics, through the German romantics from whom Coleridge heavily borrowed, to Freud) is the theme of Thomas McFarland’s challenging essay entitled, “A Complex Dialogue” (290). McFarland begins by showing the roots of polarity in Heraclitus, and then alludes to Coleridge’s acknowledgment of Giordano Bruno’s reassertion of this doctrine in the Renaissance. Bruno writes: “Harmony is not effectuated except where there is contrariety. The spherical does not repose on the spherical, because they touch each other at a point; but the concave rests on the convex” (in McFarland’s, “A Complex Dialogue” 292 hereafter “CD”). McFarland’s main point is that Coleridge used Bruno’s notion of the unifying power of opposites, especially Bruno’s statements about the “minima and maxima of contraries and opposites,” to demonstrate that when “extremes meet,” the observer has evidence of polarity. Coleridge made many notations of empirical evidence to support this principle of polarity, demonstrating his intense preoccupation with it, a fascination, says McFarland, he shared with Bruno. “It is a profound magic,” says Bruno, “to know how to draw out the contrary after having found the point of union” (“CD” 292). Bruno’s importance to Coleridge is that he re-established this Heraclitian doctrine in the Renaissance.

McFarland compliments Coleridge for his “critical acumen” in copying Schelling’s philosophy since in his writing, “we encounter an apex of the doctrine of polarity” (“CD” 311). Yet he adds that even Schelling had no special “property rights” to this concept. Schelling, Hegel, and later writers like Marx and Freud all dipped into the current of polar logic, but Coleridge, according to McFarland’s criticism, used Schelling’s bucket. However, a more balanced view is offered in *What Coleridge Thought* (hereafter *WCT*) by Owen Barfield, a literary critic and a practicing lawyer. “Verbal plagiarism, as a labour-saving breach of the law of copyright, is a matter of determinable fact, and there is not much doubt that, as the law now stands, Schelling could have sued Coleridge in respect of one or two pages in the

Biographia Literaria” (WCT 6). In defense, Barfield adds that Coleridge was not interested in “originality” in terms of “novelty” but was concerned with truth, and thus he often “borrowed” from others when his thought merged with theirs. In fact, critics like Nigel Leask argue that Coleridge does admit “the German Provenance of his ideas,” claiming that he is only trying “to render the [German idealistic] system intelligible to my countryman” (*The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge’s Critical Thought* 127).

The force of McFarland’s argument is to deny Coleridge ownership of this term, and, in response to a call to consider the development of Coleridge’s philosophy “in his own terms,” McFarland attacks:

Strictly speaking, neither Coleridge nor any other philosopher can be said ‘on his own terms’ to have said anything at all. Not only the philosophical language he uses but the formulation of the very problems he confronts are given him by his intellectual culture (“CD” 307).

However, Coleridge never claimed ownership, just a refocusing or placing polarity in a new key in his attempt to discover the unifying principle for “this mass of discrete data.” As Langer asserts: “Most new discoveries are suddenly seen things that were always there” (PNK 19). In his concluding remarks McFarland asserts the failure of Coleridge’s life-long efforts:

The principle of polarity that aligns these Sunderings [reason and understanding, imagination and fancy, the head and the heart] was treasured, by him and by his Romantic contemporaries, as a path to an ultimate wholeness. But for Coleridge, even more strikingly than for his contemporaries, the actual experience out of which such treasurings arose was one of fragmentation and splitting apart, and those wounds the doctrine of polar reconciliations was never satisfactorily able to heal (“CD”341).

This description “of fragmentation and splitting apart,” is an apt one, in my view, because it affirms the argument that Coleridge is more of a modern theorist than most postmodern critics would care to admit. Moreover, it enables his readers to see a parallel between Coleridge’s seeking a unified theory of art and life in the face of his fragmented experience, and some of our best postmodern scientists who certainly have an even more fragmented experience yet are currently seeking a unified field theory.² In fact, McFarland admits that Coleridge’s “incompleteness as a practicing polar schematist becomes a badge of honor” in comparison to Hegel’s more completed system or attempts to tame reality by “*a priori* networks,” which, in turn, gave way to logical positivism (“CD” 339). However, setting Coleridge within the context of his own thought does not deny the “fragmentation and splitting apart” of his experience, but it simply affirms Coleridge’s epistemology and especially his definition of the imagination, which does have a unifying power in its polar function. Yet the “gaps” and “holes” in Coleridge’s writings, especially in the *Biographia*, clearly identify him as a postmodern (i.e. non-systematic) thinker.

Owen Barfield responds to the call for a consideration of Coleridge’s work “on its own terms and not as a representative of something else, whether it be German idealism, English Platonism, pantheistic mysticism, semantic analysis, or depth psychology” (Barfield 4). In his masterful analysis, *What Coleridge Thought*, Barfield, unlike McFarland, shows a coherent pattern in Coleridge’s thought and also its applicability to contemporary thought, including the philosophy of science. McFarland does pay tribute to Barfield’s tenacious confrontation of passages “ignored or dismissed” by most commentators. Nevertheless, in this same essay, “A Complex Dialogue,” he takes

Barfield to task for his “New Critical concentration on the passages at hand” while ignoring the larger context of Coleridge’s work and for “this Angelocentric distortion of perspective (“CD” 308-309). In other words, Barfield, in considering Coleridge in his own terms, fails to write according to McFarland’s standards.

In his close analysis, Barfield explains the seminal concept of polarity by contrasting logical with polar opposition. He says that logical opposites are contradictory while polar opposites are generative of each other, acting together to create a new product. “Polar opposites exist by virtue of each other as well as at the expense of each other” (*WCT* 36). It is important to comprehend this principle of productive opposition because it underlies all of Coleridge’s philosophy. Not only is polarity the principle of life--”unity in multiety,” but it also undergirds Coleridge’s theories of art, epistemology, and science. As Barfield succinctly puts it, “A cosmology, a philosophy, a psychology, which allows to imagination a primary as well as a secondary role, must begin by recognizing two forces” (*WCT* 29). Although Coleridge himself does not speak of the relationship of dialectic and rhetoric, his theory of the two forces suggests that these two discursive activities form a polar relationship so that, even though we can distinguish between them, we cannot ultimately divide them. Because polarity both names the creative power and is the faculty through which human consciousness becomes aware of itself in the act of creation, it designates a fertile concept that has been used by post-Coleridgean thinkers trying to show dialectical relationships within the field of epistemology, though they will often use different terms.

III. Polanyi and Complementarity

One such thinker is the chemist and philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, whose term, “complementarity,” parallels, in the field of scientific discovery, Coleridge’s principle of polarity. In his essay “Knowing and Being,” (hereafter “*KB*”) Polanyi states:

We can see then two complementary efforts aiming at the elucidation of a comprehensive entity. One proceeds from recognition of a whole towards an identification of its particulars; the other, from the recognition of a group of presumed particulars towards the grasping of their relation in the whole.

I have called these two efforts complementary since they contribute jointly to the same final achievement, yet it is also true that each counteracts the other to some extent at every consecutive step. Every time we concentrate our attention on the particulars of a comprehensive entity, our sense of its coherent existence is temporarily weakened; and every time we move in the opposite direction towards a fuller awareness of the whole, the particulars tend to become submerged in the whole (“*KB*” 125).

In this same passage Polanyi goes on to explain that the advantage of these dialectical processes is that every dismemberment adds to the overall knowledge even though it weakens the comprehensive features, and each new integration of the parts adds more to the understanding than it damages understanding by blurring their identity. “Thus an alternation of analysis and integration leads progressively to an ever deeper understanding of a comprehensive unity” (“*KB*” 125). To illustrate this process, Polanyi uses an analogy from medicine. A medical student learns a list of symptoms for various diseases, but only clinical practice can teach him to integrate the clues and form a correct diagnosis. If the student simply focuses on the pole of a memorized list of symptoms at the expense of observing and listening to the patient, he will form a wrong diagnosis; and if he focuses on the opposite pole of the patient’s symptoms without a knowledge of symptoms, he will fail as well. In Polanyi’s explanation, proper medical practice involves a

synthesis of the two poles, yet it would be difficult for the doctor involved to explain exactly how these two opposite poles came together in his mind while he was in the act of discovering an illness.

In commenting on Polanyi's ingenious theory, Richard Gelwick in his study entitled, *The Way of Discovery* (hereafter *WD*), defines Polanyi's epistemology as a new paradigm, "a new way of seeing," or a new set of questions, to use Langer's terminology. About the complementary process of reading, Gelwick writes:

The reading of a text is another form of knowing so common that we scarcely notice its complexity. Polanyi observes here how we perform many feats of integration without being aware that we are doing them. For example, we get the meaning of a sentence or a whole story without concentrating upon grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. When we read, we place these things at the service of our purpose of getting the meaning, and we do not think "subject," "predicate," "tense," and so on. (*WD* 60).

As Gelwick points out, the integration of clues, either by the reader when his mind unites with the text in reading or by the doctor when her skill palpates our organ so dexterously, is a kind of "indwelling," a pouring of ourselves into particulars that forms a complementarity of the two poles--"unity in multitude" as Coleridge named this power of human perception. Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge* (hereafter *PK*) defines "indwelling" in relation to tools or probes: We pour ourselves out into them and assimilate them as part of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them (*PK* 59). We indwell language as well.

In discussing this concept in terms of music he writes: "By dwelling in a harmonious sequence of sounds, we acknowledge their joint meaning as a tune: a meaning they have in themselves, existentially" (*PK* 344). Polanyi's complementarity is a comprehending of the whole by interiorizing or "indwelling" the parts. This paradigm shift in Polanyi's thought, according to Gelwick, is that all knowledge revolves around the perceiver and does not separate logic and psychology (*WD* 56). Knowledge is thus personal and involves "belief" in the presence of an external reality with which we can establish contact. Polanyi offers this thesis as a first premise of his theory. "I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations" ("KB" 133). On one level, we cannot prove the existence of the world, nature, or reality through our senses alone, yet we still believe it exists. In other words, we cannot demonstrate the reality of the world apart from our belief in the world; belief is fundamental.

Like Coleridge's polarity, Polanyi's complementarity is such a comprehensive concept that he can apply it to many endeavors. He thus argues that the alternation between the poles of dismemberment and integration is not only important in acquiring intellectual knowledge but is helpful in perfecting skills as well. Golfers or tennis players can benefit from an analysis of their strokes because these athletes realize that they cannot learn a skill by learning the constituent motions separately. In fact, focusing on the individual motions separately tends to paralyze performance, and only when the mind refocuses on the purpose of the activity can the isolated motions be put into play. Indeed the kinship of knowing and doing is so intimately bound together that the two can be distinguished but in real life not divided; "distinguishing while not dividing" principles of mind is a notion echoed throughout Coleridge's writings. In his introduction to *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi describes this dialectical relationship:

I regard knowing as an active comprehension of the things known, an action that requires skill. Skillful knowing and doing is performed by subordinating a set of particulars, as clues or tools, to the shaping of a skillful achievement, whether practical or theoretical. We may then be said to become “subsidiarily aware” of their particulars within our “focal awareness” of the coherent entity that we achieve. Clues and tools are things used as such and not observed in themselves. They are made to function as extensions of our bodily equipment and this involves a certain change of our own being. (*PK* vii).

Having expounded such complementarity, Polanyi continues to trace this principle in the workings of our senses, our perceptions, and in our relationships to tools and probes. Our sense organs and internal messages from our brain work as a unity with external stimuli in creating sensory impressions, yet the internal particulars are “never clearly observable in themselves” (“KB” 127). Polanyi explains that any appearance in nature or in human nature has what he calls “a physiognomy,” relating it to “the delicately varied expressions of the human face which we can likewise identify without being able to tell quite how we recognize them” (“KB” 123). We cannot be specific about the particulars that make up the comprehensive unity because “there is always a residue of particulars left unspecified; and . . . even when particulars can be identified, isolation changes their appearance to some extent” (“KB” 124).

We have all had the experience of ordering green-and-white striped material from a swatch only to discover the colors change when we see the whole bolt or place it in our room next to other colors. Polanyi explains by saying: “Since the colour of any patch of a surface varies with the context in which it is placed, coloured patterns are not specifiable in terms of their isolated particulars” (“KB” 124). Removing a concept or discourse from its context is a topic that holds great importance for Mikhail Bakhtin because he believes that discourse, like a being in nature, changes and may even die when torn from its natural environment--“a word uttered at that place and in that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. . .” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 428 hereafter *DI*).

In the case of tools or probes as mentioned above, the person becomes the internal stimuli, and the tool becomes the extension of the hand or finger. When a writer uses a typewriter or word processor, these tools become the extension of the mind in transcribing ideas, and the typist integrates the thought with the keys and words on the screen or on the page. Another example of this process involves integrating the parts of our body into a unified whole, an assumption most humans take for granted. However, Polanyi refers to cases of psychotic patients who have normal feeling in their arms and legs, yet do not consider these limbs as part of themselves, believing them to be external objects (*PK* 58). This interpenetration between “inside” and “outside” bears a striking resemblance to Coleridge’s theory of the imagination discussed earlier and Bakhtin’s dialectical theory discussed later.

Polanyi conceives of human consciousness as making contact with reality; he claims that humans passionately participate in the act of knowing, never more so than in the fields of science that claim objectivity. He explains that knowledge is not a thing but an activity that is best described as “a process of knowing.” Knowledge and research keep developing and building in an ever-moving, dynamic process. In his comprehensive study of scientific discovery, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi rejects the idea of scientific detachment, which in the exact sciences he believes is harmless because it is disregarded there by scientists (*PK* 141-42). Nevertheless, physicists and chemists will still speak as though their work is objective and factual as compared to humanistic studies. Polanyi’s thought shows the similarity of scientific and humanistic studies; it fosters clear lines of communication and more interdisciplinary studies. Coleridge, too, fosters interdisciplinary connections, which he links together with his “comprehensive theory of life”-

-polarity. He recognizes the participation of the observer in the observed.

Polanyi does argue that this detachment claimed by the hard sciences “exercises a destructive influence in biology, psychology, and sociology,” and he later adds, “in medicine” as well (PK 138-9). He further states that in the case of these higher sciences, the subject matter is intrinsically more interesting because living, but for that reason the subjects don’t lend themselves best to “accurate observation and systematic study” (PK 139). Nevertheless, many areas of inquiry still labor under the spell of the Laplacean delusion of objectivity. Polanyi writes: “The ideal of strictly objective knowledge, paradigmatically formulated by Laplace, continues to sustain a universal tendency to enhance the observational accuracy and systematic precision of science, at the expense of its bearing on its subject matter” (PK 141). In Jacques Lacan’s postmodern revision of Freud, a topic which I can only mention in this essay, Lacan takes this issue into account, showing how Freud himself participated and, in Polanyi’s terms, indwelt his patients.³ Bakhtin revises Marxism along similar lines showing the impossibility of a scientific treatment of ideology.

In another passage, Polanyi points out that personal knowledge is manifested “in the appreciation of probability and of order in the exact sciences,” and we see it as well in “the way descriptive sciences rely on skills and connoisseurship” (PK 17). He continues by saying that “at all these points the act of knowing includes an appraisal; and this personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge, bridges in doing so the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity” (PK 17)--a bridge evocative of Coleridge’s principle of polarity as tri-unity. He concludes in *Personal Knowledge* that

So far as we know, the tiny fragments of the universe embodied in man are the only centers of thought and responsibility in the visible world. If that be so, the appearance of the human mind has been so far the ultimate stage in the awakening of the world; and all that has gone before, the strivings of a myriad centres that have taken the risks of living and believing, seem to have all been pursuing, along rival lines, the aim now achieved by us up to this point. They are all akin to us. (PK 405).

This discussion of the complementary relationship of mind and reality is reminiscent of Coleridge’s discussion of the creator-directedness of consciousness in the *Biographia*. For Polanyi as for Coleridge, ideas are no longer Platonic forms that are separable from the individual consciousness that holds those ideas. Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of what he calls the “dialogic imagination” adds another voice to this dialogue concerning the “centers of thought and responsibility in the visible world.”

III. Bakhtin and Dialogic

If we employ Aristotle’s distinction between dialectic and rhetoric, dialectic concerns itself with impersonal examination, definition, and classification of ideas without regard to persons, while rhetoric concerns itself with the relationship between speaker and audience, between the practical agreements and disagreements between people. In his *magnum opus*, *The Dialogic Imagination* (hereafter *DI*), Bakhtin identifies the “layers” within all discourse:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist--or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It

is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (*DI* 276-77).

According to Bakhtin's definition, dialogic seems to fuse dialectic and rhetoric because its concern is with the dynamic relationship of people articulating their ideas in response to one another. Thus he stresses the speech aspect of language, "utterance" or the spoken word, so that he can highlight the immediacy of the type he is seeking. While dialectic attempts to discover the truth and rhetoric seeks to persuade people or change their minds, Bakhtin's "dialogic" strives to articulate and analyze the symphony of voices within ourselves and others.⁴ This perspective represents the new key that Bakhtin brings to dialectic--its explicit reunion with rhetoric and the further union of rhetoric with poetics.

Bakhtin, like other Marxist critics, emphasizes the ideological cast of all discourse, but for Bakhtin "ideology," according to Caryl Emerson in "Bakhtin and the Present Moment" (hereafter "BPM"), "is not something inflexible and propagandistic, something politically unfree. For Bakhtin and his colleagues, it meant simply an 'idea system' determined socially, something that *means*" (23). Speaking to this issue, Bakhtin writes:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it--it does not approach the object from the sidelines (*DI* 277).

Even though Bakhtin is often classified as a Marxist, critics like Gary Saul Morson point out that biographical evidence would suggest otherwise since most of his life Bakhtin spent in hiding from the Soviet party and espousing views antithetical to Marxist theory. In supporting this view, Morson argues that it would be hard for critics "to pinpoint the time when this neo-Kantian proponent of individuality, open-ended dialogue, and historical unpredictability--perhaps even of some version of Russian Orthodoxy--could have accepted a class-based, materialist, and teleological account of life" ("BPM" 203). In fact, the evidence shows that Bakhtin attacked Marxism and countered all the "isms" in his Russian society, linking him to both Coleridge and Polanyi, who vigorously fought against the ideologies of their day. Like Polanyi, Bakhtin distrusted extreme relativism because of its link to nihilism.

Because of Bakhtin's intense interest in human freedom and its relation to creativity, he turned to the realistic novel of the nineteenth century, especially the novels of Dostoevsky.⁵ "Bakhtin so loved Dostoevsky," according to Morson, "because he saw in him the writer who most palpably and realistically captured the very feel of human freedom" ("BPM" 213). Bakhtin admired this Russian artist for his stress on the complexities of consciousness as opposed to a consignment of all the complexities to "a hypothetical unconscious" because, for both Dostoevsky and Bakhtin, consciousness presupposes an emphasis on moral responsibility rather than "in terms of conditions and diseases" ("BPM" 213). Given this view, Bakhtin's conception of mind is similar to that of Coleridge and Polanyi because for all three the human mind is the center for moral activity. For Bakhtin "the unconscious" that Freud identifies as

the seat of the drives is more aptly defined as that portion of consciousness not yet articulated, or the struggle of various motives and voices within consciousness. Bakhtin's rereading of Freud has certain similarities to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic reinterpretation because both are interested in structure and language, but they have some real differences as well--Bakhtin is a Dostoevskian existentialist and Lacan is a language materialist.

In a passage from his book praising Dostoevsky's methods, Bakhtin specifies the aim of dialogic discourse and the manner in which this writer reveals "potential," the capacity for various outcomes. Dostoevsky, he argues,

brought together ideas and worldviews, which in real life were absolutely estranged and deaf to one another, and forced them to quarrel. He extended, as it were, these distantly separated ideas by means of a dotted line to the point of their dialogic intersection. In so doing he anticipated future dialogic encounters between ideas which in his time were still dissociated. He foresaw new linkages of ideas, the emergence of new voice-ideas in the worldwide dialogue (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 91, hereafter *PDP*).

Bakhtin claims that Dostoevsky writes a new kind of novel, the polyphonic novel, characterized by a plurality of voices that embody ideas, "a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world" (*PDP* 6). In the polyphonic novel, plot becomes secondary because the focus is on discourse and how it creates the traditional elements of fiction, an analytic method that fuses poetic and rhetoric. The hero becomes "a particular point of view on the world and on one's self;" (*PDP* 47) and the author becomes the medium through which other consciousnesses are presented--his voice is only one among many. Caryl Emerson's essay "Outer World and Inner Speech" describes this "Copernican revolution" Bakhtin attributed to Dostoevsky. "In Dostoevsky's novels, the author is no longer the creator around whom characters are forced to revolve but is, so to speak, himself but a planet among planets" (35). This freedom was for Bakhtin characteristic of all "true novels" and for the genre of the novel as a whole.

Each character in a Dostoevsky novel is thus a free agent whose ideas, "voice-ideas," are tested by his being placed in different situations with unusual and unexpected conditions, causing him and his ideas to collide with other people and their ideas (*PDP* 78-79). Dostoevsky's characters all share in a special characteristic called "unfinalizability"--that is

their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word (Bakhtin in Morson 214).

Bakhtin believes that dialogism in both the realistic novel and in life allows people, events, and society a sense of "genuine becoming." He claims that a precedence for this kind of discourse exists in the ancient seriocomic literature of the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire, both sharing features of carnivalistic folklore, mixing the high and low, the serious and comic, prose and poetry. In creating his theory, Bakhtin looks back to the Socratic dialogues and Plato's use of dialectic, which seeks truth through the free play of several voices (*PDP* 112-114). Moreover, Bakhtin's emphasis on the dialectical counterpoint of voices and ideas places his theory in the tradition of philosophic rhetoric but formulated in a new key because he rejected Hegel's dialectical method in which the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis could all, according to Bakhtin, occur within a single consciousness and be "monologic," meaning it lacks the dialectical principle. For Bakhtin, debate is essential in the same ways that it was for Plato and Aristotle, the first practitioners

of philosophic rhetoric.

In an article entitled “Dialogics as an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism” (hereafter “DA”), Don Bialostosky claims that according to Bakhtin,

Dostoevsky is a paragon of dialogic practice because he takes the widest purview for dialogue he imagines, because he hears the mutual bearings of ideas that do not yet hear one another, and because he presses the characters who embody those ideas to further articulation that alters the conversation from which he has drawn them (“DA” 789).

People possess the dialogic imagination when they strive to hear and to recognize the mutual bearings in the diverse voices of others and to answer these voices from their own point of view. Similar to the theoretical positions of Coleridge and Polanyi, Bakhtin’s principle will allow for a distinction of opposites but not a separation. For example, dialogism does not conceive persons as separated from the ideas they voice or ideas from the specific texts or contexts of their discourse. Moreover, Bakhtin’s emphasis on the present moment is in direct contrast to the Soviet practice, one now enshrined in the American academy, of judging the past by the present political and moral standards. George Orwell called this practice “Doublethink” and “Doublespeak” in his anti-utopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Bakhtin’s view was that “everything that belongs to the present dies along with the present” (in Morson 220-221), a view that mitigates against the prideful notion that the current judgments are the wisest possible ones since they are “politically correct.”

In Bakhtin’s view, the best prototype for this discourse is the symposium, because it “represents a series of voices differentiating themselves from one another and open to new voices”(in Bialostosky 790). Moreover, the dialogic model not only fuses dialectic or theses with rhetoric or persons, but also it merges written and spoken discourse with reading, because the dialogic reader is in constant dialogue with what she is reading. When this reader becomes a writer, she is again in dialogue with herself and with the other voices she is creating or citing. Coleridge himself uses such a symposium of “voices” in his *Biographia*, but that is the subject of a different study.⁶ Indeed, Kathleen Wheeler seems to be underlining this same polyphonic quality in Coleridge’s prose when she states: “What the *Biographia* reveals is a level of self-consciousness about its own devices, its readership’s habits, its effect upon its readership, and the narrative undermining of authority. . .” (93). This symposium of voices that Wheeler describes presupposes a dialectical relationship between knowledge and language, a polarity defined by Bakhtin’s dialogic imagination and one that is embedded in the writings of both Coleridge and Polanyi.

V. Some Implications for Composition

Even considering the differences between Coleridge’s polarity, Polanyi’s complementarity, and Bakhtin’s dialogism, their thought connects well with the current paradigm shift to the process model in composition theory with its focus on invention and the recursive nature of writing rather than on the final product. All of these thinkers emphasize the creator-directedness of consciousness, though each with a different perspective. Textuality for these theorists means more than simply knowing how to punctuate a sentence or understanding subject/verb agreement. Thus in the true spirit of romanticism and post-romanticism, every writer has the power to become a creator. Composition, cast in this new key, is thus redefined as an art, not simply a skill. Moreover, we must reinvent the trivium, reinstating rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic as the core of our curriculum where both art and skill are stressed. Perhaps in Coleridgean terms,

art and skill are in a polar relationship within rhetoric, with the art pole having polar predominance. Connecting this model of rhetoric with Bakhtin's dialogic view, I suggest that art is the centripetal pole, expanding outward, and skill the centrifugal pole, seeking form and structure.

Since in Coleridgean terms, creativity is central to human consciousness, any theory of composition informed by the thought of these three thinkers will, as rhetorician Ann Berthoff puts it, "reclaim the imagination."⁷ In *The Making of Meaning*, (hereafter *MM*), she argues that

what we need, I think, is to reclaim Imagination as a name for the active mind, the mind in action making meaning. . . . By coming to see how writing thus continues the work of the active mind, we can discover that we know more about composing than we might have thought we did. We can come, as Coleridge put it, to know our knowledge (*MM* 1).

The process model already places consciousness in the center of writing, but I agree with Berthoff that we should reclaim Coleridgean and post-Coleridgean theories of the imagination as the center of the writing process because teachers of writing do need to become philosophers who are interested in actively pursuing knowledge and desire as she suggests. When the imagination is central to rhetorical theory, then teachers may reunite creative writing with discursive writing, letting students experiment with various voices and modes. Teachers can point up the recursive nature of discourse, using Polanyi's theory of the integration of clues. Students, even those struggling with writing, use complex patterns of grammar and syntax without any conscious awareness of their level of difficulty. As Richard Gelwick points out, when they decode text, they are using equally difficult grammatical rules that they often cannot name (*WD* 60).

In sum, I propose that scholars redeem Coleridge's thought for contemporary reflection and explore the ways Coleridge's dialectic thought serves as a precursor to the thought of later writers like Michael Polanyi and Mikhail Bakhtin. The ideas of these three briefly discussed in this essay form a link toward a new consideration of textuality that supports the process model of composition. These three offer a dialectical and philosophic counterpart to process composition theory, an element lacking, according to contemporary rhetoricians. Yet it is important to understand, as Polanyi so aptly states, that all theory, like knowledge, has tacit components, is felt, and is passionately believed. Coleridge passionately believed that polarity expressed the deepest principles of the imagination and of language, and Polanyi and Bakhtin echo elements of polarity when they analyze the ways writers indwell their language and language, in turn, indwells the writer. Understanding these theories can help teachers communicate the polar nature of language itself--we create words but words also create us.

Endnotes

¹ Postmodernists like Ross Winterowd have actually said openly at conferences that Coleridge and the romantic rhetoric he spawned has been detrimental to the field. James Berlin in his book *Rhetoric and Reality* describes expressionist rhetoric, but he never alludes to Coleridge. *Into The Field: Sites of Composition Studies*, a collection of essays edited by Anne Ruggles Gere cites all three writers, but Polanyi and Bakhtin are noted for their theory while Coleridge is mentioned in connection to his poem "Kubla Khan," written in an opium sleep.

² I am referring here to the British scientist, Stephen Hawking, whose book *A Brief History of Time* outlines his and others' search for a unified field theory.

³ In reinterpreting Freud's analysis of Anna, Lacan shows that although Freud was aware of Anna's desire and transference to himself, he was not fully aware of his own desire and transference to Anna. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan writes: "an analyst may say that the whole theory of transference is merely a defense of the analyst."

⁴ In speaking of a symphony of voices, one is reminded of the "symphony" Coleridge uses in his *Biographia*. Some critics see this "dialogic imagination" as a mark of his genius while others, like Norman Fruman in *Zymandias and the Reconstruction of Opposites* are maddened by it.

⁵ Polanyi, too, had a deep interest in Dostoevsky's work. He writes in his essay "The Two Cultures": "The line of modern writing descending from Dostoevsky undertook to explore the limits of nihilism, in search of an authentic residue of moral reality. While this quest has sometimes led to meaningless despair, the movement has, as a whole, hardened the moral tone of our century and cleared the ground for re-laying the foundations of morality" (*Knowing and Being* 44).

⁶ In commenting on Bakhtin's writing style as well as his theory, Caryl Emerson notes in her introduction to *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* the way in which Bakhtin commingles voices. "In one sentence he will present direct speech, indirect speech, quasi-direct speech, his own voice interwoven with the voices and arguments of his opponents and fellow travelers. Bakhtin's own term for this is 'voice interference' " (xxxvi). I would suggest that Coleridge's *Biographia* has similar "voice interferences," and it is this dialogic style that critics like Fruman find so objectionable. In fact, Dale Bauer's *Feminist Dialogics* argues that dialogics can be reread as a female style of discourse.

⁷ Although Coleridge, Polanyi, and Bakhtin all have a similar notion of the human imagination ("multiety in unity"), Lacan cannot be included in these general statements about the imagination because what Coleridge would name the imagination with its active and creative powers, Lacan would most likely label as language, and Lacan rejects any unity within the human subject.

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