

The Definition of Dialogue

When Sperone Speroni (1500-1588) heard that his dialogues had been denounced he requested and got an audience with the Master of the Sacred Palace, who could give the *nulla osta* needed for publication in Rome. In the meeting, as he describes it in his *Apologia dei dialogi*, he tried to defend his dialogues by defining the literary dialogue and the author's responsibilities in such a way as to excuse the questionable passages of his works. His defense was in vain; despite his willingness to change passages and write an *Oration Against Courtesans*, his collection of dialogues was put on the Index of forbidden books. The popular dialogues that he had written in his youth (1520s to 1540s) were, by the 1570s, no longer acceptable in the ever more repressive atmosphere of Counter-Reformation Rome.¹ His written apology, which was not published, but was circulated among friends to deal with the danger of the denunciation, did not have the desired effect, nor did his meeting with the Master of the Sacred Palace.

In this chapter we will look at the context of Speroni's defense and the theory of dialogue he proposes. We will move from this defense to a working definition of dialogue inspired by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist. Until now we have been answering the question: Is dialogue one thing or many? In the last three chapters we have seen that oral and written dialogue are surprisingly similar to the major stakeholder, the reader/auditor not to mention the author/composer. The experience of overhearing an oral dialogue (designed to be overheard) and reading a written one are similar enough for us to treat dialogue as one thing for the purpose of definition. The

¹ By 1563 the Council of Trent had ratified the proposals that gave the Inquisition power to control opinion in the name of religious orthodoxy.

question then for this chapter is: What is dialogue? We will approach this question obliquely, returning to earlier definitions of literary dialogue.

Bread, Fish, and Anchovies

The trouble with Speroni's dialogues started when an anonymous "gentleman" submitted a copy of the dialogues to the Master of the Sacred Palace with the dangerous passages marked and annotated. Speroni did not know who was the gentleman who denounced his work, but he was sure the man could not be a gentleman; on the cover of the copy of the annotated dialogues was written, "bread, fish, anchovies, flour, pepper, tuna".² Speroni saw this shopping list as a sign that the man was a "cook, even a good cook, but a gentleman, never."³ That Speroni's accuser would be a cook is strangely appropriate as the theory of dialogue which Speroni uses to defend his works in the first part of his *Apologia* is one of delightful mixture. A dialogue, Speroni argues, is like poetry (in the larger sense of fiction), specifically like *commedia*, where the audience is entertained by the combination of different characters, many of whom are unsavory taken alone, but delightful when mixed with each other. In the hands of a good cook, bread, fish, anchovies, flour, pepper, and tuna, might make a delightful meal; similarly in the hands of a good dialogue writer, characters like courtesans and money-lenders might

² Speroni, *Opere*, p. 313. I have used two versions of Speroni's *Apologia*. Where I could, I used an annotated and modern edition prepared by Mario Pozzi which is in *Trattatisti del cinquecento*, volume 1, p. 683-724. This I refer to as "Speroni, Pozzi." Unfortunately Pozzi only chose to include the first part of the *Apologia*, so I also used a reproduction of the 1740 edition of the *Opere* of Speroni. The complete *Apologia* appears in this collection in the first volume, p. 266-425. This I refer to as "Speroni, *Opere*."

³ Speroni, *Opere*, p. 313.

make an enjoyable symposium.⁴ The author of the mixture (*satura*) should not be confused or blamed for the words of the ingredients who speak according to their nature.

The Return of Dialogue

To understand the original flavour of Speroni's *Apologia* we need to step back and get a sense of the context of the work. The first point that should be noted is the extraordinary resurgence of the dialogue starting with Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* (1401). The dialogue had never disappeared during the Middle-Ages, (witness the importance of Boethius' *Consolation*), but in the 15th and early 16th centuries it became the dominant form of learned discourse in Italy. Why was this? For humanists like Bruni, the Ciceronian dialogue was a way of defining a new culture based on conversation among gentlemen that was the humanist answer to the barbarous hair-splitting disputations of scholasticism. Dialogue was not just an alternative literary form in the Renaissance, it was also an alternative philosophical activity. In dialogue the character and oratorical skills that the humanists were cultivating could be displayed in the community they imagined. The Renaissance writers were interested in forming a new culture around learned and courtly dialogue; the literary form, especially the Ciceronian style, could be used to evoke the culture they were creating just as Cicero set out to create a Latin philosophical tradition. Bruni, unlike Petrarch who had earlier written a dialogue

⁴ To be fair to Speroni, he does not make this comparison between the dialogue writer and cook, he compares the dialogue writer to a host at a *convito* (symposium) who arranges an agreeable collection of characters for a discussion. Giordano Bruno does, however, make this comparison in a dialogue entitled "De la causa, principio e uno," (*Dialoghi italiani*, p. 197.) "Just as in the material and physical meal, likewise happens in the verbal and spiritual; thus this dialoguing has its various and diverse parts, just like the other; nor otherwise does this one have its proper conditions, circumstances, and means, just as the other does." This is my translation from the Italian.

that is closer to the soliloquy of Augustine or Boethius, turned back to Cicero for inspiration, with a dialogue between Florentine characters designed to evoke a polished culture for Florence comparable to the classical culture of Athens and Rome. (It is no surprise that the relative merits of classical culture and Florentine culture are at stake in the dialogue.) In his dialogue there are neither the short questions and answers of the Socratic dialogue, nor the self-examination of the soliloquy.⁵ In the dialogue you have an admirable set of leading men and their students, men who respect each other and enjoy arguing both sides of the issue in an Academic fashion that shows off their social and oratorical skills. All the characters represent the author in a fashion, not just the narrator, because Bruni is proud of the entire community he was recreating in the classical fashion with dialogue.

This Ciceronian style of dialogue was later adapted to other ideals as in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* where courtly life is celebrated and codified. Castiglione set an example of learned courtesy in conversation; including women in the community of dialogue for the first time, his work became a textbook of conversational manners for both sexes. The Ciceronian style of dialogue was also versatile enough to also be adapted to uses that

⁵ Two works of interest on the Italian Renaissance dialogue are David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue*, and Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. Marsh is good on the origins of the humanist dialogue. He sees Augustine as a crucial figure in the period between the classical dialogue of Plato, Lucian, and Cicero, and the return to the classical of the Italian Renaissance. Augustine rejected the Academic evenhanded Ciceronian dialogue that tries to show both sides of an issue for the soliloquy. Boethius' *Consolation* and Petrarch's *Secretum* are in this tradition of internal dialogue. It is Bruni who shrugs off the spiritual model where there is one correct answer and returns to the classical Ciceronian model. Cox on the other hand deals with the way literary dialogue responded to and often attempted to imagine intellectual culture - a topic I discussed in the context of Cicero in the preceding chapter. She nicely charts the politics of the dialogue.

later the essay or treatise would be used for: Galileo's *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* for example, where scientific issues are popularized by putting them into dialogue, showing incidentally how learned men should discuss science.⁶

This is not to say that the Ciceronian model was the only model of dialogue that Italian Renaissance writers returned to. Lucian's satiric dialogue-of-the-dead was picked up by writers like Alberti. The Socratic dialogue was also adapted by writers like Valla, as we pointed out in a previous chapter. The symposium or *convito*, where there is a round of speeches around a meal, was also popular (witness Ficino). All said, this often ignored chapter of the philosophical dialogue was not only remarkable for the quantity of works and their application to the changing culture of letters, but also for its variety and invention. When philosophers bemoan the end of the dialogue after Plato they overlook this exceptional period when the dialogue was a fully exploited and dominant literary genre.⁷

The Turn to Theory

It is not surprising, given the explosion of dialogue and a growing interest in literary theory that someone would become interested in the poetics of dialogue. What is

⁶ For an accessible abridged translation with commentary see, *Galileo on the World Systems*, 1997. It should be added that Galileo may have also used the dialogue form to protect himself by representing the Copernican views as those of a character. See section 3 of the Appendix by Maurice Finocchiaro.

⁷ I can think of three reasons why the Italian Renaissance dialogue has been ignored in English speaking philosophical circles. First, many of the works have not been translated out of Latin or Italian. Second, this was not a period of professional philosophy with concerns similar to ours and is thus better studied in departments of Renaissance Studies or Italian Studies where the eclectic mix of issues, languages, and history can be dealt with as a whole. Third, the popularity of the dialogue makes these thinkers difficult to assimilate into a history of philosophical positions.

surprising is how long it was before there were any works on the theory of dialogue. This was in part because of the value placed on dialogue as an activity, and the relationship of the literary form to the activity. The literary dialogue was tied to the culture of conversation and *convito*. The written dialogue was the humanist way of theorizing the culture of civil conversation they were creating. A dry treatise on the theory of literary dialogue without characters and situations would have missed what was at stake and would have been viewed as crude and scholarly. Literary dialogues like Bruni's and Castiglione's can be seen as the Renaissance way of writing about conversation in a fashion appropriate to the conversation imagined. They are, like Plato's *Phaedrus*, examples of what they discuss.

By the second half of the 16th century with the exploration of other types of dialogue (other than the Ciceronian) the literary dialogue had come of age and detached itself from the oral and cultural issues it was tied to earlier. The translation of, and commentaries on, Aristotle's *Poetics* brought that work and literary theory to the forefront. It was inevitable that someone like Sigonio noticed that Aristotle had left open the question of the nature of the literary dialogue.⁸ In a relatively short time from 1561 to 1585 there was a burst of works about the poetics of dialogue by three scholars associated with Padua. Three significant works on dialogue were written in this period, that of Carlo Sigonio (*De*

⁸ Luisa Mulas in "La scrittura del dialogo" discusses the late appearance of theories of dialogue and the possible reasons for this. She finds it surprising how few and how late the theories of dialogue are given the predisposition to write dialogues and the theoretical interests of the Cinquecento.

Dialogo Liber, 1561), Sperone Speroni (*Apologia dei dialogi*, 1574), and Torquato Tasso (*Discorso dell'arte del dialogo*, 1585).⁹

It is significant that these theories of dialogue of the late 16th century came at a time when open dialogue was being suppressed and closed down in the name of orthodoxy.¹⁰ Sigonio's work, the first theoretical work on the literary dialogue, is a manual telling people how they should write dialogues; Speroni's *Apologia* is triggered by a denunciation and attempts to reopen a space for free dialogue. Tasso's work was written when he was confined to an asylum and paranoid about the very real dangers associated with expressing unorthodox opinions. In sum, this burst of theories about dialogue came at a time when the literary dialogue was exhausted and under increasing scrutiny. The theories reflect in different ways the change in climate that brought an end to the extraordinary output of literary dialogues in Italy. Some of these theories reflect the new orthodoxy, while others like Speroni's try to leave room for a dialogue wedded to comedy.

The Climate of Interpretation

Speroni, when he meets his Master and later writes his defense, has the immediate problem of distancing himself from the works of his youth and clearing his name, but his

⁹ For a more complete discussion of the theories of dialogue of the late Italian Renaissance see Jon R. Snyder's *Writing the Scene of Speaking*. This excellent work covers the works of Sigonio, Speroni, Tasso, and Castelvetro (whose commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* discusses the dialogue.)

¹⁰ Cox, in *The Renaissance Dialogue*, charts the shift from open dialogue to closed dialogue. She finds the change gathered in Speroni's apology. The first two parts celebrate the open dialogue, the last two reflect the effects new orthodoxy. "How intentionally we cannot be sure, the third and fourth parts of the *Apologia dei dialoghi* give us a shrewd indication of the path that the dialogue was to travel. ... The tradition of the open dialogue, he suggests, was set on a collision course with secular and religious authority." (p. 76.)

deeper problem is dealing with an anonymous accusation. Like Socrates he isn't defending himself against an openly articulated position but must deal with a suspicious interpretative climate that increasingly sees the dialogue as a sneaky way of delivering unorthodox ideology which therefore needs to be disciplined. His answer is to respond to the interpretative tendencies that misread his dialogues by suggesting how dialogue works, what type of work it is, and thus how it should be read. To understand this interpretative climate we can look to the other two theorists of dialogue, Sigonio and Tasso, though neither of them can be held responsible for the atmosphere Speroni encountered in Rome.

In Sigonio's model of the dialogue, which fits the Ciceronian works of Bruni, all the characters of the dialogue have to be great and admirable men; there is no room for wits, courtesans, and money-lenders.¹¹ The dialogue should show the best of the community discoursing in one of their few moments of leisure together, usually a feast day¹², because otherwise, if they discoursed when there was work to do, they would not, by definition, be serious gentlemen. (Shopping and cooking, needless to say, are unworthy of such leaders.) All of these men and women represent the author as an ideal community. The author chooses the dialogue form both to make the message easier to assimilate and to show how gentlemen discuss such issues (in their few moments of leisure together).

Renaissance literary theorists were fond of classifying and a major issue around the dialogue after Aristotle left it hanging was where it fit in the order of discourse. The key

¹¹ This discussion of Sigonio's theory is largely based on Snyder's discussion in *Writing the Scene of Speaking*.

¹² See Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 62.

to the reading of dialogue is what sort of work it is; all three theorists bother far more with the classification of dialogue than we would. In fact, a major defensive tactic of Speroni is to try to dislodge the classification of dialogue as a form suited to the representation of serious discussion. We can best see the competing classification of dialogue that Speroni has to deal with in Torquato Tasso's *Discourse on the Art of the Dialogue*, a short clear work, that nicely summarizes the conservative position on the place of the written dialogue and the types of dialogue.¹³

Tasso mentions the classical distinction that there are three types of dialogues:

1) Representative or dramatic ones that can be performed on stage where the reasoning is done by the characters, 2) Historical or Narrated dialogues where the narrator reports his thoughts and what people say, and 3) Mixed dialogues where there is a mixture of narration and direct representation.¹⁴ This classical distinction depends on the way the words of the characters are reported. In a narrated dialogue the narrator will report that then so and so said this, while in the direct representative dialogue, and in parts of the mixed dialogue, the speeches alternate with no such reporting. This formal distinction seems petty to us now, but it hinges on the presence of the narrator which in many cases has an effect on the openness of the dialogue. Where there is a strong authorial presence through a narrator the other characters fade to the point where one wonders whether the

¹³ It should be mentioned that Tasso studied under both Speroni and Sigonio and his *Discourse* follows Speroni's even though I am using it too as an example of the classifications of dialogue Speroni is responding to. I do this because Tasso is accessible to the English reader, is close to Sigonio, and in his clear exposition seems to best capture the interpretative waters that Speroni is navigating his apology through. For an introduction to Tasso see *Tasso's Dialogues: A Selection, with the Discourse on the Art of the Dialogue*. This collection contains English translations and an introduction by Carnes Lord and Dain A. Trafton.

¹⁴ Tasso, *Discourse*, p. 19.

work is a dialogue or just a discourse with a few quotations. Conversely where there is no narrator the author is most distant and the comic possibilities of incongruous characters are greatest. One might add that when there is a strong authorial presence the possibility of an ineffable meaning coming through is also endangered. Needless to say, the formal distinction does not always hold; there are direct dialogues where the characters are so similar that they really seem like ornamental variations of the author's wishes. Likewise there are reported dialogues where the narration does not affect the lively differences between reported characters.

Tasso is not, however, happy with the classical distinction and introduces one modeled on Sigonio. He summarizes it nicely:

We shall say, then, that the dialogue is an imitation of discussion, written in prose, without representation, and designed for the benefit of civil and speculative men. We shall set it down that there are two kinds — one contemplative and the other moral — and that the subject of debate in the first is infinite while in the second it can be infinite or finite. What the plot is to a poem, moreover, the question of debate is to a dialogue: its form and, as it were its soul. And just as a plot must possess unity, so too must the subject about which questions are raised in a dialogue.¹⁵

For Tasso there are two types of imitation, that of action, and that of discussion or reasoning. Verse and drama imitate action; dialogue imitates the reasoned discussions of men, though, as he points out, you can't have one without the other. Rather than dividing

¹⁵ Tasso, *Discourse*, p. 25. I have adapted the translation of Lord and Trafton to highlight the normative character of the passage. The translator chose to translate "senza rappresentazione" with "not intended for performance" where it could be translated literally "without representation", which suggests that for Tasso the narrated dialogue is paradigmatic. Also, Tasso uses the word "quistione" which Lord and Trafton translate "subject" (of discussion) and I have chosen to leave as "question" because it emphasizes the importance Tasso put on questions to the plot of the dialogue.

dialogues by their formal features, Tasso categorizes them by their subject matter or question. There are those dialogues that discuss contemplative matters and are aimed at knowledge and truth, and then there are those that deal with actions in which case they are moral, and directed at praise and blame. While his classification allows for the imitation of frivolous conversations by disreputable men directed to entertainment, Tasso clearly thinks the dialogue proper imitates only the reasoning of the speculative men on serious philosophical questions.

Tasso identifies four parts to the dialogue: the question or subject matter, the opinions, the characters, and the style. He spends a large part of his discourse on the subject matter and the importance of the unity of the question. For Tasso the plot that unifies the dialogue is the flow of questions and answers that make up the dispute over the subject. He remarks that "because questioning is the particular business of the dialectician, it seems that he is the one who ought to undertake to write dialogues."¹⁶ Later he grumbles about the habit of giving the questioning in a dialogue to the less informed interlocutor rather than the Socratic figure because that leaves the plot in the hands of ignorant interlocutors. For Tasso the core of dialogue is a series of dialectical questions aimed at eliciting the truth or at least purifying error. Wandering dialogues that touch on a number of subjects without resolving anything are not his idea of the an ideal dialogue. Around this core there can be ornamental settings and conclusions, but it is the chain of Socratic questions that define the dialogue.

As for the opinions and characters this is where Tasso sees the need for poetic skill. In a dialogue the opinions and the character of the interlocutors have to be faithfully imitated with poetic skill. By this he means that a writer of dialogues has to be able to

¹⁶ Tasso, *Discourse*, p. 25.

imitate the language and actions of the characters he chooses. For this reason Tasso concludes that the "writer of a dialogue must be an imitator no less than the poet; he occupies a middle ground between poet and dialectician."¹⁷ As for style, Tasso believes that the dialectical passages with questions and answers should be simple, but the openings and conclusions can be as ornate as any other work.

We can conclude this section on the interpretative climate faced by Speroni by summarizing thus the unexpressed expectations that he had to confront:

1. The dialogue is a serious form suited to the presentation of truths or at least the purification of error. The entertaining (poetic) character of the dialogue should enhance but not drive the dialogue.
2. The dialogue is best suited to the representation of reasoning that leads to truths for which the author is responsible. To put it another way, the dialogue is a way of showing the convincing reasoning that leads to the truths that the author wishes to expound.
3. For this reason the movement of questions through a dialogue is the equivalent of a plot, providing unity to the work. The author is responsible for the choice of subject and the movement of the questioning (and answering).
4. This means the author is responsible for the choice of characters and situation. The characters should all be worthy of the author and likely to discuss the issue in a serious fashion. (If there are to be disreputable characters they should be soundly refuted in the course of the dialogue.) Given that the characters should be realistic they should be examples of good men who in the right situation are disposed to serious discussion and learned reasoning leading to approved ends.

¹⁷ Tasso, *Discourse*, p. 33.

5. Therefore the author is responsible for the words of all the characters, especially their conclusions unless those opinions are clearly refuted. In addition the author can be identified with the primary speaker or narrator when there is one.

Needless to say this is a limiting view of dialogue that leaves very few acceptable dialogues. Even Plato would not fare well if tested this way, and Speroni for this reason makes much of the example of Plato in his defense. These interpretative tactics were not codified anywhere unless one looks to the works of Sigonio, and later Tasso, but Speroni has to deal with the worst case, a suspicious and conservative climate that is intolerant of poetic license. Speroni has to draw out these interpretative tendencies where they were never written down and confront them over and over. He has to resort to theories, examples, and analogies to make conviction difficult. It doesn't really matter if one agrees with all of Speroni's wandering thoughts, or that they contradict each other, so long as one leaves the meeting (or reading) unsure that one can condemn the author for the words of his characters.¹⁸

Speroni's Defense

Before going into detail about Speroni's defense it is best that we comment on the peculiar form of his apology. The work has four parts. The first, and the most important for our purposes, reads like a random collection of thoughts on the interpretation of the dialogue addressed to the Master of the Sacred Palace. In the second part he goes over the questionable passages defending them, addressing the reader rather than the Master. In the third part he is engaged by his conscience (his Socratic *daemon*) who calls him to critique his youthful work, which he does in the first reversal of the work. Whereas in the

¹⁸ Snyder makes the interesting point that the wandering character of the first part is a deliberate strategy. (Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 91.)

first and second part he ingeniously defends his work by concentrating on the distance of the author, in the third he finally admits the author's responsibility. Finally in the fourth part, addressed to God, there is a second reversal where he concludes that the author is really only responsible to God and that all literature that is not devotional is vain. Thus, what he had conceded in the third part, showing his good will by critiquing his own work, is trivialized as he concludes piously that only God can judge his work.

The work, like Plato's *Apology* is hardly a dialogue.¹⁹ In parts it becomes dialogical, and it is interesting to chart the different interlocutors that Speroni engages, not to mention the different postures Speroni takes as he conducts his defense. In the first part where Speroni recounts what he said to the Padre Maestro we feel the presence of this judge and on one occasion Speroni even reports his words.²⁰ Further on he addresses his unknown accusers admonishing them to listen to his lengthy defense (as if they were there to interrupt).²¹ In the second part we have a similar direct challenge to the reader to pay attention to the context of the passages he is dealing with. This is a young and combative Speroni. Then in the third part we have the reported dialogue with his conscience and finally the fourth part is addressed to God — *Signor Dio onnipotente*.²² Speroni in these last two parts gets older, more conservative and less interested in his dialogues.

¹⁹ Snyder makes the comment that it is a dialogue "between Speroni and his own writings or, rather between Speroni and the writing of dialogue itself." (Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 95.)

²⁰ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 689.

²¹ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 698.

²² Speroni, *Opere*, p. 392.

In each of the parts Speroni begins engaged with an interlocutor but slides into straight prose. There is a unifying thread to the character of the interlocutors addressed that is mentioned at the very beginning, when Speroni complements the listening Father, who he says is an "example to him who doesn't know how to pay attention when it is a matter of the honour of others".²³ Like Valla, he sets up the possible character of his audience, who can in this case either listen quietly (and let a gentleman defend himself,) or rudely interrupt like someone just out of a kitchen. Throughout the work there is the presence of these two possible listeners, the patient judge-conscience-God, and the kitchen mob that threatens to interrupt. The judge is the ideal auditor, and the mob is reminiscent of the jury heard through Socrates' defense. Speroni's work tries to encourage the reader to reject the latter and listen patiently like the former, slipping into an attitude that becomes involved in the feast of ideas, reversals, and images to the point of forgetting the original issue, i.e. the condemnation of Speroni's youthful dialogues.

This is not the place to wander down the delightful path of comparing the defense of Socrates and that of Speroni, nor am I going to do justice to the second, third, and fourth parts of the *Apologia*, though I agree with Virginia Cox that the work has not been dealt with adequately as a whole. (She points out that concentrating on the first part does Speroni a disservice.²⁴) Instead, like Snyder, I am going to concentrate on defensive tactics of the first part because they include the first attempt to articulate a definition of dialogue that fits the variety of dialogue and captures the open character of dialogue. Speroni's first position on dialogue is remarkably similar to the position I believe emerges from the evidence I have so far gathered on the oral and written dialogue.

²³ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 685, my translation.

²⁴ Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, p. 70-71.

One of the features that stands out in the first part of the *Apologia* is its wandering and labyrinthine character.²⁵ The defense is not presented methodically, but in a fashion compatible with the comical type of dialogue that he is defending. Jon Snyder put it thus:

Speroni's theory of dialogue emerges in a text that is a *satura*, a mélange of many things ranging from parable to oration to literary pastiche to dialogue itself. This protean critical rhetoric or metalanguage constitutes a defensive maneuver in its own right, masking Speroni's own stake in his text. ... Speroni says so much about dialogue in so many ways that only with considerable difficulty can he be pinned down to a single position.²⁶

Before trying to extract his defensive arguments we should look at some of the many analogies he gathers to his defense. For example, Speroni compares the writer of dialogue to a doctor who uses poisons (disreputable characters) to do good,²⁷ or a painter who might include monsters in a composition.²⁸ Elsewhere, to emphasize the artistry needed for such *commedia*, he compares the author to a general who has to organize troops in war and guests at a *convito* in peace.²⁹ One of Speroni's more interesting analogies comes when he is comparing the philosophical works of Aristotle, which he calls contemplative fields (they are flat and only produce one crop,) to the gardens of dialogue that surround rural villas with their mix of fountains, statuary, and plants. The garden is the place of leisure not work, and produces a variety of herbs and spices that can be mixed with the nutritious produce of the fields to add flavor. While the fields feed the philosopher, the

²⁵ For an excellent treatment of Renaissance theories of dialogue, Speroni, and the labyrinthine in Renaissance dialogue, see Pugliese, *Il discorso labirintico del dialogo rinascimentale*, 1995.

²⁶ Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 92.

²⁷ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 685.

²⁸ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 699.

²⁹ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 695.

gardens add spice to the plain fare of the intellectual. Another image he uses for the dialogue is that of the rose bush, that while it has a delightful flowers, also has thorns, just as the dialogue may have inspiring moments among prickly characters.³⁰ He doesn't do so, but he could have compared the author of dialogue to a chef who marshals ingredients, but cannot be blamed for the bitterness of pepper if taken out of context, to say nothing about anchovies and their fishy character.

We can now return to how Speroni deals with the interpretative tendencies that I summarized above. To begin, he classifies the dialogue as prose that is like *poesia*, the Italian word for fiction that, taken from Aristotle, covers everything from drama to verse. The dialogue as such is an imitative form, in this case the imitation of what people say, and it is thus well formed when what the characters say is what they would be likely to say, and not what the author might want them to say. Central to his defense, however, is the next move, where he narrows the classification and compares dialogue to *commedia* whose effect depends on the novelty and variety of the characters who speak according to their different natures. Speroni is trying to get his dialogues read as if they were light farces not intended to deliver truths but meant to delight through lively misunderstandings and absurd characters. By shifting the classification Speroni hopes to achieve six things:

- 1.** First he wants to legitimize his choice of disreputable characters. In comedy one expects unsavory characters, not just old wise men. (The old wise men in comedy tend to look rather silly.) If he can get his dialogues read as comedy then that frees him from the responsibility to only portray the best people in the best light.

³⁰ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 717.

2. A second expectation of comedy is that it should represent a diversity of characters who are different from each other. Traditionally the entertainment of comedy comes from the contrast of diverse characters. Thus one expects, in comedy, people of all sorts, from noblemen to courtesans to be combined in ways that highlight their differences. Much of the humor of comedy comes from this incongruous combination where often the most respectable characters taken out of context are made strange. Plato was not adverse to the comic possibilities of the combination of reputed wise men with an uncommon character like Socrates. Representing people out of context is a classical parodic tactic to ridicule the serious and established ideology.

3. In comedy the author is expected to match the opinions and manners of his interlocutors to the type of person they represent. "Thus the well formed dialogue , like that of Plato, has many and different interlocutors who reason in the fashion of the character and life that they represent."³¹ A writer of dialogue, like Plato, should not be blamed if disreputable characters say disreputable things, but should be admired for the poetic skill displayed if what they say is in keeping with their type. This is the crux of his defense — that the first responsibility of the dialogue writer is to the realistic imitation of types of people even if disreputable. (It should be noted that in the third part of the *Apologia Speroni* amends this position by assigning to the author responsibility for the whole.)

4. The classification of dialogue as comparable to comedy should also answer the temptation to expect dialogue to deliver truth. In comedy one does not expect an orthodox truth but a variety of contrasting opinions, especially novel ones, even if all

³¹ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 684, my translation.

flawed.³² A comedy is made of errors that do not necessarily lead to truth, except in so far as the reader might notice its absence. The dialogue writer should, like a painter, concentrate only on the appearances — the manner and speech of characters — not the truth of the matter.³³

Speroni goes further and suggests that representing the opinions of people who think they know, but do not, is a particularly delightful tactic, one that Plato was fond of.³⁴ He also singles out dialogues that combine characters who are all ignorant but refuse to be silent or confess their ignorance. Speroni compares this combination of ignorance in dialogue to the striking of flint with iron, where two cold and serious substances can be used to produce hot sparks which could light up the soul of the right reader.³⁵

5. Speroni makes much of the fact that when he wrote his comedies he was young and ignorant. A young author of comedies cannot be expected to know the truth, but only to imitate character, a twist on Socratic ignorance and love of *logos*. The author, like the painter, need almost be deliberately ignorant of whatever underlying truth there is in order to capture the appearance of people. The painter manipulates the visible appearance while the dialogue writer imitates their oral display. Thus Speroni grabs the bull by the horns, and deliberately claims the mantle of ignorance in his defense, claiming it a virtue

³² Speroni, Pozzi, p. 691.

³³ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 699.

³⁴ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 707.

³⁵ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 708.

for the young dialogue writer.³⁶ (The hint, if we remember the Socratic precedent, is that those who are judging Speroni do not even know they do not know. This is part of the thrust of the fourth part where Speroni damns all writing that is not devotional as vain and ignorant — at least he has the wit to admit it.)

In a pretty touch Speroni, now old, comments on how he will critique his dialogues as the severe father of comedies lectures his son.³⁷ Though he doesn't do that in the first and second part, there is a degree to which the third and fourth parts seem like the useless lectures of the old patriarchs in a farce, lectures which no one listens to anyway, *pace* Cox.³⁸

6. If the dialogue is not expected to deal with serious truths and the reasoning that achieves those truths, then we should not expect the dialectical movement of questions and answers to move the dialogue. Instead it is the artistic combination of very different characters that provides the delightful unity of the work. "Certainly the contrast of people, because that is full of novelty, is the heart and soul of dialogue..."³⁹ (One of the

³⁶ Speroni draws on Plato's *Ion*, where Socrates shows the ignorance and inspiration of the poet. As the dialogue is like poetry the dialogue writer is like the poet/rhapsode of the *Ion*, and hence knows nothing. Speroni, Pozzi, 710.

³⁷ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 689.

³⁸ One is tempted to reply to Virginia Cox that the last two parts are such lectures of the severe patriarch, and therefore do not deserve any attention. There is however a deeper way in which all the parts, and all the characters of the author taken on in each part make up a comedy of defense. This serves both the purpose of complicating the issue of Speroni's guilt beyond simple calculation, and turns the whole work into a mixture of authorial positions. The whole work is, in effect, a mix of the possible characters of the author, from the young defensive youth to the pious old man who just wants to make his peace with his maker.

³⁹ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 707.

questions we have to ask of the artist is how he combines these incongruous characters while making the dialogue look natural and unforced.)

This comical defense pulls together a number of the themes we have dealt with in previous chapters. To begin, Speroni draws on the Socratic idea that dialogue is tied to leisure. He distinguishes *ozio* and *negozio*, Italian for leisure and business, which he says includes the business of contemplation (professional philosophy).⁴⁰ Leisure is the time of recovery from work and has types of literature appropriate to it like the comical dialogue. The work of leisure should not be judged by standards of the time of work. Dialogue is not suited to hard philosophical work, but philosophical play, when we want to be entertained and have suspended our judgment.⁴¹ Aristotelian treatises, on the other hand, are philosophical works suited for instruction and the serious transmission of ideas. Speroni, no doubt, has the discussion of leisure in the *Phaedrus* in mind when he defends his works thus, but the time of leisure is no longer the time when others are drinking, but the time of youth, followed by the serious work of wise old age.

Speroni makes hay from the absence of the author. The dialogue delights us by presenting us with variety and novelty and to do this the author must withdraw in favor of the different characters (as Plato did). When writing, the author "silences his own voice, and fills those [dialogues or gardens] with various new names and manners, and with new and different arguments..."⁴² The absence of the author is linked to the ability to delight. The greater the presence of the author the less the variety and hence the less the diversion. In addition Speroni ties the authorial presence to the responsibility of the

⁴⁰ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 690.

⁴¹ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 690-1.

⁴² Speroni, Pozzi, p. 694, my translation.

author. The greater the presence of the author the easier it is to disentangle the author's opinions and judge them. This in turn puts a damper on the entertainment value of the work, as an author, when present, becomes answerable for the tenor of the conversation as a whole. An author if present can be judged by the company he keeps and if he values his reputation will steer the conversation towards serious subjects or stay away entirely.

This allows Speroni to give new life to the classical classification of dialogues. He distinguishes the reported dialogue from the representative one. The reported dialogue is like the epic where the author narrates (like a historian) the actions and words of others. In the representative dialogue others are allowed to speak for themselves. Since the epic dialogue (which he associates with Cicero and Xenophon) is like history where one does not report all facts but only the important ones, it should only report the worthwhile words of serious people. By contrast the representative dialogue, associated with Plato and Lucian, is free to entertain through the imitation of the ridiculous and ignorant.⁴³

He also comments on the responsibilities and place of the reader. It is up to the reader to know how to read dialogues written for leisurely entertainment. It is the fault of the reader if he pricks himself on the thorns of a rose bush by trying to grasp it. The reader should know not to expect instruction from a genre suited to entertainment. Nor should the reader expect resolution from a dialogue; rather the author presents characters who have their say and leave the dialogue all believing they have won the dispute, to the amusement of the reader and author who have not missed this. The dialogue is thus not for the instruction or delight of the characters, but for the audience who are entertained by the contrast of ignorance. The author and reader together can laugh at the play of the posturing of characters. The reader is not expected to identify with an unrepentant

⁴³ Speroni, Pozzi, p. 696-7.

interlocutor, learning as he is questioned, but can delight in the ignorance of those who think they know.

To conclude with Speroni, his feast of ideas on dialogue are not as incompatible with Tasso's as they appear; they offer a different type of dialogue as paradigmatic. For Tasso the serious narrated dialogue is paradigmatic, for Speroni it is the comic dialogue without narration. Both their theories of dialogue leave room for the other, Tasso comments that one can have the dialogical equivalent to comedy, and Speroni talks about the serious work of Cicero's dialogues. In Speroni's case his garden of thoughts is not designed to be a coherent theory that excludes others so much as a defensive labyrinth of ideas, while Tasso's work has a normative aspect that could be used to critique the comical dialogue as unworthy. In conclusion it is interesting to compare these two paradigms conveniently in a table:

	Tasso's Serious Dialogue	Speroni's Comic Dialogue
Direct or Reported:	Reported or Mixed Dialogue	Direct Representation
Characters:	Serious and Important Men	Variety of People, including Women, Disreputable People, and Fools
Subject:	Speculative or Ethical Issues	Anything (Does not necessarily have a coherent subject)
Resolution of Dialogue:	Purification of Error or Resolution of Truth	Comedy of Errors
Audience:	Civil and Speculative Men	Men and Women of Wit and Letters
Responsibility of Author:	To Instruct and Benefit	To Delight

A Definition of Dialogue

Given the limiting effect theory was put to in the late Italian Renaissance it would be unseemly if I were to use Speroni to propose a definition of dialogue that can be used to delimit dialogue today, as tempting as that may be given the growing fascination with dialogue in all quarters. Rather I will present, courtesy of Speroni, a theoretical position that tries to keep open the possibilities for dialogue and suggests ways of discussing the close connection of form and content. What I am going to propose is a working definition, buttressed by Bakhtin's theory of the novel, intended to show what the dialogue is capable of and how we can appreciate its artistry. It is a working definition in that it is supposed to provide work for the lover of dialogue.

Why choose to define dialogue at all? Definitions have a reputation for limiting discourse. The etymological roots of "define" lie in "de-finire", the Latin for "to end" or "to terminate." It is no surprise that one definition of "define" is "to determine the boundary ... to settle the limits of..."⁴⁴ But there is another sense of the word define, "to bring something into focus," which is what this definition is designed to do. Definitions can be treated as hints that guide one back in the direction of the sought. So without further ado let us propose a short form of the definition:

A dialogue is a unity of diverse voices

The reader familiar with Bakhtin will notice how I have borrowed from his definition of the novel. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" he writes: "The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a

⁴⁴ This is from the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary 2. See entry for "define."

diversity of individual voices, artistically organized."⁴⁵ My borrowing is not without reason. Bakhtin himself, in another essay "Epic and Novel", calls the Socratic dialogue the "authentic predecessor of the novel."⁴⁶ The Socratic dialogue for Bakhtin had many of the defining characteristics of the novel: laughter in the form of Socratic irony, the combination of different styles and dialects, a hero like Socrates, and closeness to everyday life and its language.

The key to Bakhtin's definition and mine is that the dialogue is a combination of different voices, each with its own form and content. It is a meal made of many ingredients like fish, bread and anchovies. The ingredients have not been melted in a pot until the result has a single colour and flavour; they have been instead mixed into a garden salad leaving the ingredients distinct. (Canadian readers will recognize this variation on the ethnic melting pot metaphor.) All other genres have their own particular form, but the dialogue (an even more so the novel) is a mixture of these.⁴⁷ The paradigmatic dialogue has no single language, nor a single form, but is made up of the artistic combination of others. "The style of the novel is to be found in the combination of styles; the language of a novel in the system of its 'languages.'"⁴⁸

It would be tempting to call the dialogue a metagenre that encloses within it other forms of discourse, but that would give it a status it doesn't deserve. If anything it is beneath the other genres, closer to the everyday confusion of voices from which literary

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 262.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", p. 22.

⁴⁷ Croce would disagree that one can clearly distinguish the form and content of any work of art. See page 15 of his *Æsthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*.

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 262.

genres rise. I prefer to consider it a genre at the threshold of others, parasitic on the authoritative voices of the age, capable of parodying them, but not of determining them. The dialogue, like any form of parody, depends on the voices it contrasts. It is woven out of the distinct threads that have been spun by others.

Voice

Let us begin at the end of this definition and work our way through its words. A voice is a combination of form and content. Most of the voices in dialogue are the speech of a character which carries opinions (content) in the language appropriate to his or her background and personality. Dialogue, however, can be used to combine voices other than those of characters. We can find in dialogues the voices of Gods, the voices of artificial entities like Dialogue and the Laws of Athens, and voices that are of a different genre like the verses that introduce each part of Boethius' *Consolation* or the prefaces to Cicero's dialogues.

Often one voice will come through another. The most obvious example is in narrated dialogues where the narrator writes in his own voice and then slides into direct reporting of others so that you can hear them through him. You can also have characters that impersonate others, as Socrates does when he argues with the Laws of Athens or represents the positions of others in the *Theaetetus*. (The conversational ability of Socrates to represent the voice of others makes him particularly suited to dialogue; he can organize within himself voices in a fashion similar to Plato when writing. Socrates is the oral analog to the dialogue writer.)

Bakhtin takes this a step farther and suggests that all voice is the reorganization of other voices. "The ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of

selectively assimilating the words of others."⁴⁹ This leads to an interesting problem: if a dialogue is a unity of voices and a voice is itself a unity of voices, one gets an infinite regress of voices. It also means that in some way all discourse is dialogical as there is no such thing as a simple voice. Bakhtin would undoubtedly not be bothered by this regress, because he is fascinated by the ways we can include the voices of others within ours. The difference between a voice and dialogue, however, lies in the degree of assimilation of the enclosed voices. A dialogue is a unity where the voices are not assimilated, but left clearly distinct; in a voice the assimilation is an ongoing process where most of the differences have been sanded down. (The exception to this is the Socratic hero who speaks in different voices like dialogue, but he has a special role in dialogue comparable to that of the author outside.)

Bakhtin talks about language where I have chosen to focus on voice. A language is a broader category than a voice. "We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life."⁵⁰ A voice is a particular instance of the use of a language, for example a character choosing what to say within the possibilities offered by the conceptual scheme and distinctions offered by the language. In philosophical dialogues, where the contrast of the ideological dimension of different languages is important, characters tend to be exemplary representatives of the languages (social, professional, and regional background) they speak in. Characters tend to be simplified so that they become pure voices identifiable by the reader as belonging to a

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 341.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 271.

certain class and profession. This is especially true when we have characters who represent abstract entities like Philosophy or Justice. This simplification highlights the contrast of the characters and their ideological backgrounds. This also explains why we have slipped into talking of dialogue between communities.

To be fair, most of us speak many languages, switching languages even in mid sentence. Therefore, just as there can be different voices using the same language, an individual can switch languages or speak in different voices. Thus in dialogue one also finds certain characters like Socrates who are not simple voices, but themselves a unity of voices in different languages. These characters, because they have the same ability to represent different voices that dialogue has, are typically the heroes of dialogues, and the closest we have to a representative of the author. It should be noted that these heroic speakers do not necessarily represent the opinions of the author; they represent the capability to compose their voice that is parallel to the author's ability to compose a unity of voices. Socrates can manage oral dialogue the way Plato manages written dialogue. The symmetry of Socrates and Plato we have mentioned before. What Plato did with written dialogue can be seen as an application of the Socratic oral practice.

By languages Bakhtin does not mean the traditional national languages like French, English, German, and Japanese; he is interested in the ways of discoursing particular to different social, professional, and regional groups. Languages for Bakhtin also have a ideological character; they are not content independent. A language has a horizon of possible opinions that can be expressed within it. Among other things it is difficult to critique a language from within it, using only its distinctions. This was the danger Heidegger felt so acutely. While for Heidegger the ideological dimension of a language is a problem as it makes understanding between languages difficult (not to mention the difficulty of reaching beyond the concepts of one's language), for Bakhtin this is not a

problem as it is not the characters who have to understand each other. The novel and dialogue, intended for the audience not the interlocutors, can delight and instruct even if the interlocutors do not reach an understanding. If anything, to paraphrase Speroni, the dialogue delights most when the interlocutors talk at cross-purposes misunderstanding each other because of subtle differences in meaning. In Hume's *Dialogues* we see this at work. Philo deliberately voices his skepticism in the language of Demea thereby convincing him that they understand each other and are united in their critique of Cleanthes. Cleanthes alerts the reader that the agreement masks a much deeper difference than that between him and Demea, but it is not until the end that Demea realizes the extent of the difference and leaves.

Heidegger's hesitation and awareness of the danger of dialogue between languages is particularly interesting because it is a problem within dialogue, not a problem for the auditors outside of dialogue. Within his dialogue Heidegger worries about his ability to understand the other and resorts in his hesitant way to defining terms. The defining of terms, be it in the roundabout fashion Heidegger takes, or the direct way Socrates imposes on his interlocutors, is one mechanism for overcoming language differences and forging a communal language that will maximize understanding. (This is not the only tactic for entering into dialogue; others are to make the conversation itself a topic of conversation, to agree on "rules" of discussion, or to periodically review what has passed.) Heidegger is not innocent of the ways languages can be adapted to meet; he himself was a master at borrowing from the language of poetry and religion to overcome limitations in the language of metaphysics, thereby altering the very language of metaphysics we now use. But all these tactics are for those within dialogue who wish to understand each other (which is not always the case). From the distance of the author and auditor, understanding between characters is not always desirable as it erases the contrast of the characters. The comic dialogue and its ironic variant thrive on certain

misunderstandings. The Socratic hero often takes advantages of the ambiguities to eject characters rather than educate them or include them in the understanding. Particularly in representative dialogues, where the comic contrast is highest, we find characters sacrificed rather than included in understanding. This is often the fate of orthodox voices whose authority is made strange when contrasted with other voices that they, in their ignorance, refuse to acknowledge. If the hero of dialogue is the voice that can adapt to other voices, the villain is the brittle unchanging voice, convinced that it is the universe of truth.

Diversity

A dialogue that combines voices that are indistinguishable in their opinions and language is hardly a dialogue at all, for it reads like a treatise artificially rendered as a dialogue. A treatise, after all, also has content and form. What distinguishes the dialogue is the diversity of opinions and characters. A dialogue is a way of bringing different opinions together while preserving the voice of those opinions. In Hume's *Dialogues*, we do not have the dry comparison of positions on the nature of God, all represented in the same voice, and therefore losing the particular character of some of the voices; instead we have incarnated opinions expressed in the fashion that suits the type of person who would hold those opinions. In the *Phaedrus* it is not an accident that the speech-writer Lysias is not present, since that is in the character of the speech-writer; he writes for others rather than for himself, absenting himself from the declamation.

A dialogue that simply mixes voices at random is also rarely successful. As Speroni says, it is the contrast of these voices that delights. Dialogue is particularly suited to the contrast of positions that are rarely confronted and are fundamentally unreconcilable if one takes seriously their expression. That which is a problem when you are in dialogue, is a virtue when you audit the represented dialogue. Within dialogue you have to beware of

the differences between your language and that of your interlocutors, especially when the difference is subtle enough to be overlooked. For this reason the process of entering into dialogue, defining your terms and setting out the rules of the dialogue, is so important to participants. Outside of the dialogue, as an auditor, reader, or author, you can take advantage of this diversity in a number of ways. You can use it to parody a language and those who speak in it. You can choose to use one language to highlight the inadequacies of another, thereby critiquing it, or you can admire the persistence of those who are adapting to find a middle ground.

The traditional philosophical work extracts positions from voices, translating them to the voice of professional philosophy with its jargon and character. The voices once depersonalized can be compared as objects of the same sort. This reduction in certain cases fails to grasp what is at stake, especially in cases when it is the character of the community of discourse which is at issue. Dialogue by contrast can preserve the situated expression of ideas, but rarely works when one wants to resolve differences because it thrives on diversity and therefore tends to maintain diversity. To paraphrase Hume, dialogue is not suited for the delivery of complex systems that reconcile everything, but is suited to issues where there is no clear resolution.

Bakhtin is at his best when he shows the dialogical character of all works, even those that on the surface seem monological. As he points out, "our speech is filled to overflowing with other people's words."⁵¹ To some extent all discourse includes a diversity of voices. The extent to which a work is a dialogue is a matter of the degree to which either the work contains dialogue or is situated within a larger one. A monological work is addressed to an audience; it enters into a larger dialogue that is already taking

⁵¹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 337.

place, identifying its interlocutors through references.⁵² A dialogue, by contrast, encloses its own dialogue and thus its own audience. It is no coincidence that so many dialogues spend time building up the character of the auditors among whom the reader (and author) can sit. The dialogue, rather than entering an existing community of discourse, tries to imagine its own community of discourse. For this reason the dialogue is particularly suited to situations when what is at stake is the community of discourse, its language, the character of the participants, and its possible subjects. The traditional work enters an existing community of discourse and therefore cannot stand outside it to offer alternatives. The philosophers who take advantage of the dialogue either mock the existing community or try to imagine a utopian community, be it a small circle or a republic, where new configurations of voices gathered can join.

The failure to account for the diversity of the voices in a dialogue (or novel) leads to interpretative strategies that isolate some feature from the whole. Especially in philosophy, where our professional discourse is built around the comparison of ideas in the voice of a recognized professional language, it is tempting, and not altogether unwarranted, to try to extract from a dialogue a single voice with one content. This is done in two ways: 1) you extract a single voice from within the dialogue, like that of Socrates, and treat it as the essence of the whole, 2) or you take the whole as the single voice of the author, ignoring the differences between the voices. Neither of the strategies is entirely unwarranted, for the dialogue lends itself to being treated as an encyclopedia

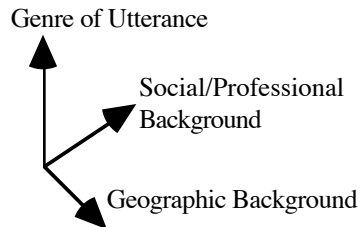
⁵² "All rhetorical forms, monologic in their compositional structure, are oriented toward the listener and his answer." Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 280-1. It should be pointed out that Bakhtin's project is much more ambitious than mine. For him dialogue is the principle of all discourse. He approaches what might be called a philosophy of dialogue that understands thought, speech, and literature in terms of its interaction with the other.

of voices on a subject which can be mined for positions that extracted can be answered elsewhere. (Certainly Cicero intended to provide a collection of acceptable positions from which Latin philosophy could start.) The problem arises when one tries to establish exactly what the author believed in this fashion. Plato scholarship has struggled with this problem for centuries; one is tempted to think that this struggle is the real legacy of Plato. Readers can never be confident in their reading, so they must continually reinvent Plato through increasingly complicated interpretative moves.

What is of particular interest to us is what Bakhtin calls the stratification of languages in literary works. These strata are the different dimensions on which different voices can be plotted. It is a rough, three-dimensional taxonomy that we can use to appreciate not only the differences between voices of the same background but the differences across backgrounds. For Bakhtin there are three dimensions of languages:

1. *Generic languages* are the languages of different literary forms, for example the language of the epic, the letter, the oration, or the manual. The novel, and on occasion the dialogue, combine different genres with their particular languages. So, for example, in dialogue we find not only direct speech, but epistolary prefaces which are in the language of letter writing, fragments of verse, and composed speeches.
2. *Social or Professional languages* are the second dimension of languages, and this is the one most exploited in dialogue. Different professions have their particular jargon and ideological background as do different social classes. The dialogue allows the combination of characters who speak different professional and social languages, using the same vocabulary in subtly different ways. It is no coincidence that Socrates was always out in the market talking to the tradesmen.

3. *Regional languages* are the third dimension of languages. In addition to the differences between genre of voice and social/professional background, we have to listen for the sometimes subtle geographic differences.



These three dimensions give us a starting point for identifying the types of voices of a dialogue. Each voice has a genre, a social and professional background, and a regional dialect. If the dialogue is a unity of these voices, we can begin to appreciate a dialogue by identifying the types of differences between voices, plotting them in this three-dimensional space. For example, in epistolary dialogues, the voice of the narrator is couched in the language of letter writing; it is of a different genre than the others in conversation. Cicero, the letter writer, is a character who, though of the same social, professional, and regional background as the other characters, is expressing himself in a different genre of utterance. The work of appreciating a dialogue involves appreciating the variety of voices within.

Unity

If dialogue preserves diversity, the challenge for an author is to create a unified work that can be called *one* dialogue. While in traditional philosophical works the language and content can provide unity to the work, this cannot by definition be the case with dialogue, as it is a unity of many languages and opinions. For this reason the strategies that dialogue writers use to create unity out of the diversity of voices have to be different from the ones used by the essay writer. A philosophical reader might be tempted to throw up his or her hands and consign the unity of dialogue to the broad category of "art," that

divine inspiration that cannot be discussed further but only located. This, however, misses some obvious mechanisms for forging unity out of contrasting voices, mechanisms which have philosophical relevance, not only because they are the concrete expression of the author's composition, but also because they are tied to the issues of philosophical culture that are central to many dialogues. Identifying these mechanisms allows us to appreciate the artistry of a dialogue, but that doesn't lessen their hermeneutical significance to the philosophical reader.

Formal Clues

The least interesting and most obvious mechanism for providing unity is to use formal clues that indicate to a reader the beginning, end, and parts of the dialogue. Prefaces and postfaces can work this way, wrapping up the dialogue into a unity bracketed by these devices. Especially important can be the finalization clues that indicate the end of the dialogue. Dialogue is like any utterance; there are hints that indicate when the utterance is over so that the audience can respond or go home. In dialogue these mechanisms can be internal to the conversation or external to it. To give a few examples: in Socratic dialogues it is not unusual for the Socratic character to take advantage of the confutation of the interlocutor to deliver a longer speech that wraps up the debate. In narrated dialogues, like those of Cicero, a final reversal can be a closing mechanism, unwinding the careful reasoning as a final act.

Occasion

The occasion of the dialogue also provides a unity to the work. A dialogue between characters usually involves some sort of meeting that brings them together. The reason for their meeting I will call the occasion and it often has its own logic. The occasion should not be confused with the setting, though the two are obviously tied. The occasion is the explicit chain of events that brought the characters together and will inevitably take

them apart, back to their own worlds. It is the action of the dialogue, what little there is. In Lucian's dialogues-of-the-dead we find an unearthly occasion — meetings in hell. In the *Phaedrus* the desire of Phaedrus to learn Lysias' speech by heart, out of hearing of others, takes him outside Athens where he meets Socrates who notices the half hidden speech.

Setting up a believable occasion is one of the challenges that faces the author or arranger of dialogue. If the characters are people who do not usually meet in everyday life, or if they do meet, they haven't the time to philosophize, then the author must craft a meeting where they all have an excuse to stay and talk. The arranger of an oral dialogue also has to make sure his audience is around to hear. One can see how the occasion, especially where the characters involved are busy men, must be an exceptional moment of leisure like a religious holiday when it would be unseemly to work. The choice of occasion is not simply a matter of setting up a believable meeting, the occasion, in the finest dialogues, is in harmony with the rest of the dialogue. Socrates meets Euthyphro because both are involved in court cases that revolve around a younger generation trying its elders. In the *Phaedrus* the discussion of writing and rhetoric is nicely illustrated by the fate of Lysias' speech in the hands of Phaedrus and Socrates.

Chronotope

In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" Bakhtin introduces a useful idea for understanding the unity of dialogue, the idea of the *chronotope*. The chronotope is the time-and-space of a work of literature. It is more than the physical setting, it is the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically

expressed in literature."⁵³ The chronotope is the type of place and the pace of life in that place that characterizes a dialogue. It is a major constituent of the culture of the dialogue which in turn, I have been arguing, is often the point of dialogues. Thus the chronotope may be our best device for categorizing dialogues philosophically. Discussions of chronotope make more sense if we give examples of the most important ones in philosophical dialogues. These chronotopes should be compared to the space and time mentioned at the end of the chapter on oral dialogue.

Villa Time: One of the most common chronotopes is the rural estate with its leisurely villa pace. The villa is a country estate far from the city and work. It is a place of relaxation with gardens that provide spices and herbs to dress up the business of city life. When gathered at a villa you have all day, and sometimes more than a day, to discuss anything. The amount of uninterrupted time naturally encourages long speeches.

In that the villa is a private space, one can say things that one could not in public. The privacy encourages play, especially the oratorical play where characters take both sides of an issue reversing themselves to show off their rhetorical skill. The privacy of the villa means that there is no audience outside the collection of friends gathered, which means the author has to use a narrator to let us in on what we would otherwise never hear of. Unlike public dialogues there is no place for us sitting at the edge, so we hear of the dialogue through a reporter like Pamphilus in Hume's *Dialogues*.

The villa is where friends gather; thus the competition among characters tends to be friendly, without the combative dialectic of public dialogue. Discussions in the villa rarely have the clear resolution of a dialectical dispute; friends do not bully each

⁵³ Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", p. 84.

other into humiliating capitulation, nor do friends impose rules for discourse on each other. Finally, at a villa you tend to have gathered people of similar social and economic background. There is less diversity among friends — people tend to spend their leisure with people they have similar interests to.

Symposium: The space of the symposium is the dining room; the time is the leisurely pace of dinner punctuated by dishes. The pace of a meal conditions the pace of the speaking, the speaking is the meal for the mind, each speech has its time and contributes to the complete feast. Being in the home, the symposium space is private, like Villa time, but the home is often in the city, so the symposium is a shorter break from work, and therefore closer to everyday business. As it is private you again have people who know each other and generally respect each other. Since there is also the issue of the reader's access to the private home, the symposium is therefore often reported; we gain access through someone who was there.

Public Space: After Villa Time the second major chronotope of the dialogue, closely tied to Socratic dialogue, is that of the public space. The public space can be a piazza, the steps of a court, a gymnasium, or the coffee house. In public space the interlocutors are on show, so they tend to talk for others, which is why there are more possibilities for irony in public dialogues. This type of dialogue is often representative, not narrated, because the public is right there; we the auditors need no excuse to listen in. Characters in public have to nurse their reputation and this conditions what they say. In public people are not likely to play with words, try new ideas, or express private beliefs. The public space thus encourages the discussion (and embarrassment) of orthodox (public) opinion. When in front of others the discussion tends to be aimed not at the instruction of the interlocutors but at the silent audience, the interlocutors speak at each other, but for the audience as in a debate. Interlocutors compete as if the silent majority were a jury and their reputations were at stake.

In public space the interlocutors need not be friends. This is where any citizen can discuss issues of public concern. This is where important public figures are challenged before others. It is where people who would not normally meet at home or at their villas encounter each other, often people from different social and economic groups. The public dialogue can thus offer the greatest diversity of characters (with the exception of the dialogue-of-the-dead).

The encounter in public space is rarely planned. People with other business happen to run into each other, and this sets the pace of the dialogue. When you have other affairs, and did not intend to spend time chatting, the dialogue is fast and short, crowded by the important business of the interlocutors. The time of the public dialogue, because it is sandwiched between other events, is closely tied to the affairs of the city. It is a time situated in the history of the characters and polis, not a leisure time apart and unconnected to its history. Public dialogues are part of the history of the community as they can make reputations, so the subject of the dialogue tends to be serious and politically relevant.

Along the Path: A less common chronotope is the road along which the interlocutors wander. The path usually leads from somewhere to somewhere (even if in a circle back to home) and thus the dialogue along the path often moves from topic to topic. Heidegger nicely uses the rhythm of the day to pace his dialogue along a country path. The path followed usually leads through the countryside so the dialogue has some of the private character of villa time with people who respect each other wandering over ideas at their leisure.

Limbo: An important literary chronotope is the space of the dead, be it Hades, Heaven, or Limbo. This is a space and time entirely disconnected from human history where characters can be brought together who could have never met in real life. The dialogue-of-the-dead is like public dialogue in that this space allows for unlikely

combinations of people in front of others. In limbo these characters should have all the time in the world to talk, yet these dialogues are often short and paced like those that take place in public space. This is partly because Limbo is a public space where people meet before others in contest. It is also because dead characters are often stereotypes; their death has fixed them as a type. The dialogue-of-the-dead achieves most of its effect through the incongruous combination of these characters in a way that mocks one or another type, and this effect does not take long to achieve if the mix of characters is right. Such a dialogue is almost over before it has begun; once the comic combination is clear to the reader so that they can see its potential there is no reason to continue.

Soliloquy: A chronotope at the edge of dialogue is the solitary space of contemplation, be it in a study, a dream, or a prison. In this space the narrator enters into dialogue with spiritual advisors, be they daemons, one's conscience, Philosophy incarnate, Gods, or saints. The space is isolated and private to the extreme, and there is no one but the narrator and the advisor they conjure up. While during the soliloquy the time seems eternal; the meditation is often triggered by a personal crisis. The time of the soliloquy is an interruption of eternity into the personal life of the narrator. The soliloquy takes as long as it has to, and when it is over, the normal course of events starts up again. It is the long night before death.

Because the soliloquy is often triggered by a crisis of some sort and it is a dialogue between characters within the narrator, this type of dialogue is often autobiographical. It is a type of dialogue that represents the thinking of the narrator at some critical moment. In the soliloquy the hero gathers up his life and prepares philosophically for day.

This chronotope extends beyond the dialogue. The diversity of characters is always tenuous in a soliloquy. The soliloquy is properly a genre of its own including

such works as Descartes' *Meditations*. Some soliloquies are dialogue in the sense that there is an alternation of voices, but most do not qualify as there is not the diversity between the voices.

What all these chronotopes have in common is that they are all places and times of discussion, and interludes in the life of work. They are times of leisure when people have time to think and talk. The only chronotope that involves any action is that of the path when people are walking while talking. (This is what distinguishes the novel from the dialogue; the novel includes places and times of action not just leisure.) Most of these times are within history. Most dialogues are particular moments in the history of the community of discourse, a good example being the set of dialogues around Socrates' death: the *Euthyphro*, that takes place before the trial, the *Apology*, which shows the trial, the *Crito* which takes place after the trial, and the *Phaedo* that recounts his death by hemlock. The place of these dialogues is also a specific spot in the community accessible to the participants. While the place may not be public, it is rarely an intimate spot unlikely to be the site of a conversation (that could be reported) like the bedroom or bathroom. For this reason I consider the soliloquy a different genre from the dialogue. Its private meditative space and time is what distinguishes it. The exception to these general rules would seem to be the dialogues-of-the-dead, those that take place in Hades or Limbo, but even they are in a specific place in the afterworld. Though they do not take place in the history of the living, they do, however, take place in the history of the dead. For example, they have to take place after the death of the participants, and in many of such dialogues one senses that there is a "history" of sorts for the gods of the afterworld. My point is that dialogue always seems to take place in a specific context, something a treatise does not, for example. Even the dialogue-of-the-dead has this sense of context — that it is in a particular time and place and is not a work that is eternally true.

The chronotope can be used not only to differentiate the varieties of dialogue, but also to differentiate genres. We have seen a hint of this with the soliloquy, which overlaps with the dialogue, and with the awkward fit of the dialogue-of-the-dead. In the conclusion I will discuss the varieties of philosophical writing at greater length using the chronotope to distinguish three major genres. Those who are interested in the differences between dialogues and the differences between dialogues and other genres do well to use the chronotope as the distinguishing feature.

Themes

The last unifying mechanism that needs to be mentioned is the theme. I use the word theme because not all dialogues, even philosophical ones, have only explicit subjects, and even when they do, there are other themes that, like strands stretching through the dialogue, help keep it together. Themes can be explicit subjects of discussion recognized by the speakers as an issue that keeps them talking, or they can be implicitly carried in the images, examples, and manner of the characters. The most interesting themes have a way of being both a subject for discussion and turning up transformed in other ways. In Socratic dialogues these themes are often driven by the movement of questions that acts like the plot of a novel. This is not, however, the case with all dialogues, even ones clearly philosophical.

Any discussion of themes in a dialogue needs to consider a) the explicit issues that are discussed openly, b) the implicit issues, and c) those issues that are both. Often the most interesting issues, like that of the relationship between the younger generation and their elders that runs through the *Euthyphro*, are developed both explicitly and implicitly by the author. The theme is discussed as an issue while also being shown in the interaction of Socrates and Euthyphro. For this reason it is important to trace themes through an entire work rather than extracting the explicit discussion and ignoring other

developments of the issue. If we are interested in the just individual as discussed in Plato's *Republic*, we should follow the discussion on the just state. For example, the proposal to purify the state by evacuating it of all older citizens can be compared to the traumatic purification of the individual that was discussed in the chapter on oral dialogue. A proposal to get rid of unwanted voices might seem extreme for a state, but therapeutic for the individual.

Another aspect of this is that it is important to understand how a theme emerges in the social context of the dialogue. We should not treat themes only as arguments that can be represented by a series of questions and answers unattached to people. We have to understand the conversational context of each theme. Why and how does someone raise an issue? Why did it come up at that point? To generalize, careful attention needs to be paid to a) how and by whom a theme is launched, b) interventions on the theme through the work (be they explicit or implicit), and finally c) how the theme is concluded. We can think of a theme as the trajectory of an issue through the space of the dialogue. It is important to note who launches the theme and where it is launched. It is important how the course of the theme is altered by other characters and themes, and finally, it is important where the theme is going when the dialogue ends. Only then can we appreciate how a theme holds the diversity of people together.

There is a tendency in philosophy to follow a theme only when it is being discussed explicitly. If we isolate moments in the development of a theme we miss the unifying nature of that theme. For example, in Hume's *Dialogues*, scepticism is an explicit issue at the beginning (especially dialogue 3) and at the end of the dialogue (dialogue 12). What happens to the issue in the middle? In the dialogue by Heidegger discussed at the beginning of this book we noted how issues would hesitantly wind their way through the work. Questions are asked only to be answered obliquely or much later. To understand

how such a theme is a unifying mechanism one has to ask what happens to it throughout the dialogue, including the middle parts when it is not discussed. Are there really two discussions of scepticism, or are the two explicit discussions part of a single trajectory of the issue through the dialogue that picks up baggage in the long traverse through the parts that do not explicitly deal with scepticism? If the latter is the case, how is the issue modified by the intervening parts? This is not to say that all themes must traverse an entire dialogue; my point is that we have to be sensitive to those that do.

Not only do we have to pay attention to how themes traverse a dialogue, but we need to be sensitive to how the themes interact. Certain themes can be difficult to extract and discuss as a single thread because they merge with other themes, are modified by others (intervene in the trajectory of each other), or change into new themes. It is therefore important that individual themes not only be followed through a dialogue, but that attention be paid to how they work together to make a dialogue a thematic unity. To understand how themes unify a dialogue a careful interpreter might:

1. Identify the major themes in a dialogue both those that are explicitly discussed and those that are not.
2. Follow each theme through the dialogue paying careful attention to:
 - 2.1 the context in which the theme is launched,
 - 2.2 the interventions on the theme as it moves through the work, and
 - 2.3 the concluding direction of the theme when the dialogue ends.
3. Consider the interaction of the major themes and how they affect each other.

Intepretation of Dialogue

I said at the beginning that the definition proposed was a working one. One way we can use this definition is to help us read dialogues appreciatively. We can take the definition of dialogue proposed here and use it to identify questions that the interpreter of a dialogue should consider. If the features I have discussed, especially the unifying ones,

are really relevant to the dialogue, they should provide a framework of things to look for and describe in a dialogue. This framework should not limit interpreters; it should help them focus on the dialogue, and remind them of features they might have missed. We can repurpose the definition as two sets of questions designed to elicit the nature of a particular dialogue:

1. **Diversity of Voices:** Who are the principal voices in the dialogue? How is the form of their expression related to the opinions they express? What is the generic, social, and geographical background of each voice? How are the voices different? What voices might be missing?
2. **Unity of Dialogue:** *Occasion* - What is the occasion of the dialogue? How do the characters happen to meet? *Chronotope* - What is the setting and pace of the dialogue? What type of space and time does the dialogue take place in? *Theme* - What are the major themes? How do they move through the dialogue, and how do they interact?

Oral Dialogue

To conclude this chapter we need to ask if this definition can illuminate the oral dialogue. We have conducted this discussion of the definition of dialogue in the context of literary dialogues, but the larger context of this work has been the search for commonality between the oral and written dialogue. We found that both the oral and written dialogue are composed for the delight of the auditor or reader, that the dialogue was not directed to the participants, but to those in the audience. I have also commented, in the context of this definition, on the concerns of those in dialogue against those auditors at the periphery. Heidegger, the character in dialogue, wants to overcome the difference in language, while Heidegger the author wants to use it.

To digress for a moment, this definition is not a manual for those who want to enter into dialogue. The needs of those in dialogue are different from those of interpreters who wish to appreciate it from the outside. The auditor and reader can enjoy a misunderstanding that would be counterproductive for those within. Something can be a dialogue for those outside that is frustrating or humiliating for those within. One of the implications of the unity of dialogue is precisely that one has to be outside to name it as such. One has to have a distance from an event to call it a dialogue. The distance can be that of the participant after the fact reflecting on it, or that of the auditor listening in, or that of one who hopes for a dialogue coming. My point is that distance is a feature of our relationship to dialogue, something can only be so named at the distance from which it can be seen to be a unity. That said, we could work our way back from this definition to guidelines on how to encourage dialogue. I will do so briefly in the conclusion. What remains now is to see if this feature can help us understand the oral dialogue.

One feature of oral dialogue is its hesitant character. We hesitate to say we are in dialogue; rather we talk about entering dialogue. We hesitate to call something a dialogue while it is ongoing; rather we call for dialogue to come, or recognize it as such after the fact. One reason for this is our expectation that a dialogue be a unity comparable to those exemplary dialogues we have heard or read. Our expectations of dialogue are such that we hesitate to call something a dialogue unless it is completed and we can look back on it and find it worthy, just as we would hesitate to call a life just before it is over. As in literary dialogue we have to achieve a distance comparable to that of the reader before we can call something a dialogue. Even the participants in a dialogue, when they recognize it as such, see the dialogue from a peripheral perspective, that of a reader or auditor; they step outside their role in the dialogue and look at it as an auditor. I have noted earlier the importance of the negotiations about how to proceed, and the reflections by characters on the course of the dialogue. These negotiations and reflections within dialogue are that

stepping back that we all do to think about the value of the conversations we are in and their possible direction. This negotiation and reflection is characteristic of friendly dialogue.

But how do we recognize something as a unified and completed dialogue, even if we do so only after the fact? The characteristics that I suggested above for appreciating the written dialogue are the features we look for in the oral dialogue. We look for the bringing together of diverse voices. Where everyone is of the same background and agrees about everything you don't have a dialogue. It is rather the bringing together of difference that we admire in oral dialogue. To change the focus of this discussion, the political dialogues we call for tend to be between groups that have significant differences. Nobody would consider a discussion a dialogue unless significant social, professional, ideological, or regional differences are overcome. This is the healing power of dialogue that we call for, its ability to gather difference. As for the mechanisms that we use to bring our voices together in oral dialogue, the unifying strategies noted above also apply. We have to pay attention to the formalities of conversation, there has to be an occasion (preferably one congruent to the issues discussed), we need a setting and pace that is appropriate (and the setting and pace chosen will affect the character of the dialogue, especially the publicity surrounding the dialogue), and finally there are themes and subjects that tie dialogue together. These unifying strategies are an analytical tool for the interpreter of dialogue, but they can be refocused to allow us to imagine what are the conditions for dialogue are, or to allow us to appreciate what brought diverse people together in something we want to call a dialogue after it happened.