

**DIGNITY OF BOUNDARY**

**“JACK LONDON SLEPT HERE”**

**(A NOVEL)**

**“FOREGROUNDING DIALOGUE: AN ETHICAL APPROACH**

**THROUGH COURAGEOUS RISK”**

**(AN EXEGESIS)**

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**“FOREGROUNDING DIALOGUE: AN ETHICAL  
APPROACH THROUGH COURAGEOUS RISK”**

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**Volume 2**

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**(AN EXEGESIS)**

**Volume 2**

## INTRODUCTION

On July 16, 2001, *The New York Times* published an essay by author, Elmore Leonard, who shared his exploration of literary themes and his rules for writing. In doing so he introduced a challenge to the author who is reluctant to explore a trajectory of erasure “If you have a facility for language and imagery and the sound of your voice pleases you, invisibility is not what you are after, and you can skip the rules. Still, you might look them over” (E1). Leonard introduces a prologue from John Steinbeck’s *Sweet Thursday*, a prologue that “makes the point of what my rules are all about” (E1). Steinbeck’s prologue highlights the foregrounding of dialogue and accurately summarises the direction of my exegesis:

I like a lot of talk in a book and I don’t like to have nobody tell me what the guy looks like. I want to figure out what he looks like from the way he talks ... figure out what the guy’s thinking from what he says. I like some description but not too much of that. ... Sometimes I want a book to break loose with a bunch of hooptedoodle. ... Spin up some pretty words maybe or sing a little song with language. That’s nice. But I wish it was set aside so I don’t have to read it. I don’t want hooptedoodle to get mixed up with the story (v-vi).

Hooptedoodle is not an academic term. But as a literary contribution from a Nobel Prize-winning author, it playfully and accurately summarises and defines all novelistic text that is not dialogue. And no, this definition is not meant to be complimentary. Indeed, for the authors I will be investigating, the absence of “hooptedoodle” is notable and intended. Leonard introduces an argument about

how the reader can play a role in boundary identification by identifying and rejecting the passages in a novel that are not dialogue:

Think of what you skip reading a novel: thick paragraphs of prose you can see have too many words in them. What the writer is doing, he's writing, perpetrating hooptedoodle ... or has gone into the character's head, and the reader either knows what the guy's thinking or doesn't care. I'll bet you don't skip dialogue (E1).

Leonard explores the relationship between author and reader and how this relationship can become strained when the interfering author relies too heavily on description and interior monologue. The intrusive author is not just intruding into text. The intrusive author is crossing a boundary into the reader's space with these acts of intrusion by telling the reader what something looked like or what a character is thinking.

In reading dialogue, if the author is restrained with their use of adverbs, the reader is free to interpret and render meaning, emotion, motivation, etc., without being told by the author what to think, what to feel, what to see. The reader's space is one in which the reader has the freedom to explicate, engender meaning. Fictional dialogue provides a collaborative forum in which these freedoms may be explored. An authorial incursion into the reader's space reduces the opportunity for collaboration. There is, I will argue, an almost narcissistic disrespect for the reader's sovereignty on the part of the intrusive author, an unpleasant experience akin to the person who constantly interrupts others when a conversation is taking place. I will argue later that this narcissistic disrespect, this tendency, can also



extend to boundary violations of the characters in the novel that the author has created.

I should note that not all readers are the same and Leonard oversteps his argument by dismissing readers who do become engaged with long passages of descriptive prose or interior monologues rendered by a skilful author. However, for the purposes of this exegesis, I am focussed on foregrounding dialogue and how this foregrounding argues for a respect of boundary between author and reader because authorial incursions are kept to a minimum.

The question of boundary may also explain why there has been, at times, harsh criticism by scholars of the theoretical work of authors. Theory is the work of scholars. Fiction crafting is the work of the author. Boundaries must be respected. And yet, again and again, authors who foreground dialogue, like the just quoted Leonard, provide theoretical scaffolding for their crafting choice. Perhaps the theoretical efforts of these authors are an attempt to fill the vacuum of scrutiny that has been lacking when it comes to fictional dialogue. Scholars such as Bronwen Thomas have only recently addressed this blind spot that has existed in scholarly attention to fictional dialogue.

Intentions to reduce authorial intervention are nothing new. They have existed long before Steinbeck. This objectivity is on full display in the Greek epic poem, *The Odyssey*, one of the oldest literary works of Western literature. A significant portion of Homer's poem is dedicated to dialogue. E.V. Rieu, translator of the 1946 Penguin edition, describes it as "the true ancestor of the long line of novels

that have followed it” (10) and highlights its “interplay of character,” (10) an interplay achieved by the foregrounding of dialogue. Rieu notes that the writer of *The Odyssey* is “the most objective of authors” (10). Objectivity will be explored more deliberately later in this exegesis.

My initial exegetical interest in dialogue focussed on question-and-answer methodology in the novel. This research area proved to be too narrow for the purposes of my exegesis but my reading of theorists like Hans Robert Jauss have contributed greatly to my improved understanding of fictional dialogue and its place in academic discourse. I was intrigued enough by Jauss’ question-and-answer study of the *Book of Genesis* (1989, 52) to briefly explore the best-selling book of all time, *The Holy Bible*. I was curious to see if dialogue had a function in these sacred texts and if so, how much? I limited my reading to the first three chapters of *Genesis*, using The New International Version (NIV), a modern English translation of the Protestant Bible. I counted 2,018 words in Genesis 1-3. And of these words, which tell the story of God creating the heavens and the Earth and the rise and fall of Adam and Eve, 803 are dedicated to dialogue. Of course a full reading of *The Bible* would render a more complete picture of dialogue use but it is notable that this ancient text which I previously had assumed would have a dominant, controlling narrator, has 40% of its first three chapters committed to dialogue. And this commitment to dialogue, which includes the voices of Adam, Eve and the serpent, occurs while God, in the narrative, is busy creating ... everything.

Yehuda Halevi, one of the greatest Hebrew poets who lived in Spain during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, made a choice to foreground dialogue when, at 50 years of age, he began writing *The Kuzari*, a monumental work about a dialogue between a rabbi and a pagan who ends up mythologised as a king, a work that would take him 20 years to complete. The book is composed entirely with dialogue, a discipline I will explore with more contemporary authors and one that I am attempting with my creative work attached to this exegesis. Terry Steven Neiman showed that Halevi's use of dialogue "allows the dialogue's interlocutors to speak in their own voice (i.e., stylistically, philosophically and culturally). It is thus an argument for authenticity, and a rejection of particularism" (218). Using dialogue as a tool to achieve a closer proximity to authenticity will be argued later in this exegesis. Of course, any critical study of fictional dialogue, of an author's rendering of interlocutors speaking in their own voices, requires knowledge of Mikhail Bakhtin's work on dialogue and polyphony. I will offer support for what might be seen as a controversial claim regarding Bakhtin's writing on fictional dialogue, namely that he placed very little theoretical value on scenes of pure dialogue.

Episode 17 (the "Ithaca" chapter) of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, like Halevi's work, takes foregrounding dialogue to a remote outpost, a chapter with no narrative intrusion, in the form of 309 questions and answers. The entire chapter is dialogue only. This approach intentionally undermines the literary devices and authority of the novelist to describe, intrude and display intention. One of the reasons I am studying the foregrounding of fictional dialogue is because I want to find out why authors resist these conventional narrative choices. By foregrounding dialogue

they are resisting, revolting against their own authority as authors. They are undermining their own authority, destabilising and deconstructing their own authority.

In an article for *Slate*, author Ron Rosenbaum explains why Joyce's "Ithaca" chapter held such appeal for him:

Ordinary narrative acts as if it doesn't care what you care about, only what *it* cares about and acts all superior by making you guess why. The Q&A form makes you wonder why you wonder why. It's not about piling on literary tricks, so much as dismantling them to see how they're done (Rosenbaum).

The aesthetic appeal of dialogue, as argued by Leonard, is not just for readers. Frank Budgen, an English painter and writer, and close friend of James Joyce, spoke of the dialogue-only "Ithaca" chapter from *Ulysses*, "Joyce once told me that Ithaca was his favourite episode" (264).

In 2012 Bronwen Thomas published her seminal work on dialogue, *Fictional Dialogue: Speech and Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern Novel*. Her study, she argued, "is the first of its kind to combine literary and narratological analysis of fictional dialogue with reference to linguistic terms and models, Bakhtinian theory, cultural history, media theory, and cognitive approaches" (*FD* viii). And further highlighting fictional dialogue as a neglected area of academic scrutiny, Thomas stated, "It is also the first study to focus in depth on the dialogue novel" (*FD* viii). Thomas embarked upon her study of fictional dialogue as the result of novelist and literary critic David Lodge's argument that novelists who

foregrounded fictional dialogue “have been somewhat undervalued by academic criticism because their foregrounding of dialogue made them resistant to a method of analysis biased in favour of lyric expressiveness” (AB 83).

I encountered a significant challenge when I needed to narrow my list of authors I wanted to include in this exegesis. There have been many authors who have foregrounded dialogue. These include Ernest Hemingway, Ronald Firbank and Ivy Compton-Burnett. And more recently Robert Pinget and Nicholson Baker. In the end I narrowed my list to represent three authors from three separate continents – North America, Europe and South America. My interest in foregrounded dialogue is now a passion, both academically and personally. I look forward to continuing my research and writing on this topic so I can explore the field of foregrounded fictional dialogue in African and Asian literature, and also within the indigenous story-telling traditions of Australian Aboriginals and North American indigenous communities.

The three authors I have chosen for my exegesis are William Gaddis, Henry Green and Manuel Puig.

William Gaddis published his first novel in 1955. *The Recognitions* is 956 pages long and contains 480,000 words, almost all of which are dedicated to dialogue. Like James Joyce before him Gaddis uses dashes instead of quotation marks for his dialogue. There are very few speech tags and at times it becomes a challenge for the reader to figure out which character is talking. The book was not well received by critics and it would be another 20 years before Gaddis published *JR*,

his next book. The emphasis that Gaddis placed upon dialogue made reading his work almost impossible for some readers, including author Jonathan Franzen who wrote an essay about Gaddis for *The New Yorker* in 2002 titled “Mr. Difficult: William Gaddis and the Problem of Hard-to-Read Books.” The essay highlights some of the issues that the dialogue novel raises including the illuminating contrast between a “contract” writer: “a novel deserves a reader’s attention only as long as the author sustains the reader’s trust ... the discourse here is one of pleasure and connection” and a “status” writer: “the value of any novel, even a mediocre one, exists independent of how many people are able to appreciate it” because the status model “invites a discourse of genius and art-historical importance” (Franzen). Gaddis is an author who took significant risks. He was not churning out novels every two years. It was twenty years between his first and second novel. He maintained his commitment to foregrounded dialogue, to the collaborative reader, even though his first novel was seen as a failure, critically and commercially. This speaks to his courageous approach to the craft of writing a novel. And it is something that he has in common with Green and Puig.

Gaddis, Green and Puig take risks with their expectation that the reader is a collaborator in the truest sense of the word. The reader is expected to work, to fill in the intentional gaps, to infer meaning, to provide the other half of the dialogue between author and reader. There is very little in the way of the guiding voice of a narrator in these dialogue novels. And what dialogue novels offer, as Thomas argues, is “something quite different from novels where a narrative voice or presence guides the reader and provides a sort of lodestar from which events and exchanges may be charted and navigated” (*FD* vii). Gaddis had a particular

aversion for the pianola because it required no effort, and novels that feature controlling narrators are similar to the player piano. Further to the piano analogy, Gaddis, Green and Puig showed what is required of the reader. This is not an author sitting alone on a bench creating beautiful music on the piano. This is the author asking the reader to sit at the bench to play a duet. Gaddis often spoke of this collaboration.

... the reader is brought in almost as a collaborator in creating the picture that emerges of the characters, of the situation, of what they look like—everything. So this authorial absence, which everyone from Flaubert to Barthes talks about, is the sense that the book is a collaboration between the reader and what is on the pages (*PR* 79-80).

English novelist Henry Green, born Henry Vincent Yorke, was once asked about the introspective style of James Joyce and the work of Franz Kafka. His answer speaks to the respect he has for their brilliance and to the directions and choices he made as a novelist. “I think Joyce and Kafka have said the last word on each of the two forms they developed. There’s no one to follow them. They’re like cats which have licked the plate clean. You’ve got to dream up another dish if you’re to be a writer” (*S* 247). Green’s words about dreaming up another dish appear sincere and accurate but his expression of admiration for the styles of Joyce and Kafka betrays his consistent and passionate opposition to authors who render thoughts of characters in their fiction and utilise a domineering narrator.

Between 1926 and 1952 Green published nine novels and an autobiography. All of his novels foreground dialogue and like Gaddis there are lengthy sections of text where the reader has to figure out who is speaking because the use of speech

tags is kept to a minimum. Green famously refused to be photographed from the front. This refusal might seem trifling but it speaks to the erasure of self and to Green's commitment to the erasure of the author from the text. Green's work embodies an ethical approach to character depiction. Characters will speak and the narrator, for the most part, will remain silent. The reader of Green, like the reader of Gaddis, will be asked to participate in the telling of the story, will be required to read closely, to read carefully, and the reader will interpret what a character is saying.

Argentine writer Manuel Puig was influenced by cinema. In 1985 the film adaptation of Puig's *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* was released and Puig found himself in the spotlight. Samuel G. Freedman did a profile piece on Puig and highlighted this cinematic influence, "Born in Vallegas, Argentina, in 1932, he started his movie-going career with 'The Bride of Frankenstein.' Through his childhood and adolescence, he went to the local theater five nights a week, using his same seat for 10 years" (C11). Henry Green shared Puig's devotion to the cinema. While at the University of Oxford, Green would try and see a film every afternoon and every night. Jeremy Treglown affirms, "Most films were changed midweek and all were paired, so that Henry could have seen up to sixteen in almost any week" (52). The objective requirements of cinematic technique had a significant influence on the choices that Puig and Green made as authors.

Jorgelina Corbatta asked Puig about his literary influences in 1979 and he replied, "I don't have traceable literary models because I haven't had great literary influences on my life. Instead, that space has been occupied by cinematographic influences" (167).



Shari A. Zimmerman contributed a paper about Puig's resistance to authority and spoke of Puig's "complex and profound quarrel with authority, a quarrel that began, when, as a child, he almost instinctively rejected the prescribed male role" (208). Zimmerman further argues, "As a safeguard against the repressive authority of an existent social order and the sometimes dogmatic language of liberation and change, Puig supported a 'critical attitude' and an 'atmosphere of dialogue,' an atmosphere in which no single voice or perspective would be privileged" (217).

At this point we need to consider the question of voice and perspective and return to the privileged position that an author holds. Gaddis, Green and Puig have made a choice to undermine their own authority by foregrounding dialogue. All of this implies a commitment to Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, a commitment to multiple voices that refuse a single perspective, a commitment to the subordination of the author's voice. The act of subordination by the author requires courage and humility. This abdication of power is not something that most authors seek. But this is precisely what Gaddis, Green and Puig pursued in their literary works.

My exegesis will fill the following gap in the literature on fictional dialogue by addressing the following question: Why do authors choose to foreground dialogue? The reasons for this choice provide the sedimentations for my central argument, which is that the foregrounding of fictional dialogue, as demonstrated in the novels of Henry Green, William Gaddis and Manuel Puig, is not the result

of experimentation or ideology but instead has its ethical roots in the crafting of the novel as the result of risk and erasure.

Gaddis, Green and Puig challenged their readers. Their dialogue novels put pressure, stress, on the reader, because in these novels the reader becomes an active and necessary participant, thus in a way, negating authorial direction. This trust, this pact with the reader, creates an innate sense of performance.

## Chapter Outlines

### Chapter One

#### Theory

Literary theorist and novelist Friedrich Spielhagen put forward the idea that “Objective Narrative Theory” makes a persuasive argument for the foregrounding of fictional dialogue in the novel. As Brian Poole has argued, “‘Objectivity’ proves to be one of the major fulcrums around which the concept of novelistic dialogism and polyphony originally revolved” (1). I will provide explication for Thomas’ assertion that Bakhtin was dismissive of fictional dialogue and he was not alone. Virginia Woolf, as one example, was openly hostile to foregrounded dialogue. The absence of scholarly work on foregrounded dialogue and the hostility directed at its use by some critics and authors supports the assertion that risk plays a fundamental role in the work of authors like Gaddis, Green and Puig.

### Chapter Two

#### Omission

Henry Green said, “The more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in” (*S* 246). This chapter will examine what is left out when an author foregrounds dialogue. I will isolate a central element of the novel that is excluded from novels that foreground dialogue – narrative text, with a focus on description. I will illuminate the independent narrative text of the narrator and argue that these utterances, in almost all cases, are monologic. They are monologic because they

go unchallenged. I will highlight criticisms of foregrounded dialogue, including arguments from Virginia Woolf, and contrast these criticisms with arguments defending the choice to foreground dialogue and forego passages of description by dialogue novel authors themselves, including Ivy Compton-Burnett. This chapter will identify a deficient territory in academic and literary criticism – namely the lack of scrutiny over “thought-rendering” of fictional characters in narratology.

### Chapter Three

#### Text Analysis

The focus of this chapter will be on “what is left in,” which is dialogue. This will be a close reading of Gaddis, Green and Puig with respect to erasure of self, risk and an ethical approach. My analysis will focus on *Carpenter’s Gothic* (Gaddis), *Doting* (Green’s last novel), and *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* (Puig). Gaddis’ strategy (to incorporate more narrative text, more authorial intrusions, than his previous novels) will be contrasted with Green’s approach (to virtually eliminate authorial intrusion). Puig’s crafting choices in his dialogue novel, his first and only novel written in English, includes the use of correspondence. This documentary-style technique takes on more urgency when Puig reveals during interviews that half of the dialogue for this novel was taken from typed conversations he (the author) had with a friend who knew that Puig was using his spoken words for dialogue in his novel. Puig subverts the authorial obligation to make up a character and dialogue, and in doing so he surrenders much of his authority.

## Chapter Four

### A Novel Under the Exegetical Influence

Bronwen Thomas argues that it is a “badge of honour for the dialogue novelist to eschew actions or events of any kind of conventional magnitude or significance” (FD 88). This is accurate when describing Gaddis, Green and Puig. My novel, *Jack London Slept Here*, resists this trend in the dialogue novel by telling a story that has recognizable plotting that is crucial to the execution of the novel. I will argue that the aesthetic appeal of some dialogue novels has been diminished because the foregrounding of dialogue has sacrificed attention to plot and story.

The dialogue novel provides a unique opportunity to investigate the challenges and limitations of objective narration, which foregrounding of dialogue requires. The crafting of a dialogue novel can act as a crucible to the relationship between author and ego, between author and authority. How much power does the author want? All power is given but how much should be taken?

## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORY

I began my search for the theoretical scaffolding of foregrounding fictional dialogue in what, at the time, seemed the most logical place – the critical work of Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his writings on polyphony.

#### **Bakhtin and Pure Dialogue**

Bakhtin used Fyodor Dostoevsky's work to develop the musical concept of polyphony for literary analysis. Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's writing contains multiple, different voices that do not merge into a singular perspective, and that these voices are not subordinated to the voice of the author. Each voice should have its own narrative weight in the novel. The finished work should reflect the dialogic properties of human life and thought. A dialogical novel does not have a single voice, a single consciousness.

The voices in the dialogical novel should remain autonomous and independent and must retain their independence for the duration of the novel. A key to polyphony is the interplay of these voices. And this includes the author's voice, a voice that does not censor or champion the other voices in the novel. For Bakhtin dialogism is the essence of existence, the minimum requirement for exploring truth, and if the author's voice is the only voice then there is no existence, there is no truth. Bakhtin argues, "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of

an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction” (PDP 110).

In the spirit of a continuing and robust dialogue about Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony it will be important to share the voices of those who question some of Bakhtin’s theoretical ideas and challenge his theory of polyphony. Cedric Watts, University of Sussex, presents such a challenge:

If “dialogism” suggests that equal validity is given to each viewpoint – and Bakhtin’s phrase “a plurality of fully valid voices” does indeed suggest this – then Dostoevsky is not dialogic. His political and religious biases are evident. He is not neutral but a clear advocate of certain positions. Dostoevsky was a supporter of Tsarism, a hater of Poles, an ardent advocate of Christianity (itself not “dialogic”), and an anti-Semite. In *Crime and Punishment*, the Jewish gate-keeper is described thus by the narrator: “His face wore that perpetual look of peevish dejection which is so sourly printed on all faces of Jewish race without exception” (419). There is no “dialogic” challenge to this depressingly prejudicial generalization (16).

The interplay of characters in a fictional novel can provide a forum in which characters can comment on one another. This interplay of characters is critical to the execution of the dialogue novel. Bakhtin states, “The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a *secondhand* truth, becomes a *lie* degrading and demeaning him” (PDP 59). The poet, Robert Burns, provides a counter argument to the unreliability of these words, “in the mouths of others.” For Burns, there is unbridled, uncensored truth to be found,

and he asserts this position in his poem, *To a Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church*, that “to see ourselves as others see us” would be a gift, a bounty, a chance for liberation:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,  
And ev'n Devotion (156)

My introduction of two criticisms of Bakhtin's words should not be taken as an indication that his work is not respected. Indeed, as Brian Poole argues, “For many his thought changed the coordinates of the modern literary canon” (1). This exegesis is about foregrounding dialogue and dialogue can sometimes employ voices and counter-voices in the conversation. This exegesis is also about the undermining of authority and this includes the authority of Bakhtin. Clearly, the impact of Bakhtin's theoretical writing is felt across a broad spectrum of disciplines including history, psychology, sociology and anthropology, to name a few, and of course, literary criticism.

I assumed, when I began, that my research, my theoretical framework and methodology, would be framed by Bakhtin's theory of polyphony and its relationship to fictional dialogue. After all, what better way to articulate fictional dialogue in an exegesis than to foreground a theorist who wrote so often about the importance of voices in the novel and what better way to craft these voices than fictional dialogue? Ken Hirschkop, a prominent Bakhtin scholar, has said,



“Scholarship always dreams of a straight and steady passage, forgetting that history is not only the storm that blows it off course but also the wind that fills its sails” (2). And Caryl Emerson, another prominent Bakhtin scholar, translator of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* and co-translator of *The Dialogic Imagination*, says that “Bakhtin continues to be a spectacular starting point for all sorts of cultural study” but has also said, “Study a person or event long enough and it ceases to provide any answers at all; instead of theory there is a singular, stubborn, quixotic journey” (RR 622).

Bakhtin refers to dialogue often in his work but frequently these efforts refer to examples of social dialogue, double-voiced discourse, internally dialogized discourse, its relation to heteroglossia, and the dialogue between author and characters: “The area occupied by an important character’s voice must in any event be broader than his direct and ‘actual’ words” (DI 320). And yet Bakhtin does see special relevance for the speaking person in public, “The topic of a speaking person has enormous importance in everyday life. In real life we hear speech about speakers and their discourse at every step” (DI 338).

Bakhtin speaks of fictional dialogue but he almost always refers its context to social forces. Bakhtin also argues that dialogue should be subordinated: “Pure languages in the novel, in the dialogues and monologues of novelistic characters, are subordinated to the same task of creating images of language” (DI 365).

As previously mentioned, Bronwen Thomas contributed a seminal work on the foregrounding of fictional dialogue (*Fictional Dialogue: Speech and*

*Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern Novel*). She was asked to contribute a chapter on “The Dialogue Novel” for the *Encyclopedia of the Novel* and she argues for Bakhtin’s dismissiveness of fictional dialogue, “Bakhtin himself was dismissive of scenes of pure dialogue, as his analysis tended to focus more on passages where the seemingly monologic discourse of the narrator is colored by the voices and perspective of others” (EN 253).

Thomas suggests that some of the scholarly neglect of fictional dialogue is the result of Bakhtin’s dismissiveness. The unique qualities and opportunities that dialogue affords the author and reader require that this neglect be remedied:

But theorists have perhaps been too ready to acquiesce with Bakhtin’s apparent lack of regard for directly represented speech as a narrative technique. Bakhtin seems to characterize unmediated scenes of dialogue as little more than masquerade or puppet show, yet it is precisely the interrelation between showing and telling in scenes of dialogue that make them so fascinating and so complex (FD 4).

In 1961 Bakhtin composed notes for a second revised edition of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. These notes appear in Appendix II. Some of the notes address the positioning of the author and the author’s relation to the polyphonic novel. In some ways Bakhtin has seen it necessary to look at the function of reducing authorial intervention. Character participation in dialogue is obviously a significant requirement for a dialogue novel. The reduction of authorial intervention is also a key crafting element in the dialogue novel and is not something he had argued for previously:

The ultimate whole in Dostoevsky is dialogic. All his major heroes are participants in dialogue. They hear everything that is said by others about them, and respond to everything (nothing is said about them secondhand or behind closed doors). And the author is only a participant in this dialogue (and its organizer) (*PDP* 296-297).

It will be made apparent later in this exegesis that authors like Green and Gaddis have, at times, completely abandoned a participatory role and function exclusively as organizers. Indeed, both authors dismiss the crafting choice of “free indirect speech” in favour of “quoted” direct speech.

Before I return to Bakhtin I did want to acknowledge statements about dialogue that have been made in the fields of psychiatry and philosophy. Jacques Lacan was quoted by French psychoanalyst Maud Mannoni: “There is no such thing as dialogue, it is a swindle” (215). The quote was meant to be a warning to insurgent students in Paris in May 1968 about the perils of their negotiating with university and government officials. The quote was seemingly motivated by the real-world civil unrest at the time involving university students and it is impossible to locate this quote in a setting of a literary text. Still, “dialogue as swindle,” as a marker is not that far removed from the perception of those novelists, academics, theorists and critics, who find the foregrounding of dialogue to be problematic, something I will be addressing later in this exegesis.

David Vessey refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical work on dialogue and argues, “according to Gadamer, dialogue is the perfection of language” (98). Vessey supports his argument by referencing a quote from Gadamer, “language

has its true being only in dialogue” (446). Vessey links Gadamer’s arguments about dialogue to intersubjectivity.

The question of intersubjectivity came up during my correspondence with Rowan Scott, a psychiatrist in Canada. I was investigating a possible theoretical link between analyst/analysand and author/reader by focussing on an author’s use of foregrounded dialogue and the implied resistance, revolt against their own authority. My argument that these authors are undermining their own authority by foregrounding dialogue triggered this response from Scott as it relates to psychiatry: “The movement in psychoanalysis toward the intersubjective stance undermines the authority of the analyst and places them in a position of equality with the patient and a position of equality in the search for understanding and formulating the changes and actions that are implemented. Authority is overtaken by responsible proximate intimacy” (Scott in personal email). This intersubjective stance will be taken up, as it relates to boundary and the foregrounding of dialogue, in Chapter Two.

It is notable that Lacan and Gadamer have such divergent views of dialogue, even if the dialogue they comment on is placed in a real-world setting as opposed to a fictional text.

Lacan never wrote down notes for his seminars. David James Fisher argues for his function as a performer, “Lacan was a narcissistic speaker, a high-powered entertainer” (15). Lacan, similar to intrusive novelists, ignores the ethical opportunities available through dialogue. Fisher states that Lacan “evolved into a

monologist” (15), an ironic destination, because “psychoanalysis was invented as a continuous, long-term, open-ended and candid dialogue between analyst and analysand” (15). Perhaps the real “swindle” of dialogue is not engaging in it. Fisher argues that Lacan was not necessarily “open to dialogue” (15) and that “paradoxically, the one best equipped to advise on swindling was a swindler himself” (15).

On the other hand, foregrounding fictional dialogue can indeed represent a swindle if the author ignores an ethical approach to craft by commenting on characters “behind their backs” or smuggling personal ideology into the speech acts of their characters; something I will be addressing in Chapter Four.

Vessey’s argument about Gadamer’s philosophical work, that “dialogue is the perfection of language” (98), has implications for my study of literary texts; if dialogue, in the real world, enjoys such exalted status in the mind of Gadamer, why has it been such a neglected area of study in the field of literary studies? What we get, mostly, is commentary about whether an author has “an ear for good dialogue.” The challenges of understanding the function of dialogue in the novel go far beyond an aesthetic evaluation.

This brief detour of dialogue arguments from Gadamer and Lacan highlights the range of informed opinion about real-world dialogue. But what about Bakhtin? And what about fictional dialogue? I will argue that Bakhtin functioned more as a philosopher as opposed to a literary theorist.

Notable translator of Bakhtin's work, Caryl Emerson, has commented on Bakhtin's primary function as a philosopher taking precedence over his contributions as a literary theorist:

The local task of water-tight literary theory or a satisfyingly whole explication of artistic texts and authors had never been Bakhtin's primary concern. He tended, rather, to invoke literature as illustration of his principles or strategies for living and thinking (*FHY* 6).

Emerson recounts attending the Bakhtin Centennial Conference in Moscow in June 1995. It was at this conference that selections from recordings of a final interview with Bakhtin, shortly before he died, were played. The interview, eighteen hours of conversation, was conducted by Mayakovsky scholar Viktor Duvakin in February and March 1973. Emerson describes the breadth of academic scrutiny at the conference and comments on the tendency to appropriate and reference Bakhtin over a vast array of disciplines, "We, outsiders, it seemed, were forever grasping a small amount of Bakhtin and then applying it to concerns within our own fields of expertise" (*FHY* 32).

One could argue that Bakhtin's lack of scrutiny about fictional dialogue resulted from the fact that dialogue novels had not yet been written at the time he was doing his own work on the author and the novel. And it is true that a novel that makes exclusive use of dialogue, like *The Recognitions* by William Gaddis, postdates Bakhtin's contributions. Nevertheless, it's not as if fictional dialogue was invented in the 1950s, after Bakhtin wrote about Dostoevsky and his essays that became *The Dialogic Imagination*. Dialogue, even foregrounded dialogue, can be placed as far back as eighth century BC (*The Odyssey*).

Furthermore, fictional dialogue does not have to be foregrounded to be deserving of academic or theoretical scrutiny. Almost all novels have dialogue. It's a fundamental device in the crafting of novelistic fiction. It's a lot more challenging to find a novel that has *no dialogue* than a novel that has *all dialogue*. Bakhtin had a blind spot when it came to fictional dialogue and this theoretical neglect had nothing to do with the historical positioning of his writing.

It is important to consider the influences and sources of Bakhtin's work because these influences helped shape the theoretical direction in this exegesis. Hirschkop comments on some of these influences:

Nothing has done more to bring Bakhtin down to earth than the revelation of his sources, however, particularly when these sources provided not just vague themes or inspiration, but concrete arguments and particular concepts, many of which became central to his project (8).

Hirschkop goes on to introduce a German theoretical influence, an influence that led me to the work of Bakhtin scholar, Brian Poole, which led me to the theoretical sedimentations of this exegesis:

We now know, thanks to the efforts of the editors of the *Collected Works* and to Brian Poole, that deleted from the published version were references to scholars who had already broached the problem of dialogue and to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (the fact that the deleted references all involved German-Jewish scholars has not gone unnoticed) (8).

Caryl Emerson describes Poole as “the superbly equipped Canadian scholar who has spent years in Germany and Russia documenting Bakhtin’s intellectual debts” (RR 620-621). For a period of time Poole was the lone non-Russian to take part in the definitive edition of Bakhtin’s writing by the Russian Academy of Sciences. Emerson refers to Poole’s essay contribution to *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*:

His essay, while respectful toward its subject, is yet another chapter in the slow unravelling of Bakhtin’s immense (and in print, usually uncredited) debt to contemporary German thought. Poole made news several years ago by identifying five pages in Bakhtin’s Rabelais book that were taken verbatim from Ernst Cassirer ... Poole’s fastidious archival work does not fit the “reverential” mode, to be sure. But Poole is not out to decrown Bakhtin. He hopes to show that powerful thinkers have predecessors and that Bakhtin, for all his cavalier indifference to idea ownership is not “the author of his own intellectual context” (109) (RR 621).

### **Friedrich Spielhagen and Objective Narrative Theory**

In April 1998 Brian Poole presented a paper at an international conference on Bakhtin at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. Poole explored the influence of German literature and theory on the work of Bakhtin. In particular Poole targeted the influence of German author and literary theorist, Friedrich Spielhagen. Poole’s paper, “Objective Narrative Theory – The Influence of Spielhagen’s ‘Aristotelian’ Theory of ‘Narrative Objectivity’ on Bakhtin’s Study of Dostoevsky,” was later published by Museum Tusulanum Press in 2001. Spielhagen’s Objective Narrative Theory argues for the foregrounding of dialogue



in order to liberate the “pure” voices of the characters from authorial commentary. I will be citing Poole’s original paper, which Poole was kind enough to send me.

Spielhagen’s theoretical work on the novel goes back to 1864 when he published an essay on objectivity in the novel, *Ueber Objectivität im Roman*. This is over sixty years before Bakhtin would publish his early works on Dostoyevsky.

Spielhagen’s explicit attention to fictional dialogue and its implications for the modern novel are startling when contrasted with Bakhtin’s dismissiveness of pure dialogue. The argument that the dialogue novel had not yet been invented during the time of Bakhtin’s work does not excuse Bakhtin’s lack of interest in pure dialogue. Spielhagen positioned much of his theoretical work around pure dialogue, long before the works of authors such as Henry Green and William Gaddis appeared.

A theme of neglect becomes apparent in my exegetical analysis of Bakhtin and Spielhagen. Bakhtin neglected pure dialogue in the novel and this neglect makes it impossible to use his work for my theoretical foundation. I initially felt an obligation to foreground Bakhtin’s theories because who better to lean on than a philosopher who wrote so convincingly, so compellingly, about polyphony, heteroglossia, dialogism. This would have been a safe choice. But it also would have meant betraying my scholarly and authorial instincts. I cannot make something *there* that is not there and in this instance it is impossible to foreground Bakhtin’s work when he is dismissive of my area of exegetical investigation – pure dialogue.

The choice to foreground Spielhagen is not safe. His theoretical work has been neglected and therefore does not carry the same academic or theoretical weight as Bakhtin would. And when Spielhagen's theoretical work is not neglected, it is condemned, as I will document shortly. My choice to foreground Spielhagen, however, is consistent with my argument that highlights an ethical approach through courageous risk. In this instance I am foregrounding Spielhagen in a spirit similar to the foregrounding of dialogue by Gaddis, Green and Puig.

I confess to a trace of unease when attributing courage to creative writing or exegetical writing. In some respects it feels misplaced. I would hope that I never make the mistake of associating artistic or academic courage with acts of heroism – rushing into a burning school bus to rescue trapped children or wading through a crowded mall to defend someone from racist abuse. On the other hand, it requires some intestinal fortitude to grind for hours, days, weeks, months and years on their novels – like Gaddis, Green and Puig did – knowing that their foregrounding of dialogue and their act of rejecting the traditional, accepted and more often preferred role of the narrator, might sabotage their chances for commercial success and invite critical rejection.

Jeffrey L. Sammons, a literary scholar who specialised in nineteenth-century German-language literature, is critical of Spielhagen's theoretical work. And, perhaps, this is an understatement. Although Spielhagen has not attracted the attention of many scholars, Sammons contributed a book about Spielhagen in 2004, *Friedrich Spielhagen: Novelist of Germany's False Dawn*. He also authored

an essay entitled “Friedrich Spielhagen: The Demon of Theory and the Decline of Reputation.” The title of his essay loudly announces where this is headed.

Sammons claims, “Spielhagen belongs to that pitiable category of writers who become decanonized in their own lifetimes” (133). Sammons states further, “Today there is barely a trace of all his glory” (135). With reference to Spielhagen’s fictional work Sammons says, “Literary critics and historians regularly assure us that Spielhagen’s fiction is of no value, and there is no need to become acquainted with it” (135). Sammons points out that Thomas Mann was critical of Spielhagen’s work but Sammons doubts that Mann had even read Spielhagen, “Had Mann, then, read him in the meantime? It seems unlikely. Here is a striking example of the way in which his worthlessness had become a received opinion, relieving readers of any direct experience with him” (136). Sammons makes reference to a critique of Spielhagen by literary critic, Heinrich Hart, “The very length and intensity of this screed suggests something about Spielhagen’s continued standing; one does not usually beat a dead horse so vigorously” (137).

Sammons saves his most strident criticism for Spielhagen’s theoretical works:

They are best known, however, for a reiterated and, one might fairly say, fanatical insistence on the doctrine of objective narration. Since few in our time seriously believe in objective narration, it turns out that the theoretical work, though declared to be his most important achievement, is a historical curiosity of no intrinsic value. With this move, he is catapulted into the black hole of decanonized oblivion from which no known force has been able to recuperate him (140).

Sammons has banished Spielhagen. One of my exegetical targets is to recuperate and resurrect the theoretical reputation of Spielhagen because his theoretical work is intimately connected to the foregrounding of fictional dialogue. This leads me to Brian Poole's scholarly work on Spielhagen.

Poole harnesses Spielhagen's Objective Narrative Theory to Bakhtin and his writing in *Toward a Philosophy to Act*: "The normative doctrines of 'objective' narration in Spielhagen's works – limiting what an author can or cannot say about his hero – fundamentally changed Bakhtin's treatment of the author-hero relationship expressed in this 'early works'" (1).

Poole argues that one of the significant goals of his essay on Spielhagen is to "make sense of Bakhtin's claim (*PDP* 278) that Dostoevsky is objective and has every right to call himself a realist" (1). Indeed, as stated earlier, Poole argues, "'Objectivity' proves to be one of the major fulcrums around which the concept of novelistic dialogism and polyphony originally revolved" (1). Poole further adds that "Spielhagen was the first European author to offer a coherent and extensive theory of 'objective narration' adapted to the demands of the modern realistic novel" (2).

Most criticisms of objective narration, including those of Sammons, do not take into account the influence that objective narrative theories had on the work of Bakhtin. As Poole explains:

Spielhagen's narrative theory was a source stimulating Bakhtin's thought and guiding his reading as he prepared to write his study of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin's synopsis of *Der Roman* by Keiter and Kellen reveals this process. Here Bakhtin's attention was devoted to the issues raised by Spielhagen; throughout his synopsis he recorded material related to objective narrative theory (41).

Poole goes on to argue that "Keiter and Kellen subscribe to virtually every normative postulate advanced by Spielhagen" (41) and introduced Bakhtin to the work of Otto Ludwig, "the German novelist and theorist of narrative who coined the phrase "polyphonic dialogue" (41-42), a phrase that Bakhtin would use often.

The stage represented an analogy for Spielhagen. Poole argues, "It helped the author to avoid the largest threat to the dramatic illusion (appearing himself on stage) and to approach the ideal form of novelistic narration that Aristotle found in Homer: the narrator should know his place, say little, show much" (29).

The relevance of Spielhagen's theoretical work corresponds intimately with the crafting choices of Gaddis, Green and Puig. But this relevance extends beyond the author who foregrounds dialogue. Reverberations can be found in the words of W.G. Sebald (speaking with Michael Silverblatt during a broadcast of *Bookworm* on December 6, 2001, eight days before Sebald died). Sebald, like Spielhagen over one hundred years before him, uses the stage to articulate a reduction of authorial intervention:

This notion of the omniscient narrator who pushes around the flats on the stage of the novel, cranks things up on page three, moves them along on

page four and one sees him constantly working behind the scene is something that I think one can't do very easily any longer (Sebald).

Spielhagen compared the intrusive author to a director coming on stage. If the author is not intruding then this gives preference to the interaction of characters through dialogue. Poole explains that Spielhagen's criticism of the intrusive author "is aimed at reducing the consummating function of the author – to the advantage of the autonomous interaction of the characters amongst themselves" (33).

Spielhagen advocated the use of dialogue and character interaction as techniques to provide elements such as biographical information. By doing this there is sometimes going to be confusion on the part of the reader, as occurs often with Gaddis but as Poole argues with quotations from Spielhagen's *Beiträge (Contributions)* (276):

Here again Spielhagen provides apt examples of such faulty narrative technique: a dialogue is interrupted, the author proceeds to fill "numerous pages" with his own prefabricated biographies and indiscretions "while the characters concerned remain frozen in the situation indicated, and their conversation can't move on a single line" (31).

Spielhagen argued that these intrusions ruined the dramatic effect of the novel but as Poole points out with respect to the author/character boundary, "he is even more concerned with the integrity of his characters as individuals" (32).

Henry Green echoes what Spielhagen has argued about the intrusive author who “takes the stage” to explain things to the reader, “It is as if husband and wife were alone in the living room, and a voice came out of a corner of the ceiling to tell them what both were like, or what the other felt” (S 139).

Poole relates Spielhagen’s thoughts of utilizing his Objective Narrative Theory in a world of complexity, a world that an author is trying to render. Poole quotes from Spielhagen’s *Ueber die Objectivität im Roman (On the Objectivity in the Novel 186-187)*, and in doing so highlights how an author who resists an objective solution is succumbing to laziness and a lack of innovation:

Should we not rather exchange our method for another when necessary, such that we remain objective as long as it is possible, and when it is no longer possible we explain to the reader: “Look, this is the way it is, and now you know the story, and we both, you and I, can have our peace of mind” (19).

The solution to avoid authorial intervention in the modern novel is dialogue. And that can mean a lot of dialogue. Spielhagen was notably prescient in that he predicts the emergence of the dialogue novel. Spielhagen was critical of what he called the “reflecting method” (*reflectirende Methode*) because it gave the author a dominant voice to comment on his or her characters, a commentary that is obviously rendered without the character knowing about it. And again, it requires that the author speaks directly to the reader, something that Spielhagen said should be avoided. Poole explores the singular significance of dialogue in Spielhagen’s theory and quotes from *Ueber die Objectivität im Roman (On the Objectivity in the Novel)* S. 190:

I am not for a moment mistaken about the difficulty of representing complex psychological conditions objectively, and how much this difficulty leads to an overgrowth of the form of dialogue (*Gesprächsform*) in the modern novel, but this method, in which the acting figures (*die handelnden Personen*) are continually in motion, is without question far more poetical than the reflecting method (19-20).

Poole points out that one of the criticisms of Spielhagen's theoretical work is that it provides very little, and sometimes next to nothing, with regard to the "productive artistic role of the narrator" (18). Of course, this criticism is accurate and justified. Spielhagen's theory argued for diminishing the role of the narrator and giving almost all of the narrative power to the characters, which is precisely the point when it comes to authors like Gaddis, Green, Puig and others. As Poole argues, instead of an influential, aesthetically pleasing narrator, "What Spielhagen offered in exchange was a provocative theory of autonomous characters, liberated from the domination of authorial description, commentary and characterization" (18).

Another criticism directed at Spielhagen's theory is that his own novels did not fully capture the essence of what his theories argued for. He did not practice what he preached. As Poole concedes, "None of Spielhagen's novels could do without a minimum of pragmatic motivation, setting the story in motion, providing a sketchy outline of spatial and physical detail, introducing characters" (41).

It is not surprising that Spielhagen's own creative work did not live up to the objectives of his preferred narrative technique, a technique achieved, as Poole



states by “emphasizing dialogue and the orientation within the perceptions of the characters of the novel as a method of characterization” (37). The demands of foregrounding dialogue, as will be seen later in this exegesis through the works of Gaddis, Green and Puig, can be rigorous, and at times, too formidable.

There is simplicity in Spielhagen’s theoretical writing that is deceptive. It could be construed as being naïve. If any one book exemplified Spielhagen’s Objective Narrative Theory it would be *The Recognitions* by William Gaddis, a book that banished the narrator and relied solely on mostly unattributed dialogue. I would be hard-pressed to describe Gaddis’ novel as simplistic or its author as naïve.

I have already highlighted Sammons referring to Spielhagen’s “fanatical insistence on the doctrine of objective narration” (140) and this observation has merit. I think it is sensible to concede that Spielhagen’s Objective Narrative Theory has limitations and some of these will be explored further in Chapter Three when I analyse the works of Gaddis, Green and Puig.

It is also relevant to concede that the theory should not be presented or accepted as dogma. Its function for the purpose of studying novels that foreground dialogue is essential and relevant. It is also relevant as an ethical foundation of boundary incursion, to study the author’s intrusion into the novelistic text. But dogma has been firmly attached to Spielhagen’s theory, as Poole argues, “Presently Anglo-American literary theorists are better informed about the “dogmas” of narrative objectivity than about the German tradition expressed by Spielhagen’s theory” (2).

Poole identifies Wayne C. Booth as a critic of objective narration, a criticism that Booth expressed in his introduction to Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Poole notes, "Booth's crusade to slay the dragon objectivity was itself quixotic in character" (3). Booth referred to a "gross but fashionable error of pursuing objectivity at all costs" (xix). Poole argues that "Booth underestimated subtler dimensions of naturalist narrative practice" (3), something Booth addressed in his Bakhtin introduction when discussing arguments supporting objective theory, "If I had not been ignorant, like almost everyone else, of the work of Bakhtin and his circle, I might have grappled with a much more sophisticated attack on the 'author's voice' in fiction ..." (xix).

It is important to recognise Spielhagen's contribution to the question of the author's voice in the novel and to separate this question from repeated accusations of dogmatic devotion and an expectation that all novels be rendered objectively. Of course, "true" objectivity can be positioned as an ideal and it becomes a task of speculation to infer what an author has in mind when he or she writes pure dialogue. The objectivity can then reside in the reader's response to the line of dialogue, which can also be understood as a psychological process of explication, operating within the "illusion" of an objective process.

As Poole points out, "Literature on Spielhagen has itself frozen into dogma by reducing his various *Contributions to the Theory and Technique of the Novel* to one element: the purely heuristic metaphor that the novel is a stage upon which

the author presents acting characters behind which the author himself disappears entirely” (4).

Poole argues against the oversimplification of Spielhagen’s theoretical work on objective narration:

As with all dogmas, we succeed in accepting or rejecting them without much thought because they grossly simplify the issues at stake. The dogma of “objectivity” has succeeded in reducing the more differentiated doctrines of Spielhagen’s theory to clichés (5).

These “differentiated doctrines” remain relevant. It is a mistake to dismiss Spielhagen’s theoretical work when the dialogue novels of Gaddis, Green and Puig are consummate fictional integrations of his theory. Spielhagen’s theoretical work began to appear in 1864. Ninety years later Steinbeck published *Sweet Thursday* and his prologue, as previously mentioned, provides stark echoes of Spielhagen’s doctrines:

Well, I like a lot of talk in a book.

I don’t like to have nobody tell me what the guy that’s talking looks like.

I kind of like to figure out what the guy’s thinking by what he says.

I like some description too – but not too much of that.

I don’t want hooptedoodle to get mixed up in the story (v-vi).

Nearly fifty years after Steinbeck’s novel and almost 150 years after Spielhagen was composing his Objective Narrative Theory, Elmore Leonard wrote an essay for the *New York Times* extolling the virtues of what Spielhagen argued for, namely a conscious reduction of authorial intrusion by foregrounding dialogue

and reducing other narrative elements to a minimum. Leonard also echoes Spielhagen's insistence that his theory was not a philosophical or intellectual exercise but a formal narrative technique with moral and ethical implications, a technique that spotlights characters and releases them from the subordination of authorial description. Leonard also suggests that authorial intrusion might be the result of conceit, vanity and ego, something that Spielhagen referred to as an aesthetic error. Leonard addresses the intrusive author directly, "If you have a facility for language and the sound of your voice pleases you, invisibility is not what you are after, and you can skip the rules. Still, you might want to look them over" (E1).

The echoes of Spielhagen's theoretical work are not necessarily revelatory because they represent crafting principles that date back to Aristotle. His work does, however, provide a necessary platform to study pure dialogue, something Bakhtin ignored in his own writing. And yes, it should be acknowledged that Spielhagen, when not being "catapulted into the black hole of decanonized oblivion" (Sammons 140), is largely unknown, ignored or undervalued by authors, academics and literary theorists. It is no small consolation that Bakhtin owed an intellectual debt to Spielhagen, as Poole argues:

What could Bakhtin possibly learn from Spielhagen? For a philosopher just emerging from his study of sympathetic empathy one answer would seem obvious. Spielhagen opened a path between narrative technique and the ethical problems of narrative perspective (38).

Bakhtin praised the “internal independence” of Dostoevsky’s character rendering and concluded it was “achieved by specific artistic means” (*PDP* 13). Poole signals, “Spielhagen taught him to appreciate the devices involved” (38).

## CHAPTER TWO

### OMISSION

Canadian author, Hugh MacLennan, wrote a prologue for a book of photographs (*The Colour of Canada*) commemorating Canada's Centennial Year of 1967.

MacLennan was writing about what he saw as the most pivotal moment in Canadian history, that Canada as a nation “came into being because our ancestors repudiated the most important single event in the history of the western hemisphere, the American Revolution. Canada exists today because they said no to that” (11).

The common misperception, one that I carried for most of my life, was that the rejection of the American Revolution was logically wrapped up in loyalty to King George III, to Great Britain. There were certainly loyalists who were saying *yes* to the King and *yes* to Great Britain. But there were many individuals who had no loyalties to England or the King. These included many Scots, Irish, Welsh, and, of course, the French. They were not saying *yes* to loyalty as much as *no* to the revolution. The reasons for this, while interesting to me as a Canadian who left home for America at 19, are too varied and indulgent to go into here. But this distinction, this rejection of something, this defiant act of saying *no* to something, has a strategic function for my fictional dialogue studies.

I'm interested in why authors like Gaddis, Green, Puig and others are saying *yes* to foregrounding fictional dialogue but I am equally curious as to what they are saying *no* to. This choice is not motivated by a blind loyalty to dialogue. It is a

considered, informed choice, a crafting choice, and in many cases, an ethical choice. What they are saying *no* to is everything that isn't dialogue. Steinbeck's Mack called *everything that isn't dialogue* hooptedoodle. And Spielhagen and Gaddis and Green and Puig treat *everything that isn't dialogue* as hooptedoodle – irrelevant to their work, unnecessary.

This act of saying “no” has ethical reverberations because it elevates the reader as a necessary collaborator and as a result the reader becomes, in the words of Gregory Comnes, “the primary ethical agent” (10). By stepping back, by saying “no,” the author is asking the reader to step forward. The reader, not the author, becomes the adjudicator of ethical evidence. This has significant implications for the study of foregrounded fictional dialogue.

### **Pretty Words**

This rejection of familiar, almost comforting elements in the novel carries some risk. Robert Pinget was an avant-garde French writer. Like his contemporary and friend, Samuel Beckett, Pinget pushed the boundaries of narrative technique. His novel, *The Inquisitory*, first published as *L'Inquisiteur*, won the French Critic's Prize in 1961. It is a novel composed entirely of dialogue. In this novel an old, deaf servant is questioned about unspecified crimes that may or may not have taken place at his master's chateau. Spielhagen called too much authorial intrusion an aesthetic error. A review by Nigel Dennis of Pinget's book in the *New York Review of Books* highlights how too little authorial intrusion can result in an aesthetic nightmare when an author crafts a novel entirely with dialogue:

Can anyone imagine a *whole* movie so composed? Or a *whole* novel such as M. Pinget's? Three hundred and ninety-nine pages long at that (what failure of stamina obliged a halt short of 400?). M. Pinget's novel [*The Inquisitory*] is only a deliberate struggle – maintained with incredible stamina – to ride a one-wheeled bicycle for 399 miles. It is hardly surprising, then, that the total effect is immensely involved, generally unreadable, and appallingly boring (Dennis).

Dialogue authors are sometimes forced to defend their choice to “ride a one-wheeled bicycle.” The subject of saying *no* to exposition and description came up during an interview between Ivy Compton-Burnett and Margaret Jourdain in 1945:

*Margaret Jourdain:* I see that yours are a novel thing in fiction, and unlike the work of other novelists. I see that they are conversation pieces, stepping into the bounds of drama, that narrative and exposition in them are drastically reduced.

*Ivy Compton-Burnett:* I do not see why exposition and description are a necessary part of a novel ... I read plays with especial pleasure, and in reading novels I am disappointed if a scene is carried through in the voice of the author rather than the voice of the characters (Compton-Burnett/Jourdain).

As previously mentioned, Lacan was quoted by Mannoni saying, “Dialogue is swindle” (215). Although Lacan was not referring specifically to fictional dialogue his disparaging perception of dialogue is shared by others including Virginia Woolf when it came to authors like Pinget and Compton-Burnett who foregrounded fictional dialogue. Instead of a one-wheeled bicycle Woolf criticises



Compton-Burnett's dialogue novels as one-dimensional by referring to hair.

Woolf refers to Compton-Burnett's work in Hermione Lee's biography of Woolf, "There's something bleached about Miss Compton-Burnett: like hair that has never had any colour in it" (615).

Woolf's criticism of foregrounded dialogue is on full display in her 1927 review of Ernest Hemingway's book of short stories, *Men Without Women* in the *New York Herald Tribune of Books*. Hemingway foregrounded fictional dialogue and compared this style of omitting other narrative devices to an iceberg, thoughts that became known as his "iceberg" theory:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one eighth of it being above water (192).

Woolf did not necessarily see the "dignity of movement" that Hemingway describes, criticising "the tendency to flood the page with unnecessary dialogue" (80). She also accuses Hemingway of seeing description and narrative as interfering devices. Even so, it is precisely the rejection of these boundary incursions that Spielhagen argued for and authors like Hemingway and especially Compton-Burnett asserted in their creative works. Woolf continues her criticism of *Men Without Women*, "On the other hand, his is a talent which may contract and harden still further, it may come to depend more and more upon the emphatic moment; make more and more use of dialogue, and cast narrative and description overboard as an encumbrance" (79).

Woolf's criticism provides a compelling contrast to the theoretical work of Spielhagen and the novels of Gaddis, Green and Puig. She clearly sees and articulates that narrative and description, and by extension, other narrative elements *that are not dialogue*, are fundamentally vital and necessary to the novel and it would be a serious mistake to cast them aside. Spielhagen argued that it would be an aesthetic error, a serious mistake, to leave these narrative elements in, or at least, too many or too much of them. Spielhagen would argue that narrative and description are, in fact, encumbrances, and should be tossed overboard.

Woolf is passionate about her argument that too much dialogue is unnecessary; that it puts too much stress on the reader and that authors should be suspicious of dialogue and cautious when using it, "Perhaps it is the excessive use of dialogue, for Mr. Hemingway's use of it is surely excessive. A writer will always be chary of dialogue because it puts the most violent pressure upon the reader's attention" (80). Woolf expresses a sense of superiority in the relationship between author and character, "when fictitious people are allowed to speak ..." and concludes her Hemingway review with a passionate plea, "At last we are inclined to cry out with the little girl in 'Hills Like White Elephants': 'Would you please please please please please please stop talking?'" (80).

John Bowen interviewed Ivy Compton-Burnett in 1960. Their conversation contrasts sharply with criticisms of foregrounding fictional dialogue and arguments in favour of greater authorial intrusion. Bowen suggests that Compton-

Burnett has no interest in description and she explains that she does allow for description of her characters.

*Bowen:* Shortly usually.

*Compton-Burnett:* Yes, shortly. But then, however people describe their characters I think the readers – each reader – has his own conception, his own picture of the character. Don't you think so? I think he only wants just a little guidance to get his own picture which should be his anyhow, I don't think a page of description would help him (166).

Compton-Burnett suggests an intersubjective stance, one that makes demands on the reader as collaborator. In Compton-Burnett we find, again, a resistance to the monologic tendencies of novelistic text that is not dialogue.

William B. Stanley references the work on Bakhtin by Giles Gunn when he states, "Monologue, in Bakhtin's view, was always associated with a type of authority or forms of speech that seek authority" (213). Stanley goes further and foregrounds the function of human voice to resist monologic authority, "In this regard, human voice functions as the instrument of consciousness, a form of interior resistance to finalization. The competence to use voice to resist monologue is an essential characteristic of our humanness" (213).

The intersubjective stance in which the reader is a necessary collaborator requires the use of this human voice in the form of dialogue. The narrative strategies argued by Spielhagen require a resistance to monologic crafting by the author. The text in a novel that is not dialogue, description, setting, etc., is inherently monologic. There is one voice informing the reader. There is no counter voice.

There is a boundary connection to be made between “author” and “authority.” How much authority does the author want? There are no exterior rules. Only self-informed choices. An author can take it all. But authors like Gaddis, Green and Puig have resisted having total control by foregrounding dialogue. In dialogue there is always the opportunity for characters to challenge utterances, challenge viewpoints and even if they don’t, the uncertainty at to whether they will, is always present. I would argue it is one of the reasons that readers pay such close attention to dialogue. By having two or more expressed viewpoints in a dialogue scene the author is withdrawing their own authority and connecting with the reader as collaborator.

The author creates scenes of dialogue. They do not blow in on polyphonic winds from some pure, mystical cloud of humble inspiration or some such place. As Bronwen Thomas point out, “Of course this is not to say that scenes of dialogue are not highly stylized and contrived affairs” (*FD* vii). However, we need to return to Woolf’s observation, “A writer will always be chary of dialogue because it puts the most violent pressure upon the reader’s attention” (80). Gaddis conceded in an interview in 1995 with Paul Ingendaay that his dialogue novels put significant stress, pressure, on the reader: “Obviously it is an excessive demand. Some authors do not create the work themselves, but leave it to the readers to do. And this is my idea: to allow the reader to contribute to the work, to collaborate in the fiction” (15).

Gaddis rejected a narrative strategy that requires the monologic intrusions by the author for plotting, characterisation, setting, description, etc. All of these literary journeys need to be accomplished through dialogue and this requires an attentive and collaborative reader even if this results in what Woolf calls “violent pressure” (80). Gaddis accepts the vestiges of Spielhagen’s stage director metaphor but refuses to have this strategy labelled as experimental.

*Gaddis:* No. I think of “experimental” as something that may not work.

When I sit down with a concept and what I’ve said about discipline and so on – what I’m going to do – I don’t think it’s experimental.

*Interviewer:* It’s probably the dialogue form that makes people label you as experimental. The novel is turned into a drama, as it were, staged almost, “theatricalized.” The narrator is just a kind of stage director who does not interfere with the play.

*Gaddis:* But that’s exactly the point isn’t it, not to interfere (*PR* 82).

The intersubjective stance between author and reader that results from foregrounding dialogue has implications for author and boundary. There is not only a pressure on the reader but pressure also exists for the author to intrude and to interfere, because, according to the expectations of how most novels are written, this is what authors do. Manuel Puig addressed this pressure:

*Interviewer:* You prefer not to have the novelist in the novel?

*Puig:* I’m not interested in listening to my voice that much.

*Interviewer:* But the voice of Manuel Puig is always there.

*Puig:* I remember at the beginning of my career a very nasty established writer said, “Oh, I know how Manuel Puig’s characters talk but how does *he* talk? He doesn’t have a persona.” I thought the world of movies

and acting provided the pure height of vanity, but I was mistaken (*PR* 139-140).

The narrative strategy to foreground dialogue, thus reducing the author's obligation or inclination to provide sweeping passages of descriptive prose, is not motivated by whimsical notions. It is not an attempt at experimentation with novelistic technique. Nor is it based on a theoretical premise. Its foundation is found in ethics. In her study of post-aesthetic ethics through the lens of Theodor Adorno's theory of artistic non-identity Michelle Holmes refers to a "narcissistic desire for identity" (14). The imposition of identity by the author can take different forms and cross character and reader boundaries. Most studies of ethics in literature focus on the text of the novel itself. This exegesis positions the ethical argument before that, in the crafting choices made by the author.

Holmes argues that the narcissistic ego can realise its own limitations and a refusal of identity imposition can result, "Immanence and transcendence thus produce a dialectical experience in which subjective reactions are constellated around the object of reflection, forming a comprehensive experience of art whereby the narcissistic ego realises its own finitude, surrendering the self-interest of Imaginary desire ..." (72-73). This surrendering of identity imposition, found in the crafting choices of Gaddis, Green and Puig, can lift objectification as a cold, analytical practice and take it to a destination of transcendence. Holmes concludes:

Within this dialectic of bodily and artistic materialism, the alienated ego is, on the one hand, barred from total self-identification within the Imaginary refuge of narcissistic pleasures as fetishised practice, but finds

on the other hand, a moment of transcendent objectification of consciousness through entry into the non-identity of the work ...” (73).

Authors like Gaddis, Green, Puig and Compton-Burnett, reject the conceit of the all-knowing author who leads readers through a novel like a dog on a leash. Dialogue invites the reader to behave a bit more like an outdoors cat, free to roam and make mischief. These authors embrace the collaboration with the unknown reader because it forms an essential and desired partnership in craft. Their abdication of authority is an ethical choice. They assume an intersubjective stance that admits *they do not know all* and therefore will *not pretend* to know all or describe all. This implication of humility, of authorial erasure, is also an expression of defiance, a defiance that says *no* to the traditional methods of crafting a novel. As Gaddis expressed through character dialogue in *The Recognitions*, “You know God damn well ... that humility is defiance ...” (457).

### **A Chary Approach to the Chamber of Consciousness**

The novelist is like any human being. They have many thoughts in a day. How many thoughts does the average human being have in a day? Numbers range from 15,000 to 70,000. It’s impossible to determine but it’s reasonable to conclude that the human mind experiences many thousands of thoughts in a given day. A novelist, using their own thoughts, makes choices as they embark on the journey of crafting a novel.

One of the challenges of character crafting for the author is cracking open the inner world of that character. A character's interior world is rendered in different ways depending on the author but it comes down to a simple question – Do I (the author) tell you (the reader) what a character is thinking?

The responsibilities and ethics of doing so are not always recognised. English author and critic, David Lodge, wrote a book titled *Consciousness and the Novel* and in it he explored the work of Henry James, an author who Lodge saw as a crucial figure in the transition from classic to modern fiction. Lodge states, “In one of his earliest published pieces, a book review written in his twenties, he is already seeing the problem of characterisation as one of representing consciousnesses other than one's own” (CN 50). James writes, “To project yourself into the consciousness of a person essentially your opposite requires the audacity of great genius; and even men of great genius are cautious in approaching the problem” (174).

I am reminded again of Woolf's cautionary tone when describing the author's relationship to dialogue, “A writer will always be chary of dialogue because it puts the most violent pressure upon the reader's attention” (80). James is arguing that the writer will always, or should always, be “chary” of consciousness rendering, or in this instance, rendering thoughts of characters. This literary device is ubiquitous but it is conspicuously absent from scholarly work and it rarely gets challenged in ethical or even practical terms. Indeed, one ends up finding strange bedfellows when it comes to criticising the technique.



Alan Moore writes comic books. He has commented on the use of thought bubbles or thought balloons. Thought-rendering in comic books is not seamless. It is right there for the reader to see. There is a bubble in the shape of a cloud. Nestled in the cloud are the character's thoughts. A chain of increasingly smaller bubbles lead to the character whose thoughts are being expressed. When you see depictions of character thought in a comic book you really see it. These efforts tend to be more seamless and woven into text in a novel. Moore, in an interview with *Mustard* magazine, has a practical view of thought and thinking, "It's the ghost in the machine, forever outside the province of science. You can't reproduce a thought in an empirical laboratory experiment, so you cannot properly talk about thought" (Moore).

You can't cheat thought-rendering in a comic book. You see it. In the bubble. You also can't disguise thought-rendering in a stage play. It would be obvious to the patrons and would probably appear clumsy, artificial. And thought-rendering in film is rarely done, again, because it can appear awkward and unnecessary. And yet, this device is used often in a novel where a skilled author can "hide" it and run it into the flow of text. Moore sees the use of thought-rendering as a crutch:

So I'd always be very ready to accept any new twist or variation that I could put upon the material to keep it fresh, and to keep it evolving. To keep my sense of story and storytelling as an evolving, living thing. So when, on *V for Vendetta*, David Lloyd suggested that we do without any thought balloons, and do without author's voice captions, and do without sound effects, at first I was horrified, because I thought this was two or three of my favorite crutches being kicked away from me (*WC* 27-28).

Gaddis rejected thought-rendering outright in his first two novels and argued that any interior depictions, motivations, observations, etc., of a character must come from the reader by closely reading the dialogue of that character interacting with other characters. Gaddis didn't see thought-rendering as a crutch. He saw it as conspicuous, dreary and the product of a dereliction of effort:

*Interviewer:* But the floated dialogue makes the reader's part very difficult. The omniscient narrator expresses no view of his own. The reader is left to imagine the psychological motivation behind what is said. What the reader is left with – in the absence of reliable authorial/narratorial information and of the psychologically more reliable direct interior monologue form – is what could be called vocal behaviorism.

*Gaddis:* Well, this interior monologue that you speak of *is* just too easy, obvious, boring, lazy, and I would agree right up to the last; I always cringe at the word *behaviorism*. But again it is very much this notion of what the reader is obliged to supply (*PR* 80).

It is difficult to locate authors going “on record,” either in essays or interviews, about their aversion to thought-rendering. Henry Green had no such reservations. Green stated clearly that “dialogue is the best way for the novelist to communicate with his readers” (*S* 137) but went on to argue, “And do we know, in life, what other people are like? I very much doubt it. We certainly do not know what other people are thinking and feeling. How then can the novelist be so sure?” (*S* 139).

James argues for authors to be cautious when crafting the thoughts of a character. Gaddis and Green rarely render thoughts, relying instead on their dialogue and the

collaboration of the reader. To date I have not found a single peer-reviewed study that proves one human being can read or know the thoughts of another human being so I am satisfied for the purposes of this paper that it has never been done.

Fiction writers will often rely on this device in their fiction and yet there is very little scrutiny about this choice. Is mind-reading, thought-rendering in fiction, more consistent with fantasy? It could be categorised as fantasy because no one has ever done it – mind-reading that is. It could even be called speculative fiction because any rendition of mind-reading is supernatural – there is nothing natural about reading the mind of another human being.

Green argues that mind-reading is impossible so authors should not do it.

Dialogue is a much more reliable tool with which the author can achieve a closer proximity to authenticity if in fact authenticity is valued. I am also curious as to why readers don't question the reliability of the fiction they are reading when the author is busy thought-rendering. Perhaps it is a device used so often that it becomes unremarkable, unnoticed. And certainly there are authors like Henry James who use interior monologue to great effect. But what qualifies an author to do this – to render the thoughts of a character or the consciousness of the other? Imagination? Skill? What else contributes to this consciousness appropriation? Hubris? It's a provocative boundary that some authors will not cross.

A person might think they know what the experience of the consciousness of another person is like but as Green has said, "How can the novelist be so sure?" (*S* 139). It is pure speculation, perhaps even fantasy to try and render this

consciousness. Critic James Wood argues in the British *Telegraph* that thought-rendering has aesthetic value, “Representing a character’s thought isn’t the only thing novels do, but it’s one of the most thrilling” (Wood) and it might, in the case of Henry James be “elegantly described consciousness” (Wood) but it doesn’t change the fact that for some authors its reliability is dubious and its violation of boundary is something to be avoided.

Dialogue is more firmly strapped to an interactive reality, to a proximity of authenticity. Every person, novelists included, has engaged with dialogue since birth. It’s one thing to imagine what a character (another person) is thinking, something we have absolutely no experience with, quite another to imagine what that character might say in a given situation in the form of dialogue. There is precedent for dialogue. It’s conversation, the most constant companion of human interaction. There is no precedent for mind-reading, except perhaps as a less-challenging means than dialogue to create life in a character. To return again to Steinbeck’s Mack, “I kind of like to figure out what the guy’s thinking by what he says” (v). Authors have complete freedom when it comes to rendering text in a novel. And when it comes to mind-reading, just because you can, doesn’t mean you should. And if you must, be cautious.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TEXT ANALYSIS

I have previously highlighted the lack of descriptive prose and the resistance to character thought-rendering in the dialogue novel. Here, I will offer a text analysis of writing by William Gaddis, Henry Green and Manuel Puig, and do so through the prism of these rejected narrative devices as they relate to boundary incursions.

#### *Eternal Curse on the Pirates of Privacy*

Manuel Puig is somewhat different from Gaddis and Green. Over the course of his writing career he made greater use of interior monologues, notably in his earlier novels, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In spite of using interior monologue Katie Gramich comments on Puig's rejection of the "unifying narrative voice" in *Spider Woman*. "In fact, the novel is characteristic of Puig's habitual structural technique in that it lacks a single, authoritative narrative voice" (157).

However, when Puig wrote *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* he abandoned all interior monologues and composed a dialogue novel more in line with what Gaddis and Green created. Puig, like Gaddis, also foregoes the use of speech tags and quotation marks.

—She's not going to have time, I told you. A page at most. Now, Larry, tell me, when you read a book by a man you admire, such as Marx, I guess, whose voice do you hear?

—I guess my own.

—But you're not sure.

—No, I'm not sure, Mr. Ramirez.

—And when you talk to yourself, is it your voice you hear?

—Hmmm. I don't think so.

—Then whose?

—I don't know.

—Please concentrate.

—When you talk to yourself, one part always sees and judges what the other is doing. Like when you're trying to make a decision.

—You hear two voices, then. One is yours, but the other one? Whose is it?

—Sometimes one part gets vicious.

— . . . (*EC 36*).

Puig provides no assistance when it comes to how these words are being spoken, what emotion lies behind and within them. He has eliminated the intrusive nature of the speech tag, which can be used to explain to a reader that “such-and-such character” said “something or other” angrily or sheepishly or happily. The reader can deduce through dialogue that two characters are speaking with one another – Larry and Mr. Ramirez. The reader does not need Puig to use a narrator to set the stage. It should be noted that the last line quoted above, attributed to Mr. Ramirez from the turn taking of the dialogue, is not dialogue but something else conveyed by an ellipsis. The reader is allowed to pause on this ellipsis if they so choose and create a life in the elliptical moment, a moment that is traditionally filled by an intrusive author.

In the novel, Lawrence John (Larry) is a thirty-six-year-old failed academic, an American, who has taken a job at a Greenwich Village nursing home in New York City. His duties consist of attending to Juan Jose Ramirez (Mr. Ramirez), a seventy-four-year-old invalid and Argentinian exile who is receiving assistance from a human rights group. Most of these duties involve Larry pushing Mr. Ramirez around in his wheelchair and visiting with Mr. Ramirez in his room at the nursing home. The relationship between the two men, explored exclusively through dialogue (with the exception of six letters and a job application at the end of the novel), is contentious and, at times, volatile.

Puig completely abandons a participatory role in *Eternal Curse* and functions exclusively as organiser. There are no authorial intrusions in the text. This novel was the first time, and the only time, that Puig wrote a novel in English. American English was a second language for Puig and it is reasonable to speculate that his limitations of usage with this language contributed to his abandonment of internal monologues, a technique he had used in his Spanish-written novels. Lori Chamberlain comments on the “objectifying” qualities that Puig adhered to, “Writing in another language, then, is a way of objectifying the entirely metaphoric experience of alienation and exile, an objectification we can see in the detachment of Puig’s flat prose in *Eternal Curse*” (265).

Puig was living in New York City at the time he wrote the novel and had become friends with a man named Mark who had a PhD in sociology, had lost his job as a professor and was teaching part-time as a lecturer. Puig initiated a conversation

with Mark several times a week. Puig would type Mark's responses. Suzanne Jill Levine quotes Puig on his process:

I asked his permission to take notes on his life: I took about 200 pages of notes in English, and now I'm trying to deal with the notes ... Language used to be a vehicle of psychology and characters, a language in which I had all the keys. Now I have all the data in a language to which I don't have the keys (297-298).

Puig described this process of himself as author "playing Ramirez" and Mark as interview subject "playing Larry":

*Puig:* With *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* there was also a real character present, but the writing process was different. I created a character myself – the old man Ramirez – so I could establish a dialogue with him. I didn't have much trouble feeling and imagining myself as Ramirez, because in 1978 and 1979, when I was working on the book, I was going through a very dark period.

*Interviewer:* So you wrote the novel from the dialogue that was going on between the two of you as one between Ramirez and the other person.

*Puig:* We practically wrote it together. He was beside me the whole time; it was a sort of psychodrama typed as it happened (*PR* 136-137).

It should be noted that Puig also used this interview/conversation technique for his novel, *Blood of Requited Love*, a story in which Puig recorded conversations he had with a carpenter who was working on his house and incorporated the words of the carpenter into the novel. In fact, Puig concedes that in the dialogue he used for *Requited Love*, "There are very few words in the book that are not his. I simply edited our conversations" (*PR* 135).



I was a bit startled when I first discovered that Puig had interviewed a man named Mark to create dialogue for Larry in *Eternal Curse*. Even if one could argue that it falls into a category, perhaps, of hyperrealism, it still felt like ... cheating. It's the author's job to create dialogue, not interview a real person, type that person's responses, and then put those responses into a published work of fiction. Should Puig's friend, Mark, have been offered a writing credit to reflect that the novel had been co-written? According to a quote in Suzanne Jill Levine's book, Puig even paid Mark for his services, "I proposed a dialogue three times a week, paying him. We'd meet two hours each time, with a typewriter in the middle since he didn't want a tape recorder" (297). Puig relinquishes some of the crafting control of his novel. He is also relinquishing himself as an ethical agent and thereby asserting that the reader becomes the primary ethical agent.

Puig, to his credit, was open and honest about this technique of recording the speech of others and incorporating this dialogue into his novels. He spoke of it candidly and often. Clearly he had no outward concerns about the ethical implications of using this technique and perhaps he was challenging the ethical principles of conventional creative composition, authorship and originality. More importantly, Puig's open admission to using these recorded conversations in his novel, highlights how much Puig abandons the author's participatory role in the crafting of the novel and functions exclusively as organiser. I quoted Puig earlier in this exegesis, "I have no ego" (*PR* 139). What really intrigues me about Puig's technique for finding the right words for Larry's speech acts, which goes beyond the mere foregrounding of dialogue, is that Puig is revolting against his own

authority as an author. He is undermining his own authority, destabilising, deconstructing his own authority.

Puig's admissions about how he crafted *Eternal Curse* are not just brazen, they are refreshing and exhilarating. It's as if he has said the following, "I have met this man named Mark. I am fascinated with Mark. I want to use him in my next book. I will call him Larry. I'm not even going to pretend to invent words for Larry. I'm going to interview Mark for hours and hours and hours and use his words, his spoken words, his real words, which I will type as he speaks them. You'll never know which of Mark's words are exactly as he spoke them in an apartment with me in New York or whether I changed them to fit the events of the novel. You'll never know. And these interviews with Mark are not what you think. It is a game of pretend. When I sit with Mark and I type his words, I will pretend to be Ramirez, which is not that hard because he is Argentinian and he will be a bit like my father. So I will be Ramirez and Mark will be Larry. I will type this conversation as it actually happens. And then ... I will assemble all of this into a novel."

Of course, it's also possible that Puig fabricated this public disclosure of using Mark's words as a further repudiation of authorial authority, which, if true, would be even more startling and revealing. There is, however, something revealing, something more tangible, to be found in the text of *Eternal Curse* that speaks to the question of ethics a novelist's authority. As mentioned earlier, Puig had used interior monologues in his novels that preceded *Eternal Curse*. He doesn't use them in his story about Larry and Ramirez. But he uses something else and it

might provide a glimpse into Puig shifting his perception of the ethics and compatibility of interior monologues, of thought-rendering, of boundary-crossing.

On page 101 Larry opens a package for Ramirez. In the package are three French novels, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *La Princesse de Cleves*, and *Adolphe*. Larry questions Ramirez about the novels:

—What are these numbers above the words? They seem random. 32, 1, 3, 16, 5, 12, 4 . . .

— . . .

—Hmm . . . if you rearrange the numbered words sequentially they form sentences (*EC* 101-102).

These “formed sentences” are in fact the diaries of Ramirez, diaries written in code while he was a political prisoner in Argentina. Larry sees value in the diaries.

— May I keep these books for a few days?

— You seem so happy . . . what has made you so excited?

— It may be material I could use . . . write about . . . (*EC* 103).

The “material” that Larry speaks about is coming from the diaries of Ramirez, diaries that convey his inner thoughts, his interior monologue. While it’s true that no human being can know the exact thoughts of another human being as argued by Green, reading the diary of another person can represent the attempt to render these thoughts, to decode as Larry does, and to do so for reasons that have ethical implications. Indeed, Larry is able to decode the diaries of Ramirez and he tells

his academic colleagues about them, which leads to a tantalising opportunity for Larry. Ramirez can sense that Larry is very excited about using his diaries:

—But why are you so ecstatic?

—I'm developing a lot of contacts. And there's the chance I might be published. Then there's the money, and maybe permanent work (*EC* 146).

This access to the inner world of Ramirez, this boundary violation, is a veritable goldmine for Larry. He has been treading water, sometimes drowning, in conditions of unemployment, depression and relative poverty. Ramirez expresses his happiness for Larry and gives him permission to begin excavation of his inner world.

—How wonderful! This is something we really didn't expect.

—Yeah, finally a break.

—Go ahead; take the books; you have the key (*EC* 147).

Near the end of the novel Larry confronts Ramirez about his past, his dead family, his dead son, and Larry's method of attack is to use the diaries, to use the very thoughts of Ramirez against him. But Ramirez revolts, accusing Larry of twisting his inner world to fit a narrative that is a lie:

—I see very clearly that you're not qualified to do this work.

—Thanks for your support, but the text has not been altered. These are your thoughts, and you felt them so deeply that you took the trouble to encode a French text to express yourself.

—Yes, all that trouble to have an irresponsible young man come along and play with it, erase the numbers, change them, write a whole new text . . . for a motive beyond my understanding (*EC* 216-217).

The motive is clear. Since leaving his job after only two years of teaching as a professor of history at a college in Brooklyn, Larry has spent the previous five years fluttering from job to job as bartender, gardener and waiter. He now has this inner world of Ramirez in his grasp and he is going to use it to his advantage.

A series of letters are used at the end of the novel to inform the reader that Ramirez ends up in a nursing home in Palm Springs, California, before being transferred to a psychiatric hospital in Los Angeles where he dies. All of the correspondence involves letters to and from Eli Margulies, Secretary of Internal Affairs for the human rights organisation that has been attending to Ramirez. Larry writes to Margulies to state that Ramirez “had agreed to have me work on the notes and publish the results as part of a project sponsored by the Institute for Latin American Studies at the University of Montreal” (*EC* 228).

The final letter is from Margulies to Larry. In this letter Larry discovers that a nurse at the Greenwich Village Home had spoken to Ramirez minutes before he left for California. In reference to Larry, the letter explains that the nurse “stated that Mr. Ramirez complained strongly about you” and “your conduct had been rather unacceptable” (*EC* 229). Margulies continues on in the letter, “She then repeated what Mr. Ramirez had told her. According to him, you had contrived to exclude Mr. Ramirez from the project” and “he no longer wished to have any association with you” (*EC* 229). Larry is then informed, “that the existence of this

witness makes it impossible for me to consider any participation on your part in potential projects based upon Mr. Ramirez' books" (*EC* 229). Not only is Larry denied any publishing rights to the diaries of Ramirez but he also must suffer the fact that the human rights organisation will publish these works and Larry will get nothing except a "thank you" in a letter. "We are, however, grateful to you for pointing out the value of these documents and there is no doubt that steps will be taken for the publication of the works" (*EC* 229-230).

For the purpose of my analysis it is appropriate that the author (Larry) is denied access to the inner world of a character (Ramirez) by a Secretary of Internal Affairs for a human rights organisation. The appropriation of the inner world of a character is considered a violation according to Spielhagen's Objective Narrative Theory and it is a violation that is avoided by authors such as Gaddis and Green. As Brian Poole argues, "The author must ask himself how situations can be created in which the heroes expose their own character and inner thoughts, and how the characters may provoke each other to say what they might otherwise prefer to conceal" (26).

The inner world of a character is left to the interpretation of the reader and not the result of authorial intrusion. An author attempting to render thoughts of a character is denying that character the dignity of something the author can never know but can only guess at or speculate about. Margulies, an official representing "internal affairs," has denied Larry from publishing the "internal affairs" of Ramirez.

It is also notable to remember that in the psychodrama that was foundational in the crafting of the novel, Puig was Ramirez and Mark was Larry. In this relationship, it is Puig (Ramirez) denying the fictional Larry, the opportunistic author, from exploiting his inner world. And perhaps Puig is also commenting on his own previous novels in which he used inner monologues and exploited the inner worlds of those characters.

### *Doting on Carpenter's Gothic*

I will contrast the novels of William Gaddis (*Carpenter's Gothic*) and Henry Green (*Doting*). The novels represent a significant moment in the trajectory of the two authors as they adjust and adapt their technique within the theoretical structure of Spielhagen's Objective Narrative Theory.

*Doting* was published in 1952 and even though Green would be alive for another twenty-one years it was his last novel. At the time that *Doting* was being published Gaddis was writing *The Recognitions*, his first novel. In terms of authorial erasure and foregrounded dialogue, *Doting* ended where Gaddis began with *The Recognitions* and *Carpenter's Gothic* shifted back to where Henry Green had been in his earlier works.

Tempestuous marriages can be found at the centre of both novels. *Gothic* chronicles the last few months of the life of Liz Booth, a troubled heiress. She is married to Paul, an angry, unpredictable opportunist. Liz and Paul are renting a house in New York, a house built in a carpenter's gothic style, from a complex and mysterious geologist, Mr. McCandless. *Doting*, a comedic novel set in London, revolves around the marriage of Arthur and Diana Middleton. Arthur's affair with a much younger Annabel sets in motion a sequence of other affairs involving most of the characters in the novel.



In spite of Green's intention to dramatically reduce his use of authorial description he does allow himself a few indulgences, including this lengthy description of a dancer at a club early in the novel:

As she swayed those hips, sequins caught the light to strike off in a blaze of royal blue while the skin stayed moonlit and the palms of her two hands, daubed probably with a darker pigment, made a deeper shadow above raised arms, of a red so harsh it was almost black in that space through which she waved her opened fingers in figure of eights before the cut jet of two staring eyes (*D* 3).

Gaddis kept descriptive passages to a bare minimum in *JR* and *The Recognitions*, his two previous novels. *Carpenter's Gothic* represented a notable departure from this. There are many examples of description and some of them are captivating, including this description of an old man who lives across the road from Liz and Paul:

On the corner opposite, the old man from the house above bent sweeping leaves into a dustpan, straightened up carrying the thing level before him like an offering, each movement, each shuffled step reckoned anxiously toward an open garbage can where he emptied it with ceremonial concern, balanced the broom upright like a crosier getting his footing, wiping a dry forehead, perching his glasses square and lifting his bald gaze on high to branches yellow-brown with benisons yet to fall (*CG* 35).

These two descriptive passages from Green and Gaddis would fall into the category of what Mack, the self-professed literary critic from *Sweet Thursday*, would call "hooptedoodle." And even though lengthy descriptive passages might

violate a strict interpretation of Spielhagen's Objective Narrative Theory, Mack is more forgiving:

Sometimes I want a book to break loose with a bunch of hooptedoodle.

The guy's writing it, give him a chance to do a little hooptedoodle. Spin up some pretty words maybe, or sing a little song with language (vi).

But even as much as Mack can appreciate a bit of "hooptedoodle" he ultimately adheres to the tenets of Spielhagen's theory by declaring, "I don't want hooptedoodle to get mixed up in the story" (vi). Again, "hooptedoodle" is not an academic term but it does conveniently and descriptively identify passages in a novel that Gaddis and Green exclude to focus on dialogue. But they do not exclude these passages all the time and will occasionally "spin up some pretty words."

An aesthetic appreciation for any descriptive passage is obviously subjective but the two passages from Green and Gaddis that I have just quoted are, in my reading, exquisite and reflect the competent, perhaps extraordinary descriptive talents of both authors. Clearly both authors were capable of writing description and writing it well but they both made a conscious choice not to. It's difficult to know how challenging it was for Gaddis and Green to create descriptive prose. Did the dialogue in their novels come easier to them in their writing? Did descriptive prose take more effort, too much effort; an effort they felt was better placed in rendering dialogue? There is something admirable about both authors being very skilled at composing descriptive prose but choosing, for the most part, to leave it out – especially when the pressures to write a more traditional novel are always present.

Green was in the middle of writing *Doting* when he shared his doubts about using description in his work:

. . . but what I should like to read and what I am trying to write now, is a novel with an absolute minimum of descriptive passages in it, or even of directions to the reader (that may be such as, 'She said angrily,' etc.) and yet narrative consisting almost entirely of dialogue sufficiently alive to create life in the reader (*S* 140).

Green saw dialogue as the best way to do what he intended, which was to create life in the reader. And why can't descriptive passages create life in a reader? Perhaps they can in other novels by other authors but Green didn't see much life being created in the reader when they are led on a leash like a dog through a descriptive passage. Maybe Green saw that the reader doesn't have to put much effort into the reading of a descriptive passage, just follow along or perhaps be impressed by the "pretty words" being spun. Gaddis certainly used more descriptive passages in *Carpenter's Gothic* than he had done previously but it's likely that he didn't see descriptive passages as challenging for the reader. I have already shared his views on interior monologues as being "too easy" for the author, "too obvious" for the reader, "too boring" for the reader and "too lazy" for the author (*PR* 80). Gaddis, as mentioned previously, insisted on a true collaboration with the reader. Does a descriptive passage require the heightened degree of collaboration that Gaddis was seeking? Perhaps Gaddis saw descriptive passages in the same way he viewed television and the movies. In a 1993 interview in Paris with Marc Chénétier and Brigette Félix Gaddis referred to "The vacuity of television and the movies and the inverse proportion of the rewards"

(Gaddis). And in another interview Gaddis refers to the disappearance of an experience when you don't have to put much effort into it, "Television is the hot medium, to which one contributes nothing except a blank slate, and the next day you say, 'What was that show we saw last night on television?' It disappears because you put nothing into it" (PR 80).

I have argued that the foregrounding of fictional dialogue is not the product of ideological positioning or experimentation with novelistic technique but how does one place Gaddis and his lengthy descriptive interruptions with *Carpenter's Gothic* into this frame? As mentioned earlier, *Carpenter's Gothic* is a radical departure for Gaddis with respect to his use of description. Did his disappointment with the critical and commercial response to his two earlier novels (*JR*, *The Recognitions*) play a part in this crafting choice? Conversely, the span of Green's writing career shows a consistent reduction of authorial description as noted by Edward Stokes in his exhaustive analysis of Green's novels. Stokes doesn't include Green's *Blindness*, which was published when Green was an undergraduate at Oxford University.

Title	Percentage of Description
<i>Caught</i>	8.4
<i>Concluding</i>	7.6
<i>Loving</i>	4.9
<i>Party Going</i>	3.9
<i>Back</i>	2.9
<i>Living</i>	2.6
<i>Nothing</i>	2.5
<i>Doting</i>	2.2 (155)

It is a revealing trajectory from where Green begins with *Caught* and ends with *Doting*. The percentage of description keeps getting smaller and smaller and then it all ends for Green with 2.2% of his text dedicated to description. There are to be no more novels. Did he reach a dead end or did he finish with something that could not be improved upon, that said everything he had previously expressed about the author's function in a novel?

In spite of the fact that Gaddis included more descriptive prose in *Carpenter's Gothic* than he had before, the dialogue is still foregrounded. And there are comedic flourishes like Paul's description of a musical gathering that included Liz's brother Billy, "Sounded like a fire in a pet store" (CG 38). The overall impact of the dialogue, with its overlapping and interrupting, is one of disruption. There is no pretence in *Carpenter's Gothic* or *Doting* that dialogue can lead to consensus, understanding, and cooperation. Bronwen Thomas argues for the revelation of character anxiety in dialogue in *Carpenter's Gothic*, "Whether or not one is being listened to is clearly an important aspect of the dynamics of any conversation, but it is rarely if ever explicitly addressed in theoretical accounts" (FD 63). Thomas observes that the characters in *Carpenter's Gothic*, "seem hypersensitive, frequently commenting reflexively on the acts of saying, telling, and hearing, highlighting their anxieties about their ability to communicate and be heard" (FD 63).

The anxieties that are portrayed in *Carpenter's Gothic* leave dark, almost sinister impressions. In contrast, Green's approach in *Doting* reflects a less ominous tone.

In this scene, Peter Middleton, the son of Arthur and Diana, has just returned from hospital where he was recovering from a concussion incurred in a car accident. Arthur and Diana argue about how much a private room would have cost them and how much money they spend on gin in a week. Peter interrupts them.

“Yes, at least three people died” Peter interjected.

“No, don’t” was Mrs. Middleton’s earnest plea.

“What time of the day or night?” his father wanted to be told.

“Usually it seemed to be about four or five in the morning.”

“But weren’t you asleep then?”

“God, you don’t sleep in those places.”

“Curious” Mr. Middleton remarked “it always seems that resistance is lowest at that hour of the night.”

“And this time of year” his wife murmured (*D* 92).

The anxieties of the characters in both novels are handled in different ways. There is a darkness and desperation in *Carpenter’s Gothic* that is not present in *Doting*. I resist the urge to say whether I “like” characters or not because these words end up sounding like an Amazon customer review. The characters in both novels are not “likeable” in any traditional sense. Green has them sneaking around, lying, and manipulating. But I was much more engaged with the characters of Green’s novel. Perhaps Green’s style is easier to read, the text, less convoluted. D.A.N. Jones, reviewer for the *London Review of Books*, saw similarities between Gaddis and Green when reviewing *Carpenter’s Gothic*, referring to the “resemblance of the narrative style to that of Henry Green,” observing that the “similarity in rhythm and eccentric punctuation is quite striking” (16). Jones goes on to say, “It is an attractive way of writing. ... But it does not make for lucidity. With his

complicated plot-lines and his quite scholarly arguments, Gaddis might win more readers if his work was less like a comprehension test” (16).

The challenges of engaging the complexities of *Carpenter’s Gothic* are found throughout the novel but one example can be offered. In this moment, McCandless, the mysterious landlord, is talking to Liz about the architectural style of his house. The passage also provides another glimpse into Gaddis’ aversion to inner monologue as McCandless comments on the house, “Oh the house yes, the house. It was built that way yes, it was built to be seen from outside it was, that was the style” (CG 227). Gaddis then refers to the sense of assault when *someone breaks into your head* by breaking into a character’s head and reading their thoughts:

... because it’s stood here, hasn’t it, foolish inventions and all it’s stood here for ninety years... breaking off, staring up where her gaze had fled back with those towering heights and cupolas, as though for some echo: It’s like the inside of your head McCandless, if that was what brought him to add – why when somebody breaks in, it’s like being assaulted, it’s the ... (CG 228).

This short excerpt from a lengthy paragraph, which is introduced by a dash on page 227, which is supposed to signify dialogue, pivots back and forth from dialogue to description to thought-rendering. And this occurs throughout the entire paragraph, which is very long. The net effect is daunting. Yes, Gaddis wants a collaborator but sometimes his work does feel like a comprehension test.

Screenwriter Bruce Jay Friedman reminisced about a group of writers who used to gather for lunches in New York. The eclectic group included authors Joseph Heller and Mario Puzo. “Heller vetoed Peter Matthiessen because of his continual reference to his membership in the Institute of Arts and Letters: (‘As I was saying to my colleagues at the Institute of Arts and Letters . . .’)” (223). Apparently the group did not experience the same snobbery with Gaddis. “There was a feeling that the novelist William Gaddis would fit in. A gentleman of the old school ... I’d met him a few times. The man who had been compared to Melville and Joyce wanted to talk only of how to break into the movies” (222). Friedman goes on to explain why Gaddis was never invited:

There was some hesitation when it came to inviting him to join us. Some unease, perhaps guilt. None of us had read his books. A call was put through to Candida Donadio, who represented each of us and had been Gaddis’ agent for five decades.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “No one has read his books” (222-223).

There is something lamentable about Gaddis’ own agent referring to him in this way. And Friedman goes on to say, “(There is, incidentally, a typo on poor Gaddis’ tombstone in East Hampton. His acclaimed novel, ‘The Recognitions,’ is chiseled in as ‘The Recongnitions’)” (223).

There is also something lamentable to be found in an article by Nigel Dennis, a glowing nine-page feature for *Life* magazine on Henry Green while he was finishing work on *Doting*. It appeared August 4, 1952. This is the same Nigel Dennis who eviscerated Robert Pinget’s dialogue novel 15 years later (quoted in Chapter Two). It might have seemed that Dennis was objecting to too much



dialogue in his review of Pinget's novel but in fact his adoration and respect for *Doting* suggests that it's really a question of how the dialogue is rendered not that it is foregrounded too much. Dennis dotes on Green and dotes on *Doting*, "One of its merits is that though no single character is described, each builds a lifelike portrait solely by speaking" (L 87). Dennis chides the reader who is unwilling to put in the effort that authors like Green and Gaddis demand, "Some people dislike reading Henry Green because they are not used to supplying colors and shapes out of their own experience – and even protest that Green is handing them a job which he should do himself" (L 88).

The Nigel Dennis *Life* piece on Green is surprising in many respects. Green was notoriously reluctant to be interviewed or seek publicity and would always ask that any photographer not take pictures of his face. But it was also a surprise that *Life* would commit so many pages to an author most readers had not heard of. With *Doting*, Green made good on his theoretical promise to avoid thought-rendering and reduce his descriptive prose to a bare minimum. And here he was, seemingly at the peak of his creative mountain, being recognised as a brilliant author in a nine-page spread in *Life*, and poof . . . he was gone. No more novels.

Some have speculated that consumption of alcohol took over Green's life. But who knows? Nigel Dennis argues, "Green's life has been a long search for a more profitable artistic margin" (L 86). So why did *Doting* signal the end? Green was quoted in *Life* about the reason he wrote, "I write to get myself straight. Writing is like diarrhoea; it pipes off the things that are in ferment. That's all" (L 94).

Perhaps what Green “got straight” was his quest for authorial erasure by “piping off” descriptive prose and thought-rendering. And once, in his own mind, he had achieved this, to a degree that was satisfactory for him, there was not much motivation to keep doing the same thing over and over. Otherwise he would end up in a circumstance similar to his characters in *Doting*, which he comments on in his last line of published prose, “The next day they all went on very much the same” (*D* 252).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A NOVEL UNDER THE EXEGETICAL INFLUENCE

This chapter resides at the intersection of my creative work, *Jack London Slept Here*, and the accumulation and influence of my literature review and exegetical writing. Consequently, the words in this chapter will be brief because the impact of my exegetical work should be evident in my novel and if this impact, this influence, this informing, is not demonstrated in *Jack London Slept Here* then no amount of posturing or explaining in this chapter will rescue the attempt.

#### Foregrounding Plot in a Dialogue Novel

My novel takes place on a dead-end alley in Hollywood. It explores the repercussions of a shooting massacre at a nearby golf course. My protagonist – Hartley Sickerdick, whose birth name was Charles Manson – is a not-so-successful songwriter with a strange habit, a ritual. Every day, and sometimes several times a day, he sits down for an interview. They are magazine interviews. *Playboy*. *Ladies Home Journal*. *Architectural Digest*. And so on.

The reader will deduce that these interviews are not real in the sense that *Rolling Stone* has not actually sent a journalist to this dead-end alley to interview Hartley because . . . why would they? But the interviews are real in the sense that they actually take place. They are preserved on an antiquated reel-to-reel tape recorder. The interviews are intentionally self indulgent, delusional, crazy, but they also serve a therapeutic function for Hartley. And for the reader, with the exception of

a few clumsy press scrums, the interviews are all they get, so the reader, as Gaddis asserts, is a necessary collaborator. The entire novel is comprised of questions and answers. There are no speech tags and there is no narrative description. It is, in the purest sense, a dialogue novel.

The formal erasure of speech tags in my novel has forced me to write better dialogue, or at least attempt to write better dialogue so that the dialogue can stand on its own. The elimination of speech tags also compelled me to understand – admit – that my previous relationship with tagging was defined by diffidence. I used speech tags as a crutch.

Speech tags can be intrusive but they also place a definitive attribution on the dialogue. Bronwen Thomas refers to Henry Green and the fact that “his narrators frequently use modal expressions (“perhaps”; “if you will”) to head off the possibility of the reader becoming overly reliant on the framing discourse” (*FD* 104). Thomas also refers to Green’s humorous use of ambiguity, “often displaying a casual disregard for accuracy and precision: ‘Julia said something or other in reply’ (*Party Going* [1939] 1978, 421)” (*FD* 104). One of Green’s solutions to the intrusive nature of the speech tag was to poke fun at its use, as Thomas explains, “he evidently enjoyed developing his own trademark tags (‘temporized’; ‘wailed’) simultaneously managing both to suggest how the words are uttered and to convey that the narrator’s colorful characterization of this may be highly speculative” (*FD* 104).

The interview style that I use in *Jack London Slept Here* makes it transparent for the reader to know who is talking. Characters are identified in a delivery consistent with a magazine interview:

PLAYBOY: What name were you born with?

SICKERDICK: I don't want to tell you.

PLAYBOY: Why?

SICKERDICK: Because you'll get stuck in the mud and this will go nowhere.

PLAYBOY: It can't be that bad.

SICKERDICK: It's worse (4).

This transparency is evident in Green's *Doting*, where characters are identified by speech tags or in the dialogue itself. And in the case of Puig's *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages*, there are no speech tags but there are only two characters speaking so the only difficulty comes if the reader loses track of which character is speaking. Often, Puig will have the characters address each other by name in the dialogue, which helps to orient the reader. Gaddis is not so generous with assistance but perhaps clarity about who is speaking is not what he was after.

Bronwen Thomas refers to the work of Ryan Bishop, a cultural anthropologist who has done extensive writing on fictional dialogue:

In his essay on fictional dialogue, Ryan Bishop (1991 58) expresses frustration with Western culture's tendency to "confuse the map for the territory," and I share his concern that "our judgements regarding 'natural dialogue are determined by our literacy and literary tradition, not by the event of actual conversation we engage in every day" (58) (FD 1).

Bishop refers to the work in Gaddis, specifically, *JR*, “which in my estimation comes as close to capturing everyday conversation as is possible given the restrictions of textual dialogue” (70). Bishop notes that Gaddis uses dashes to introduce spoken lines, similar to Joyce and Puig, and comments further on the difficulty of reading Gaddis, “Readers are left to fend for themselves in a chaotic ocean of dialogue churning with interruptions, back-tracks, elliptical phrases, and vague references to incidents both inside and outside the text ...” (70). Bishop argues that plotting, in a traditional sense, is not an objective of Gaddis who treats his dialogue as the event itself, “and it has taken us several hundreds of years of writing and print to yield a text that effectively evokes our aural life-world, our daily conversations. The irony is obvious, especially when we find this text “difficult” (71).

Doubtless, it is precarious to assume intent for an author but if Gaddis was indeed attempting to replicate the real, the rendering of real conversation, then it becomes apparent that the difficulties in reading his work can be understood in a different light and the task of reading can become more accessible and perhaps, aesthetically pleasing.

If the “reading” of Gaddis is positioned as “difficult” then it is incumbent upon any analysis to acknowledge the challenges that Gaddis faced when rendering his work. Yes, reading Gaddis is difficult and for some readers, impossible. But forget the reader for a moment. Think of Gaddis. Imagine how difficult his novels were to write. He had to create novels almost completely devoid of speech tags,

thought-rendering and description, and yet he still had to incorporate passages of time and back story, etc. He reduced his reliance on many of the traditional literary crutches in the crafting of his work and in doing so created daunting challenges for himself as an author.

The absence, as noted by Bishop in Gaddis' *JR* of "real events, in traditional plot terms" (71), is not replicated in *Jack London Slept Here*. I have a different approach to the novel. I like story. I like a good story. Dialogue plays a primary role in my novel but I want the reader engaged in the plot as well. In *Jack London Slept Here* several of Hartley's neighbours become implicated in the shooting massacre as persons of interest. The novel is very much plot-driven, which is contrary to how most dialogue novels are crafted. In this respect I am offering an alternative to the "conversation as event" contributions by other authors who have foregrounded dialogue.

Gaddis, like Green and Puig, has had a significant influence on my novel. And this influence is sometimes related to my own crafting choices that are in direct opposition to what Gaddis did. One such area of choice is what Spielhagen would call "smuggling." Brian Poole translates from Spielhagen's *Ueber die Objectivität im Roman* (191):

No, not the dialogisation [Dialogisieren] or even the frequent use of dialogue [das häufige Dialogisieren] ought to be attacked, but only whenever the form of dialogue [das Gesprächsform] is made a vehicle in order to smuggle all sorts of things that don't belong at all to the work into the objective representation (22).

In *Carpenter's Gothic* Gaddis has smuggled in, through his character dialogue, a treadmill of screeds that depict Christians and politicians as gullible fools, corrupt. There are no alternative voices. The overall effect, for me, was tedious and disappointing. It's as if Gaddis put all of his effort into technique and didn't employ the same rigour with his content. By allowing his characters to soapbox his own views about Christians and politicians he succumbed to smuggling. At every step, every instance of dialogue, an author has a choice about what a character might say. And to repeat, over and over, depressingly simplistic portraiture of religious groups or occupations is an aesthetic error.

I encountered a moment in *Jack London Slept Here* when I was forced to challenge my own views on gun control. Certainly, a novel that rotates around a shooting massacre provides an easy opportunity to insert screeds about the effectiveness of strict gun legislation. But these would be my screeds and the characters, as unwitting participants, would be forced to share them. I would be using the characters in my novel to smuggle my ideology. Instead, I chose to have Hartley try his best to explain his views, not my views:

Can I feel bad for all the families of those golfers? Yes, yes, and more yes. But that's not the same as being personally impacted. A hunter kills a lion and we blame the hunter. A lunatic kills people and we blame the gun. I'm not saying that's all there is but it's complicated (247).

I have previously highlighted two techniques that some authors have eliminated from their dialogue novels or at least significantly reduced – thought-rendering and description. There is no mind-reading in *Jack London Slept Here*. Part of my reluctance to render a character's thoughts comes from my years of training as a



screenwriter. In film writing, depicting a character's thoughts is a clumsy tactic of last resort. I also agree with Henry Green, that we can never know what another person is thinking so what makes me think that I can render the thoughts of the fictional other? It does require a degree of hubris. Some of these choices are ethical. I respect the autonomy of the characters I write and I don't want to use them as smugglers for my personal views. I also respect my characters as created people and because I would not hazard a guess as to what real people in real time are thinking, I am cautious to do it in fiction.

So what about descriptive prose? I have used it sparingly in my previous novels, relying mostly on dialogue. As a reader, I agree with Elmore Leonard, "I'll bet you don't skip dialogue" (*NYT*). When I read a novel and I see a large chunk of descriptive prose my heart sinks a bit. I have to slog through this? I never experience this hesitation with dialogue. I also don't experience much hesitation when I am writing dialogue. I enjoy writing dialogue and one reason is that it gets me away from me.

The rendering of descriptive prose feels too much like me trying to be clever, amazing, trying to show the reader what a good writer I am. And if I am honest I must admit that I'm just not that good at it because I don't do enough of it. Of course, it's entirely possible that in my next novel I will take up the challenge of writing descriptive prose and use large chunks of it. I do think it is important for an author to know their limitations. This is not only true about thought-rendering but it can also be true for crafting choices like descriptive prose.

John McPhee wrote an essay for *The New Yorker* in September 2015. He called it “Omission: Choosing What to Leave Out.” McPhee was a pioneer in creative non-fiction. His essay focussed primarily on editing but he concludes his piece with a personal account of an encounter he had with General Dwight D. Eisenhower before he became president. Eisenhower liked to paint. McPhee describes Ike’s current project, an unfinished still life. The subject was a square table with a red-checked tablecloth and a bowl of fruit – apples, plums and pears, topped by a bunch of grapes. McPhee was shy in the presence of the general and could not think of anything to say. Ike talked about how the tablecloth in the painting connected him to his hometown in Kansas. McPhee continues:

The still-life was well along – the apples, plums, and pears deftly drawn and highlighted. Pretty much tongue-tied until now, at last I had something to ask. Despite the painting’s advanced stage, it did not include the grapes.

I said, “Why have you left out the grapes?”

Ike said, “Because they’re too Goddamned hard to paint” (42).

## CONCLUSION

Friedrich Spielhagen, Henry Green, William Gaddis and Manuel Puig share a collective literary station. Their literary contributions are undervalued, underestimated, misunderstood, and at times, vilified. And all because they had the temerity to take a familiar, prevalent, novelistic mechanism, fictional dialogue, and use a lot of it and argue for that foregrounded use. Spielhagen was stubbornly loyal to his Objective Narrative Theory. Jeffrey L. Sammons asserts that Spielhagen's theoretical work was of "suspect simplicity" and points out that Spielhagen "could not understand why it was not universally acknowledged" (141).

He grieved that he lacked the ability to convince others of what was absolutely certain to him (*Finder und Erfinder. Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*. Leipzig: Staackman, 1890. 2: 222). Late in life he wrote that it was as clear to him as two plus two equals four; why would it not go into the heads of teachers of literature and aesthetics? (Mensch, "Erinnerungen an Friedrich Spielhagen," 359 (141).

Perhaps the simplicity of Spielhagen's theoretical work is an easy target for criticisms from scholars like Sammons. But it doesn't change the fact that "simple-minded" authors like Henry Green, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, William Gaddis, Manuel Puig, Elmore Leonard and others, integrated the fundamental principles of Spielhagen's theory by foregrounding dialogue and also manifesting Spielhagen's ethical arguments. Brian Poole illuminates the concern that Spielhagen had for the integrity of characters as individuals:

Has the author the right to speak behind the hero's back? Has the author the right to reveal knowledge of a character to which the character himself has no access, thus to view the character from a perspective unknown to him and (in the terminology of Bakhtin's early phenomenology) transgredient to his consciousness? Such questions allow us to pinpoint the significant changes that occurred in Bakhtin's thought from his early works to his first study of Dostoevsky under Spielhagen's influence (32).

Poole continues this thread of moving beyond the author's egocentric approach, an approach that emphasises the "I" as the author inserting commentary into the text. "Narrative objectivity thus implies yielding up all characterizing and descriptive discourse behind the hero's back" (40). I would add that this "yielding" is required of other characters, not just the "hero." Poole quotes Bakhtin with a translation modification; "the repetition of 'behind' was replaced with an idiomatic expression in the English text" (40):

Dostoevsky, while objectifying the thought, the idea, the experience, never sneaks up from behind, never attacks from behind. From the first to the final pages of his artistic work he was guided by the principle: never use for objectifying or finalizing another's consciousness anything that might be inaccessible to that consciousness, that might lie outside its field of vision (*PDP* 278).

"Never before," argues Poole, "has Spielhagen's prohibition of 'direct character description,' authorial 'interference' and moralizing or theoretical commentary received such a persuasive exposition" (40). Poole contrasts the experience of

watching actors on a stage with reading characters in a novel and points out an obvious distinction; that characters in a novel have no actors to personify them. The author is responsible for crafting the characters. On the stage the characters are independent of the author (or playwright) by virtue of the fact that they have actors portraying them. It is an experience of illusion but one made more believable because as an audience member, one can see different characters, independent speaking persons. Poole explains, “Spielhagen’s theory of narrative objectivity is an attempt to achieve this dramatic illusion in the novel” (6). Poole highlights boundary incursions by stating:

If the novelistic author continually describes the physical appearance and thoughts of his characters, then the only perspective we have of the characters is the author’s own perspective: by comparison with drama, it’s a one man show. Spielhagen’s “attack” upon the author’s voice in fiction is an attempt to avoid such a poor performance (6).

The author’s voice in the fiction of Gaddis, Green and Puig is subordinated to the dialogue of the characters. Their novels, as literary performance, embody an attack upon the author’s voice. As authors, they made the ethical choice to diminish their authoritative control by minimising, and in some instances, completely eviscerating their use of garish speech tags, intrusive description, and interior monologues. And in doing this they sought the emancipation of their characters from their own control, even as they create these characters and their dialogue.

These authors did not belong to any literary movement that espoused an ideological preference for erasure of self and risk. They carefully contemplated

the function of the author in the novelistic text and concluded that foregrounding dialogue was the best way to achieve a closer proximity to their perception of truth, of authenticity. They were not experimenting with technique. There is not a hint of tentative probing in their novels and they remained committed to the foregrounding of dialogue over the span of their literary careers. They were not experimenting to see if foregrounding dialogue *would work*. They knew it worked. For what they wanted to achieve – it worked. They knew what they were getting and giving. They were not flying a kite in a thunderstorm to see if electricity and lightning were identical.

The primary focus in novels that foreground dialogue is on the characters – a concentration on “someone” other than the author. This empathetic scaffolding contrasts vividly with the author who constantly intrudes with lengthy descriptions, interior monologues and relentless explaining. Henry Green commented on these intrusions, “But if you are trying to write something which has a life of its own, which is alive, of course the author must keep completely out of the picture. I hate the portraits of donors in medieval triptychs” (S 244).



*The Crucifixion with Saints and a Donor*, Joos van Cleve. Kneeling donor in middle panel.

There is a degree of narcissism that lumbers in when the author is constantly intruding a character's space by thought-rendering or describing how a character spoke their dialogue. Similarly, a narcissistic tendency can cause an author to intrude into the reader's space by explaining what the dialogue means instead of allowing the reader to create their own meaning, their own life, from that dialogue.

The respect for boundary in the crafting of novelistic fiction argues for a reduction of narcissistic tendency and a demand for humility. I submit no claims about the living humility of Gaddis, Green and Puig in their personal lives. If I had been able I could have asked ten of their closest confidantes if they thought the authors in question were humble people and I would guess that ten different responses

would have occurred. So who knows? But when they sat at a desk with their typewriter, pen or pencil, and began the work of crafting their fiction, in that moment, by foregrounding dialogue they forced themselves into a humble space – a space where their function as an author was to contemplate other people, their characters, and imagine a line of dialogue in a given situation.

There is risk in foregrounding dialogue. Critics might savage the work. The novels might not sell as well as more conventional novels. But the truly admirable risk that Gaddis, Green and Puig took was the risk of asking too much of the reader. All novels, obviously, require collaboration with the reader. But in novels with foregrounded dialogue the collaboration reaches a peak of urgency. In these dialogue novels there is a tremendous amount of respect for the reader and expectation of the reader. There is also trust, a trust that the reader will do their part – that they will take the dialogue and pattern their own descriptions, their own rendering of the inner worlds of the characters. This is a leap of faith that not only requires a collaborating partner but demands courageous risk as well.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AB: *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Lodge)

CG: *Carpenter's Gothic* (Gaddis)

CN: *Consciousness and the Novel* (Lodge)

D: *Doting* (Green)

DI: *The Dialogic Imagination* (Bakhtin)

EC: *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* (Puig)

EN: *The Encyclopedia of the Novel* (Thomas)

FD: *Fictional Dialogue: Speech and Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern  
Novel* (Thomas)

FHY: *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Emerson)

L: *Life* magazine

LRB: *London Review of Books* (Jones)

NYT: *New York Times*

PDP: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Bakhtin)

PR: *Paris Review*

RR: *Russian Review* (Emerson)

S: *Surviving* (Green)

WC: *Alan Moore on His Work and Career: A Conversation with Bill Baker*  
(Moore)

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