GENRE AND DIALOGICAL THEORY: BAKHTIN AND NORMAN MAILER'S *THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG*

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IN THE WORDS OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN:

> The process of the novel's development has not yet come to an end. It is currently entering a new phase. For our era is characterized by an extraordinary complexity and a deepening in our perception of the world; there is an unusual growth in demands on human discernment on mature objectivity and the critical faculty. These are features that will shape the further development of the novel as well. (40)

Bakhtin is in search of a theory that goes beyond text and immediate context. He searches for an approach to reading novels that is both holistic and dialogic. For Bakhtin dialogic theory grows out of the interpenetration of textual tropes, immediate contextual features, and a broader historical framework that encompasses centuries of development of the novel genre. The history of the novel acts as protagonist in the writing and reading of novels. Bakhtin's dialogic theory engages both writers and readers in the co-production of texts. Within this productive process, the text of a novel evolves out of extra-textual contexts (including history) as much as it does out of the text itself, or out of the creative mind of an author. Novels of the past combine with historical forces and period history to create a genre that outreaches other literary genres. Readers, entering the world of the novel become, along with writers, active participants engaged in tracking intricate

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verbal connections between text and the complex and organic nature of the genre.

This essay will explore significant connections between Bakhtin's theories and the contextual, psychological, and stylistic dimensions of Norman Mailer's fiction. More specifically, Bakhtin can also clarify many of the particular aspects of Mailer's fiction: his narrative experiments, his use of complex turns of plot, his careful attention to creating sometimes grotesque and often psychologically damaged characters. Many of Mailer's novels also include qualities and features that establish connections between history and technique. His rhetorical experiments with voice in novels such as *The Armies of the Night* provide clear connections to the play of voices prominent in the novel tradition. Mailer's voice is not simply old or new; nor is it entirely experimental or traditional. It is at different times both. Often the defining factor in a Mailer novel is the particular perspective he takes on connections between text and context. *The Naked and the Dead*, arguably his most traditionally narrated novel, defines the reader's perspective through multiple points of view synthesized within a traditional third person narration. Many critics see only the third person narration and ignore Mailer's use of shifting points of view. These multiple points of view become the reader's way of seeing the military culture contrasted with the perspectives of individual soldiers. They also represent Mailer's connection with Bakhtin's dialogic theories.

Bakhtin would lead us back to earlier uses of point of view, including relationships between history and text when applied to Mailer's explorations of text and context paradox. These cumulative effects would not be dealt with on a singular basis. They would become part of the organic nature of the coming into being of one novel, within the shadow of many novels. The critical challenge with Mailer's fiction is to look closely at those places where Mailer expands the contexts of his fiction in ways that fit with dialogic theory.

Studies of culture and literary texts also follow an historical pattern of developments, moving across the margins separating the past and present to construct dialogic meanings where historical references are embedded in text. Mailer criticism often suggests the importance of these theoretical maneuvers. But they tend to view his novels within a more restricted narrative context. A look to Bakhtin's broader historical perspective on the novel can both broaden this contextual perspective and provide further insight into

Mailer's novels. The many in-depth studies of Mailer's style, his immersion in political and public life, his interest in professional boxing, his numerous television appearances, and his campaign for mayor of New York are useful as far as they go. All these critical approaches are perceptive and useful in their own right, but they fail to discuss the role that Mailer takes on in the development of the novel. Nor do they explain how the historical contexts of the novel indirectly and directly influence the making of Mailer's novels. They also explain how Mailer's fiction participates in this organic history focused on the expanding nature of the genre of the novel.

Bakhtin has developed a dialogic (rather than a systematic or formalistic) theory that provides this broader perspective on genre. This dialogic perspective evolves out of Bakhtin's unique perspective on the history of novel. In *The Dialogic Imagination,* he selects representative novels from broad cultural and social/ historical conditions, chronologically arranged, to track linguistic and thematic connections between the novels and their social/ cultural turns of time and space. Novels speak to each other over time and across space to produce a genre that consistently grows and adapts itself to changing contexts. This approach fits Mailer's sprawling fictional world, where characters of many sorts combine with urban, rural, bureaucratic, and sometimes ghostly environments. Developing this post-modern approach to Mailer's novels relies for its success on the critic's ability to place the novels within Bakhtin's broad historical continuum. The continuum itself, or one might say, the "genre itself," actually functions as the "author" of the novel. The writer becomes the director behind the scene, managing but not actually "writing" the novel. Will this combination of textual and historical perspectives provide an approach to Mailer's fiction that accounts for the complex intertextuality and social complexity of his novels? To answer this question positively, we must consider Mailer's style, imagery, linguistic features, and themes. These formalistic approaches must become part of a superordinate synthesis of new historical and formalistic perspectives. Bakhtin's history of the novel genre will need to be correlated with the genre's broader literary and social processes. Considered more broadly, this correlation is the locus of Bakhtin's dialogic approach.

Mailer, like his contemporary John Barth, created "literary carnivals" that helped provide the groundwork for post-modern perspectives on the novel. Barth, in novels such as *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *Lost in the Funhouse*

(1968) established features from which later post-modern novelists drew. Innovative structures, complex experiments with traditional literary forms and imaginative uses of literary language found a place in post-modern theory and practice. These literary carnivals are often narrated through the minds of characters that distort reality to the point of creating unreliable or unsettling narrators; they often express simultaneous references to novels past and present; and they always refer to a multitude of social and cultural themes and events. Put more simply, novels cannot be read solely as individual works, but always as texts generated by cultures and writers in close collaboration. Bakhtin's dialogic imagination enables us to enter the world through the text of a writer. A writer, or the author in this altered sense, orchestrates the making of a novel.

Bakhtin develops a complex method of analyzing the dialogic structure of the novel. He explains how historical and contemporary cultural contexts are intertwined within the generic context of the novel. Cues within a text connect with historically driven themes and social/political, and aesthetic contexts. Lexical cues clarify connections between text and context. The process of tracking historical generic developments over time enables readers to follow interactions between text, context, and broader contemporary themes—for example, how a war that is not an objective part of a novel might indirectly influence the novel's underlying meaning, or how the prominence of threats to the institution of marriage might impact a fictional marriage. Historical perspectives explain the immediate chronologies of a novel, explaining the treatments of time in relation to place in the text. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia are the base elements of a text. Finding and creating what Bakhtin calls a "series" of textual heteroglossia become tools that novelists use to connect clusters of meaning with larger contextual themes (Bakhtin 190).

Series create meaning. For readers, these clusters of cues, ranging across time and space, become the meaning of a text. They project a novel's connections with the history of the genre, both by exposing historical information that writers might use or hold in the back of their minds, or experience as the shadow of history that lies behind the genre. A truly dialogic reading occurs when a historical series is simultaneously mixed with the formalistic textual tropes of the novel.

Returning to Mailer's place in this discussion, the critical challenge is to find those places where Mailer's novels fit into genre history. It is important

to recognize that this attention to the history of genre also strains the attention of serious readers, who must simultaneously read context and text. Jane Tompkins focused on articles by several noteworthy critics whose work on reader responses to literary texts was ground breaking. Bakhtin's dialogic theories, when synthesized with reader response criticism, form connections between dialogic theories in general and a focus on readers within that process. While Bakhtin gives more attention to the expansive process of creation of text, reader response examination is more focused on reader's part criticism creation of texts rather than to the responses of readers, reader response theorists play an important role by including readers in the processing of dialogic text (Tompkins 1980).

Early in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin discusses what he terms the "low classics." He presents these pre-classical adventure novels, these lewd and satiric treatments of Greek and Roman cultures, as an originating phase in the novel's broad social and cultural perspective. The contexts of Greek and Roman cultures pass through these early satires, embedding within them specifics of culture incapable of expression in other more formalistic literary forms. This emphasis on satiric treatments of ceremonial orgies, exaggerated character types, realistic focus on physical details, and the diverse dialects of Greek and Roman society become over time contextual staples of the novel. This fact is especially apparent in Bakhtin's examinations of connections between folk culture and the novels of Apuleius (*The Golden Ass*) and Petronius (*The Satyricon*). Plot, imagery, and metaphor in these pre-classical novels are drawn from folklore and myth ingrained in the cultures surrounding them. Many of these myths and folkloric stories are oral in origin and are tacit parts of culture. Webbing together these contextual strains becomes the novel's primary role. It enables the novelist to ensure that text is always subservient to context. Words never have the same meaning every time they are used; context always alters meaning. Novelists can be ranked according to how well they pull together the threads of text and context to create dialogic meanings. Bakhtin describes the inclusiveness of the novel as "the laughter — the fantastic — the inclusion of everything that is private and every day — the comic and the absurd — sexual indecencies —and food and drink" (Bakhtin 220).

Bakhtin also uses the term "series" to explain how the heteroglossia within the novel are organized into effective generic tropes or vignettes. Renderings of mannered, unmannered, and vulgar behavior, of lewd and bizarre

fantasies of class behavior, of grotesque images of the human body, and of specific instances of linguistic diversity are not the result of one author's imagination. Literary imagination is a dynamic collaboration between author, reader, and culture. Rabelais literally brought the Renaissance to the novel; most other philosophers of the novel saw historical periods as subordinate agents in the making of novels. In discussing *Gargantua and Pentagruel*, Bakhtin explains the overall significance of the novel. He argues that the collective desire to undermine a dying culture lies behind the evolution of the novel genre. In the case of a novel such as *Gargantua and Pentagruel*, the values, behaviors, and rituals of a receding medieval culture were gradually replaced by the tropes of secularism and courtly life. Exaggeration and parody remained as literary techniques, but the culture of the Renaissance altered them to focus on the values and behaviors of the Renaissance. Satire focused on secular social structures based on commerce, and new cultural forms begin to take the place of religious satire.

From these earlier historical periods, Bakhtin carries his discussions of the novel through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most eighteenth century novels focused on the rise of the middle class. Richardson's epistolary novel, *Clarissa*, provides a specific historical example of the novel during this period. *Clarissa* represents social change by presenting language divided among social classes. Primarily written in the vernacular of the rising middle class, Richardson employs the vernacular to assist in defining the characters of Lovelace and Clarissa, who in turn represent the romantic stereotypes of the period. The convergence of the vernacular with the language of the upper class, and occasionally with the language of the streets, captured the diversity of eighteenth century society. Added to these social/class representations are Richardson's detailed descriptions of architecture, home furnishings, and dress. Language and architecture serve an heteroglossic base connecting domestic life with the equally diverse characters and settings in the text. The dominant voice of the text, whether of a narrator, character, or implied author, often ironically contrasts with external factors, increasing the tension readers experience between heteroglossia that link text with social context. *Clarissa*, and other eighteenth century British novels, created ironic layers of meaning by emphasizing tensions between a narrator's objective role as teller of a story and the often immoral and deceitful behavior of characters. These ironic juxtapositions of cultural voices within *Clarissa*, when combined with the narrator's detailed descrip-

tions of cultural artifacts, immerse readers in the historical and social context of *Clarissa*. Bakhtin would argue that the dialogics of the novel are horizontally expanded to match the complexity of society.

By the time Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, begins his discussion of the British novel he has already established the tenets of his dialogic approach: language, context, writer, author, history, and theme are inseparable and organic elements of the novel. His discussions of the expanding internal form and meaning of novels, coupled with his focus on the ever-broadening external reach of the genre, are carried forward in the nineteenth-century novels of Charles Dickens. Dickens' emphasis on family dynamics becomes the means by which his novels organize themselves around the complexities behind the political and social changes of the nineteenth century. Dickens uses the family as industrialized societies' one stand against the dehumanizing effects of an industrialized social system that produces poverty, unemployment, an exploitive social system, and colonialism. This general situation lies behind the struggles of and among individual members of the family. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin emphasizes Dickens' perspective on the family: "Scattered throughout the great, cold alien world there are warm little corners of human feeling and kindness" (233). These "warm little corners" become society's refuge in the face of the advances of industry and colonialism. Dickens' readers take on the author's role as social critic. The elemental heteroglossic instances build toward the emphasis on the family/political tension in Dickens' novels. Readers are led from objective references in the text to the contextual conditions of poverty-stricken families.

It is important to recall here that we are redefining a genre; we are not engaging in practical criticism. Once a text is viewed from a dialogic perspective, it exists as a framework within which many critical methods can be applied. It may also help to understand the history of the novel itself as an ongoing narrative. The historical narrative, ever expanding in linguistic and tropic metaphor, combines with textual analysis to expand a novel's meaning beyond the presumed intensions of an author and the specific forms of a particular novel. The novel opens itself to what Bakhtin calls a "heteroglot" of social classes, of linguistic and stylistic registers, low and high characters, and characters of various moral suasions.

Bakhtin also uses the term heteroglossia to explain how a complex body of ideas, linguistic cues, echoes, and reflections connect with one another in

the writing of a single novel. A novel is never finished and always changing; each novel becomes a moment in literary time through which the past connects with the present and the present alters the past. It is at the moment of processing heteroglossia into larger streams or "scenes" of meaning that create the overarching themes connecting literary works and writers. Bakhtin's editor Michael Holquist provides a succinct definition of heteroglossia: it "insures the primacy of context over text. . . . At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, or physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other social conditions" (Bakhtin 428).

This semantic platform becomes the base upon which the novel builds the potential for the broadly inclusive yet specifically developed genre that has come to exist over time. Dialogics become the tools of the novelist, the materials within which the novel expands from its origins within fragments of language and context into particular generic form. Context trumps text. This generic definition insures that novelists are authors in one sense only; they are gatherers more than reapers. Novelists by definition cannot ignore the intrusions of the streets, of the languages and dialects of the courts, the clipped language of newspapers, and the oratorical nature of public discourse. In fact, they are executive managers, who lead readers to textual resolutions that influence their understanding of characters, stories, and other novelists. Novelists are also engaged in a process that has no end or beginning; they are involved in creating forms that are endlessly open to hypothetical beginnings and endings. In contrast, the epic, lyric poem, play, and short story involve forms that are far more restricted by literary convention than is the novel.

Mailer's treatment of social groups such as hipsters (in the late fifties), the post-Cold War culture of Russia in *Oswald's Tale*, the intelligence community in *Harlot's* Ghost, and the Mormon world of *The Executioner's Song* exemplify his commitment to expanding the genre of the novel. Mailer was never shy about his commitment to the novel. In mid-career he referred to his struggles with writing the Great American Novel as the most significant failure of his writing career. At about the same time he was equating his writing to experimental novelists such as Burroughs, Vonnegut, Thompson, and Pynchon. Like these fellow experimentalists, Mailer moved farther and farther away from the third person, semi-omniscient telling of his first novel.

The act of making a text became, as with *An American Dream*, a struggle to control the writing of a text while facing a contextual world that made no sense. Heteroglossia that connected text and context drawn from situations surrounding the novelist came to exist in the modern period within arguments between formalist and dialogic approaches. Post-modern, experimental novelists, however committed to innovation, were often in the role of autonomous "authors" who controlled rather than managed their texts. Following in the dialogic tradition, Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*, published much later in his career (1979-80), developed out of his willingness to work with the talented photographer and media specialist Lawrence Schiller in mining the enormous amount of personal, cultural, and legal and professional material related to Gary Gilmore's story. The research required was diverse and weighty; the result of this effort was more than factual accuracy. It was Mailer's way of finding the heteroglossia, the connecting links, between fact and understanding. Many of Mailer's novels follow in this research-based tradition, where careful research combines with the tradition of narrative experimentation. His renunciation of what he thought was a simplistic distinction between fiction and non-fiction can be seen as part of Mailer's commitment to interrelating text and context. The novel grows out of a tradition all its own.

Another suggestion of Mailer's commitment to broad contextual representation is the "true life novel" that effectively created in readers the feeling of "being there." Jeffrey Severs, in an interview with Larry Schiller, reports that Schiller indicated that he had created approximately 1500 transcribed interviews in preparation for potential film and movie versions of the Gilmore story. Mormon history and culture, the working class in Utah, the interworkings of the Utah legal system, the volumes of notes on the lives of Gary Gilmore and other major characters—all these surround the story with a journalistic atmosphere based on fact. Mailer and Schiller create an enormous accumulation of heteroglossia, which they transform into the narrative structure of the novel. Text and context evolve out of cultural and social heteroglossia produced by the authors' research as much they do out of the inherited traditional forms of the novel or the imaginations of authors. Mailer and Schiller transformed and managed this accumulation of researched detail into an 800-page novel that draws its power from careful and lengthy research.

One could argue that an author's creative role within the composing

process is to fashion, collect, and re-shape the organic genre of the novel. In this process, the "author" works creatively to fashion heteroglossia into a coherent text. The "finished" text remains intact for a finite period. Then it becomes part of the larger genre where it is changed as it is absorbed by the evolving novel genre. Textual coherence is also subjected to heteroglossia; during this shaping the author creates a text out of the materials of genre. Bakhtin uses the term "scene" to explain connections between heteroglossia and recurring parts of text. Images, themes, and recurring patterns of heteroglossia link together to create clusters of meaning that are created out of textual heteroglossia. A quick look at a passage describing Gilmore's love affair with Nicole shortly before his scheduled execution illustrates Mailer's use of the embedded narrative (Mailer 401). This passage weaves together elements of Gilmore's language and personality with his interactions with Nicole, who is attempting to sell her eyes to raise money to pay for a "big lawyer" (Mailer 401). This partially satiric reference to one lawyer combines with numerous references spread through the text to other lawyers. Readers are left with an expanded image of the legal profession. Connected to these primary narrative voices are several subordinate references. One focuses on the character of Phil Hansen, a "big lawyer" who fails to show up for a meeting with Nicole. In the process we learn that Hansen has "even got a guy off who shot a Sheriff in front of another Sheriff" (Mailer 489).

Still another representative voice appears when Gary continues his conversation with his cell mate Gibbs. Gibbs, promising "to pull no punches with Gary," warns him of Hansen's well-known "yearn for attractive ladies" (Mailer 401-402). Gibbs' character speaks the language of the working class and prisons. This portrayal of Gibbs and other scenes and characters establishes the novel's treatment of social class.

A third secondary voice enters this narrative passage in the form of a story told by Lawyer Hansen. Hansen recalls that "the last man executed in Utah was named Rogers" (Mailer 402). Hansen indicates that he had met with Rogers and arranged to defend him, but he had failed to get back in touch with Rogers who was then executed without Hansen's help. Hansen uses this story to convince Nicole of his commitment to defend those, like Gary, who were unable to pay lawyer's fees. This example also serves as another reference to lawyers as a professional class and to Nicole as an impoverished and exploited member of the working class; it also raises the larger question of gender.

The embedding of primary and secondary voices enables Mailer to col-

lapse text and context, to ensure that the iconography of popular culture America is brought smoothly into the narrative. Nicole's naïve search for a Big Shot lawyer who would also be honest; the execution that occurs because Phil Hansen fails to show up at a meeting with a client who is then executed become in the novel heteroglossia linking text and context. Gibbs, a cellmate of Gary's, connects Gary with the working class world with whom he consistently struggled. Gibb's down to earth honesty brings to the reader's mind a universe of repressed working class individuals which serves as yet another connection with the contextual world. It is not important to simply count up the number of such contextual/textual connections. It is important to realize, however, that these connections bring the cultural and professional world into the story. The result is a dialogic relationship that establishes context and genre as co-creators of the story.

There are times when Mailer creates what Bakhtin would term a "scene" to broaden the reader's perspective on social class. One example of this effort to draw more complex and interrelated links between literary elements and cultural groups were the little stories or vignettes that Mailer used to create integrated perspectives on working class characters. These vignettes can be equated with Bakhtin's use of the concept of "scenes," which in *Executioner's Song* were focused on working class individuals who used the dialogue and behavior of their families to illustrate the interdependency of character and class. They provide an integrated perspective on Gary's character. The result is a refracted and complex understanding than can be captured through character alone. Scenes also create a dramatic sense of the complexities that tie together working class social groups.

Applications of these concepts to *The Executioner's Song* are not difficult to make. In fact, they exist just about on every page. This scenic view is demonstrated in Mailer's depiction of Gilmore's family and acquaintances—Bessie, Grace, Mikal, Frank Sr. and Jr. More important than the facts of their relationships to Gary are the insights these characters provide readers into middle and working class societies of Oregon and Utah and the impact they had on Gilmore's character. The insights are detailed, psychological portraits; they help make context as much a part of the meaning of the story as any formal quality of the novel. The social dimension of *The Executioner's Song* also expands through Mailer's use of vignettes that taken together provide an added resonance to the meaning of the novel. The following passages from the novel illustrate the advantages of combining vignettes with

representations of character. The first passage focuses on Grace McGinnis, a close friend of Gilmore's mother and a high school English teacher in the Utah town in which he grew up:

> 'I am a coward,' said Grace to herself, 'I am a devout coward' [for not calling Bessie when she learned of Gary's arrest] . . . and [she] never met him, but known to her by each and every one of Bessie's stories, and Bessie's sons, Frank Jr., who never said a word, and Gaylen, who had almost died in Grace's car, and Mikal and Gary. A feeling of love and misery, and anger hot as bile . . . came flooding down. (Mailer 456)

This realistic vignette brings Grace's voice directly into the novel. Her words and opinions define her class; her memories of other relatives and Gary illustrate her relations with her family. Grace, a minor character to begin with, becomes in the narrative another way of simultaneously relating the story with its broader context. Characters in the story itself, members of this extended family, live their separate and painful lives. Individuals and the classes are interdependent. It also introduces readers to many of Gilmore's positive and negative traits; he is both the tough charismatic anti-hero and the brutal and unfeeling exploiter of others. The novel's heteroglossic features, those linguistic pieces of words, perspectives, and silences, combine to form scenes that synthesize the text and the larger world.

Several additional vignettes reinforce the relationship between Bakhtin's dialogic perspective and *The Executioner's Song*. A passage from the chapter entitled "the slammer" serves as one example.

> All at once the animal turned (a sheep). Frank got his foot caught in the rope, fell, and the sheep began to drag him. That sheep laid a slide of green diarrhea, while Frank was pulled across the lawn, the sidewalk, and the gravel in the shoulder of the road. Before they got Frank up, he had one sore bottom. 'Look at me,' he said, brushing himself, 'grass all over.'
>
> 'Frank,' Bessie said, 'It isn't grass.' (464)

Here you find dialogue and language associated with the rough humor of the working class. These elements indirectly engage readers on two levels. First,

there is Bessie's language as she describes a vignette drawn from her family's past; second, it establishes a connection between Gilmore's working class background and the influence of that background. We also see Gary's character in a different light when he is portrayed against the background of this lower class beginning. Again, Mailer's fusion of culture, context, and character in passages like the above is in line with the evolution of the novel.

From the humor connected with Bessie's story Mailer moves to another moment where a more frantic and quietly tragic episode (or scene) occurs:

> Then one night, close after midnight, Janet called Grace to say that Gaylen was very ill, and had no money for a cab. Should she drive them over to the Milwaukie Hospital? Grace did, but Gaylen could not get admitted. He had neither a welfare card nor a doctor.
>
> On the hospital's suggestion, they went on to Oregon City. There, Gaylen was told the same thing again. It was now two in the morning. The next hospital said no. Grace said she would sign for his treatment, whatever the cost, but they said he needed a doctor to admit him. Grace thought: this boy is going to die in the back seat of my car (470).

Here the tragic is juxtaposed with the comic. Mailer broadens the novel's scope to include first-hand accounts of the impending tragedies that face those who live at the margins.

In 2007, Larry Schiller referred to the "cultural panorama" that he had envisioned and Mailer had followed up on in creating the novel (Severs 90). The vignettes described above come together to create a cultural foundation upon which the entire novel is built. But these vignettes, even when considered together, simply suggest the complexity of Mailer's "cultural panoramas." His reach goes much further. Consider as well the heteroglossic detail that enables Mailer to bring to life the legal and penal systems, the culture of the prison, the journalistic world of investigative and professional journalism, and the individuals who populate these sub-cultures. Another potentially rich perspective, one that is potentially more dialogic than those focused on the novelist, might focus on the way that cultures write novels. This perspective would lead to questions focused on genre and culture as the true authors of novels. Mailer's assimilative talents have made him a

leader among those modern novelists whose "big novels" embrace genre history and wide ranges of contemporary culture.

Mailer and Schiller combined talents to create a massive dialogic novel. Present conditions, historical implications, and literary realism are all together within a dialogic space. In creating *Executioner's Song* they did not return readers to Joycean isolation. They participated instead in an interconnected world where the execution functioned as a dramatic center pulling together all the elements of text and context. Seen from this perspective serious novelists would become managers of information as well as authors in the traditional sense. They would take on the more intellectual and, perhaps, less creative roles of astute perceivers of the external world and essential craftsmen of the written word. Genius and creativity would share the spotlight with the broader generic perspective of the dialogic imagination. As Bakhtin puts it: "It might . . . seem that the very word 'language' loses all meaning . . . for apparently there is no single plane on which all these 'languages' might be juxtaposed with one other" (291).

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