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The Silence of the Wives:
Bakhtin's Monologism and Ezra 7–10*

CHRISTOPHER B. HAYS

Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 N. Oakland Ave., Pasadena, CA 91182, USA

Abstract

This article examines an understudied aspect of Bakhtin's literary theory, monologism, and then brings the observations to bear on the account of the sending away of Israel's foreign wives in Ezra 7–10. Bakhtin's ethical interests make his work a promising lens through which to view this troubling text. It allows a reader to describe the diversity of narrative techniques used to characterize Ezra and his mission while still recognizing the underlying unity of the text's message. In fact, the multiplicity of voices in the text may serve to mask its monologic effect. However, these chapters in Ezra may also be read within the context of a canon, which does comprise polyphony, undercutting Ezra's message.

Keywords: Ezra 1–7, Mikhail Bakhtin, literary theory, feminist hermeneutics, dialogism.

Meir Sternberg memorably argued that a biblical author may choose to 'dance in chains' rather than 'load the dice for or against [a] problematic character or cause'.[1] But what about cases where the narrator or implied author *does* 'load the dice' in favor of a single point of view, where conflicting viewpoints are silenced? Can one also perceive literary artistry in those texts in which a single voice is clearly discerned by almost every reader?

Another way of saying that a text speaks with a single voice is to call it *monologic*, a term that will sound at least faintly familiar to biblical scholars conversant with literary theory. Monologism is more often honored in the breach, however, since books and articles now abound about polyphony and dialogism in the Bible; scholars have found Mikhail Bakhtin's theories useful for analyzing scripture's multiple voices, whether they are due to the artistry of a single author, the work of redactors, or the nature of the canon itself. It is true that Bakhtin particularly valorized polyphonic texts, but he was also interested in monologic texts and readings. Indeed, he saw the latter as far more common. In departments of literature over the past decade or so, monologism has been taken up in relation to the likes of Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Chaucer and Maria Tsvetaeva (to name only a few).[2] In biblical studies, the concept has had something of a presence in biblical theology,[3] but it has not been applied in a detailed way to the literary study of specific biblical texts.

Although the Bible as a whole may be polyphonic, it seems to me that biblical scholars' use of Bakhtin's theory ought to be extended to account for the genuine monologism of certain *parts* of the Bible; for example,

1.   Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 493-94.

2.   Gabrielle McIntire, 'Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads *The Waves*', *Narrative* 13 (2005), pp. 29-45; Cedric Watts, 'Bakhtin's Monologism and the Endings of *Crime and Punishment* and *Lord Jim*', *Conradian* 25 (2000), pp. 15-30; Thomas J. Farrell, 'The Chronotopes of Monology in Chaucer's Clerk's Tale', in Thomas J. Farrell (ed.), *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), pp. 141-57. Catherine Ciepiela, 'Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva's "The Pied Piper" ', *Slavic Review: American Quarterly of Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies* 53 (1994), pp. 1010-24.

3.   I think especially of Dennis T. Olson's 'Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin', *BibInt* 6 (1998), pp. 162-80. Note also Chris A.M. Hermans, 'Ultimate Meaning as Silence: The Monologic and Polyphonic Author-God in Religious Communication', in *idem*, *Social Constructionism and Theology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), pp. 113-45.

the story of Ezra's mission to Jerusalem in Ezra 7–10.[4] My essential argument is that reading Ezra as a monologic text allows one simultaneously to appreciate its complex literary artistry *and* to maintain an awareness of its ideological force and the ethical issues that it raises. Further along, I will adduce other readings of Ezra by Tamara Eskenazi and by Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn to show how easy it is to lose track of either its complexity or its unity. The initial question, if I may paraphrase David J.A. Clines, is this: *Why is there a book of Ezra, and what does it do to you if you read it?*[5] However, a study of the reasons for Ezra's literary artistry presses towards its historical location, and the way in which the book advocates monologically for the banishment of women presses toward ethical and theological reflection. And so each of these matters will be taken up in turn.

Newer literary readings of the Hebrew Bible have often shaded into ideological or ethical critique.[6] This trend suits Bakhtin's writings, since, for him, literature, ideology and ethics were never separated by much; they were bound up together in the way that he wrote, and in the way that he read. As Julia Kristeva wrote, 'Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them'.[7] Bakhtin indeed inserted himself into the fabric of his time; for example, his biographers note the ways in which his theories subtly undercut the sometimes oppressive Russian governments under which he lived.[8] Bakhtin was deeply

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4. These limits are largely for manageability. My analysis might profitably be extended to larger portions of Ezra, or even of the secondary history.

5. David J.A. Clines, 'Why is there a Book of Job, and What Does it Do to You if You Read it?', and 'Why is there a Song of Songs, and What Does it Do to You if You Read it?', in *idem*, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 205; Gender, Culture, Theory, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 94-144.

6. F.W. Dobbs-Allsop, 'Rethinking Historical Criticism', *BibInt* 7 (1999), pp. 235-71 (237, 254-59).

7. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 64-65. Bakhtin wrote of Rabelais' *Pantragruel* that 'the entire novel, from beginning to end, grew out of the very depths of the life of that time, a life in which Rabelais himself was a participant or an interested witness' (*Rabelais and his World* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984], p. 437). Bakhtin went on to comment on the way that Rabelais' freedom of laughter 'was raised to a higher level of ideological consciousness' and did battle with dogmatism.

8. See, for example, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 305; also Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*: *Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 447-48.

interested in the ways in which literature affects one's epistemology and ethics in the world beyond the page. As he says, the principles of monologism 'go far beyond the boundaries of artistic creativity; they are the principles behind the entire ideological culture of recent times'.[9]

In Bakhtin's view, ideological conflicts take place in history as a clash between centrifugal and centripetal forces: forces that pull apart systems of meaning, and forces that strive to hold them together. These forces operate most fundamentally at the level of language itself.[10] He also saw these forces at work in literary compositions, as exemplified by certain genres. As Michael Holquist observed of Bakhtin's theory: 'The rulers and the high poetic genres of any era exercise a centripetal—a homogenizing and hierarchizing—influence; the centrifugal (decrowning, dispersing) forces of the clown, mimic and rogue create alternative "degraded" genres down below'.[11] These forces, in his view, are in tension throughout history, with neither one ever having the upper hand in a final way.

If Bakhtin is right to perceive this constant tension of centrifugal and centripetal forces not only in language but in ideology as expressed in literature and culture, then Ezra in an excellent place to study it. The author of Ezra[12] perceived his people to be threatened—*de-centered*—by social, religious, economic, and even romantic forces, and he worked to *re-center* Israel's ideological world through the centripetal force of monologism. Bakhtin's theory, because it is sensitive both to literature

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9.   Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 80.

10.   '[T]he centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a "unitary language", operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word…but also…into languages that are socio-ideological… Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.' Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. M. Holquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 272-73.

11.   Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 425.

12.   Here, as elsewhere, I use 'author' as shorthand for the compiler(s) or editor(s) who are responsible for the text in the form that we read it. It is not intended to gloss over the complexity of determining the mechanisms of the book's production. Still, as I discuss further below, I believe the pericope under discussion has sufficient self-coherency to create the sense of an implied author.

and to ideology, is well adapted to this purpose. It allows one to perceive and assess the work that the text does. It even allows one to appreciate the story's narrative art.

Ezra: The Many and the One

Nearly all of the narrative in Ezra 7–10 in some way serves to character-ize Ezra. It is as if its author knows that Ezra's character and his mission and the apparent mission of the text are all intertwined; they stand or fall (convince or fail to do so) together. The central problem in describing the characterization of Ezra is to account for both its unity *and* its complex-ity. Its level of complexity is significant, because the devices employed within three chapters to portray Ezra are numerous: different characters' voices, different literary forms, even different languages.

Categories will help to enumerate the ways the redactor of Ezra uses narrative art to tell his story. I will draw on two sources for terminology: Jean-Louis Ska's *'Our Fathers Have Told Us': Introduction to the Analysis of the Hebrew Narratives*,[13] and Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.[14] The goal is not to reify Ska and Alter's categories, but rather to organize the diverse material.

The first way in which Ezra seems to be characterized is by his very *name* (Ska: 'naming'). The name *ʿezraʾ* admits of different interpreta-tions, but it is built from the Semitic root *ʿzr*, 'help'. It might be under-stood either simply as a noun ('The Helper') or as a shortened form of *Azarʾel* ('God helps') or *Azariah* ('Yahweh helps').[15] In any case, Ezra's name describes him positively from the first time the reader meets him.

Ezra first appears in ch. 7, and his entrance is *narrated in the third person* (Ska: 'direct description'). The first description that the reader gets of Ezra is terse and to the point: Ezra is 'a scribe expert in the law of Moses', 'the king gave him all that he asked', and 'the hand of the Lord his God was upon him' (7.6). This set of phrases packs a lot of important data into one verse: not only is Ezra competent and learned, but he has the favor of both the secular emperor and the divine Lord. This description functions as a *merismus*, investing Ezra with earthly and heavenly

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13. Jean Louis Ska, *'Our Fathers Have Told Us': Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Rome: Editrifice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990). Cf. esp. pp. 87-92.

14. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

15. Cf. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), p. 812.

authority. Ezra is also identified as a descendant of Zadok (7.2), father of the order of priests associated with Solomon and the rest of the royal Davidic line.

Ezra does not arrive in Jerusalem empty-handed. He brings with him a royal document, a letter from Artaxerxes that contains promises of riches for the temple, and the authority to reform the state. But it also says a lot about Ezra, affirming the former inference that he has every blessing:

> This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, the scribe, *a scholar in matters concerning the commandments of the LORD* and his statutes for Israel: 'Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Peace… Whatever the priest Ezra, *the scribe of the law of the God of heaven*, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence… And you, Ezra, *according to the God-given wisdom you possess*, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment.' (Ezra 7.11-12, 21, 25)

The last sentence reinforces the vast power that the text claims for Ezra: he has *carte blanche* to do whatever he wants—again, by the authority of both God and king. Here Ezra's wisdom is held up for special attention.

The letter is from the king, but it also, as an incorporated genre, breaks into the narrative seemingly as an outside voice. Even if it were not from the king, it would allow the author to point away from his own authority and draw on someone else's. Like a letter arriving in the midst of a dramatic play, it commands a different kind of attention from the viewer (/reader). Furthermore, it is even written in *a different language*, Aramaic, a further differentiation from the narrator's voice. Aramaic was of course the *lingua franca* for much of the empire in that period, and it may be that the letter reflects an actual historical document,[16] but in any case the decision to include it in this form represents a high degree of literary stylization. Whether or not the letter reflects genuine forms of imperial Persian edicts, the Aramaic gives it at least a patina of verisimilitude.

At the end of ch. 7 a major narrative shift occurs, because Ezra takes up the narration himself. This *first-person* section, the Ezra Memoir, runs through the end of ch. 9. Ezra begins by giving thanks, in a passage that takes the form of a *prayer*, which is both a distinct genre and corresponds

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16.   See the discussion below.

functionally to Alter's 'report of inward speech'. In his prayer, Ezra states that the LORD 'extended to me steadfast love before the king', and that 'the hand of the LORD my God was upon me' (7.28). In this last phrase he uses the same construction that the narrator did in 7.6 (על־יד אלהים). He goes on to say that he has brought with him a large number of 'leaders' and 'family heads' from Babylon (7.28–8.1). This suggests that not only is he approved of by God and emperor, but that he has authority and currency among his own people. He summons more priests so that he and the returning exiles can make burnt offerings to the Lord (8.35)—this act emphasizes their cultic rectitude.

Shortly thereafter, the central problem emerges for Ezra. After he has made the proper sacrifices, some of the men who have returned with him seek him out:

> The officials approached me and said, 'The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands or their abominations—the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and the officials and leaders have been first in this faithlessness'. When I heard this, I tore my garment and my robe, and tore hair out of my head and beard, and sat desolated. (Ezra 9.1-3)

This section, which is the crux of the narrative, includes a report of *actions* (Alter) and extends the first-person narration, but it also introduces what Ska calls 'interior monologue'. That Ezra is upset may be apparent from his actions, but the word 'desolated' gives insight into his thoughts. Why would he be so upset? This offers a further glimpse into his characterization: in the Mosaic law,[17] Deut. 7.3 forbids intermarrying with the peoples of the land because of the danger that it will lead to the worship of other gods. Ezra's distress is therefore aligned with the law of Moses, which he has brought with him, and which is to be the standard for the people.[18]

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17. Many critics think that Neh. 8, which tells of Ezra's reading of the law to the people, was originally between chs. 8 and 9 of Ezra rather than in its present location. If it were replaced here, then the incorporated genre 'law' could also be included in the present accounting of literary features.

18. The identity of the Book of the Law that Ezra brings to Jerusalem is the subject of scholarly debate. It is sometimes been thought that it is in fact the Torah in essentially the form that we now have it. Other scholars prefer to date the final redaction of the Torah sometime later, positing that Ezra brought only some particular portion of the law codes

Having heard this news from the officials, Ezra prays again, and this time his prayer functions in a different way: the first time it supplied information primarily about Ezra himself; this time it serves to refract the voice of God (Ska: 'dramatization of inner life'[19]):

> At the evening sacrifice I rose from my self-affliction, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the LORD my God, and said, 'O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been deep in guilt. Because of our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to shame, as is now the case. But now *for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, who has left us a remnant*, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our bondage… After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, *shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not rage against us until you destroy us without remnant or survivor?* O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous, for we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this.' (Ezra 9.5-8, 12-15)

The prayer sets this current transgression within an historical narrative about God's interaction with Israel. A catalogue of all the ways in which this passage reflects the vocabulary and rhetoric of other parts of the Hebrew Bible would itself make for a lengthy article. Suffice it to note for now that there are deep resonances with the prophetic writings. The first italicized section above evokes a long prophetic tradition of the 'remnant' (פְּלֵיטָה) that is promised even in judgment (Joel 2.32; Obad. 17; cf. the more common שְׁאָר in Isa. 10.19-22; Jer. 23.3; Mic. 5.7-8, etc.). It reflects the promise that judgment will not be final, but that Israel will survive.

The second italicized section above echoes the warnings of the prophets before the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 44.4-8 provides a particularly close thematic parallel; note the common vocabulary: 'anger',

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preserved in the Pentateuch. For discussion, see H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), pp. xxi-xlvii.

19.   Ska remarks that often one character is brought out to 'dramatize the inner state of another' (*'Our Fathers Have Told Us'*, p. 90). Here Ezra and God each dramatize the other's inner state.

'abomination', 'peoples/nations', 'without a remnant'). Although this is Ezra's prayer, it already anticipates the answer of God, because Ezra *supplies* God's answer. Therefore, God is understood to agree with Ezra's first reaction.[20] In this passage, then, the author of Ezra channels two authoritative voices from Israel's traditions: (1) the voices of the prophets;[21] and thus, by proxy, (2) the voice of YHWH himself.

Some of the modes of speech that I have mentioned so far are relatively subtle; they relate to genre, or inferences from details. As the story builds to its climax, however, the support for Ezra begins to come in much more explicit forms. While Ezra prays, a great group of people gather around him, and th*e father of one of the households* (Ska: 'agent') stands up and says,

> We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. (10.2-3)

With this speech, a non-priestly representative of the people has affirmed everything that the rest of the voices have been saying: that Ezra's view represents both the ancient law and the immediate will of God, and that the women must be sent away. Notably, he invokes the word 'covenant' for the only time in the book—the suggestion that this agreement will represent a new covenant is a marker of a momentous event in the life of the people. The word is also a concise re-statement of the theme around which Ezra's prayer revolved: the keeping and breaking of the covenant.

At this moment, too, the narration has shifted from Ezra back to a third-person narrator. This time it is more clear that it is an *omniscient narrator*. When Ezra spends the night fasting, the reader is told that it is because 'he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles' (10.6). The use of the omniscient narrator has the effect of affirming that, objectively, Ezra is not just putting on a show of piety. Rather, he is genuinely upset about the people's transgression.

20. Tamara Eskenazi portrays Ezra as a thoroughly gentle figure who 'does not threaten with penalties', but this passage undercuts that image. He does not take the task of punishment upon himself, but he certainly threatens it. See Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra–Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 139.

21. This does not imply an argument about the composition, redaction, or availability of the prophetic books cited. Instead I assume, minimally, that both those books and this passage in Ezra drew on the same traditions of prophetic rhetoric.

Even the *weather* seems to cast judgment on the people: as the people wait outside the temple, they are trembling, not just because of the gravity of the matter, but 'because of the heavy rain' (10.9). If this is not intended as a direct sign of God's displeasure, it is at least intended to intensify the pathos of the situation: the Bible does not tend to report weather conditions idly.[22]

Finally, in the book's climactic scene, Ezra emerges and announces to the people that they have trespassed and must confess to God and dismiss their foreign wives, and *all the people* speak as one (Ska: 'chorus')—'Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said"' (Ezra 10.12)—an echo of the covenant ceremonies of Sinai (Exod. 24.3) and Shechem (Josh. 24.16-28).[23] The rhetorical effect of this universal endorsement is obvious enough. Interestingly, whereas at Sinai the people promised to follow 'all the words that the LORD has spoken', here the promise is to keep the commandments of *Ezra*—representing his highest exaltation yet! Ezra is not only God's trustworthy representative, but for this moment, for a sensitive reader or hearer, he is elevated to the status of lawgiver—which is traditionally the place of God. At the very least, he is represented as a new Moses.

All this convergent narrative diversity could cause the reader to overlook the voices that are *not* heard: those of the women who are sent away. To say that they have no voice does not put it strongly enough: in fact, they are not really characters at all. They are nameless, unlike their husbands, and we see neither their reaction nor their departure. Hebraic narrative is characteristically laconic,[24] but not to this extreme. For example, the text's utter erasure of these women stands in stark contrast to the story of Hagar's banishment in Genesis 21. However tragic Hagar's plight is, still she is visible; she has a voice, and she has advocates. God's command that she be sent away is 'evil in Abraham's eyes'

22.   Baruch Halpern suggests that rainstorms may also be miraculous signs of God's will in the Deuteronomistic History (1 Sam. 12.18; 1 Kgs 18). See Halpern, *The First Historians* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p. 246.

23.   We note also the way in which 'all the people gathered as one man' and listened to the reading of the book of the Torah in Neh. 8.1-3. The presentation of 'all the people' as unified would seem to be a major concern of Ezra–Nehemiah in general, not unlike the opening of the U.S. Constitution: 'We the people of the United States of America…'

24.   Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representations of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 3-23; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 114-30.

(21.11), and the text provides a pathetic departure scene in which Abraham provides food and water for Hagar. She wanders off into the desert wilderness to die, but God takes note of her, and provides for her and the boy. By contrast, the book of Ezra shows no interest at all in the excluded women. The silencing of the excluded is as much a narrative device as the exhaustive representation of the voices that affirm the exclusion. The fate of the wives is a remarkably clear instantiation of Bakhtin's observation that the ideology of a monologic work 'inevitably transforms the represented world into a *voiceless object of [its] deduction*'.[25] In the great chorus of voices in the text, the one voice apparently drowned out is the one most likely to object. Thus, surprisingly, all this variety only masks an underlying unity of perspective.

Bakhtin's Monologism

That conclusion is accommodated by Bakhtin's view that a wide variety of artistic flourishes need not create polyphony. 'Monologic works may convey the author's position in various ways', wrote Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, Bakhtin's biographers. 'Sometimes a given character may express it; at other times, the author's truth may be dispersed through a variety of characters',[26] but it is never anything other than the author's unitary truth. With this in mind, no matter how many different voices speak in a text, the reader must ask whether or not they enter into the 'authentic life' of dialogism.[27] Are their ideas genuinely challenged? Are the voices 'furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes in speech subjects and dialogic overtones'?[28] No, they are not. Instead, the text fits Bakhtin's portrait of the monologic work: the authorial viewpoint becomes 'the principle for visualizing and representing the world', as the redactor chooses and unifies the material so as to give it an 'ideological single-toned quality'. The same viewpoint receives 'direct expression in the ideological position of the main hero', so that it becomes for the reader the only available deduction to draw from the represented material.[29]

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25. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 83.
26. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 238.
27. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 185.
28. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (trans. V. McGhee; ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 93.
29. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pp. 82-83.

Bakhtin defines monologism in various ways. A monologically understood world is 'an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness'[30] reducing complexity 'to a single ideological denominator'.[31] In monologic discourse,

> Each word must express the poet's meaning directly and without mediation; there must be no distance between the poet and his word. The meaning must emerge from language as a single, intentional whole… Everything that enters the work must immerse itself in Lethe, and forget its previous life in any other contexts. To achieve this, the poet strips the word of others' intentions, he uses only such words and forms (and only in such a way) that they lose their link with concrete intentional levels of language.[32]

In more concrete literary terms, the author's 'aggressive self-assertion'[33] means that the characters are not 'a plurality of equally-valid consciousnesses, each with its own world',[34] but instead 'become the mouthpiece' for the author's voice.[35] To boil this down to a single sentence: monologic discourse is discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation.

Bakhtin also defines monologism by what it is *not*; it can be seen as the photographic negative or mirror-image both of polyphony and of dialogism. Because monologism has this sort of shadow existence, it may be useful to describe briefly these two more familiar concepts. For Bakhtin, the novels of Dostoevsky are the exemplars of polyphony. He saw in them '*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*'.[36] In the monologic text, only one consciousness is truly expressed.

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30.   Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 9.
31.   Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 17.
32.   Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 297. The term Bakhtin uses in this instance is 'poetic discourse'. Rightly or wrongly, in this case he treats poetry as exemplifying monologic discourse.
33.   Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 86
34.   Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 7.
35.   Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, p. 89. One may possibly object that it is not possible for an author to represent perspectives other than his own in a text—that whatever the author writes is necessarily of the author. For the purposes of the present study, it will have to suffice to say that this is obviously contrary to Bakhtin's very presuppositions (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Chapter 3).
36.   Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 6. Part of what Bakhtin admired so much in Dostoevsky was that he did not reduce the ideas in his novels to propositional statements, but allowed them to be embodied in whole, independent characters. He wrote

   The definition of dialogism is somewhat more complicated, because it may be stated at either the level of language or the level of truth. In linguistic terms, dialogism indicates one word with 'two meanings parceled out between two separate voices'.[37] Dialogism is the realization that '[e]verything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others'.[38] In dialogic interaction, words are freed from their dictionary definitions and take on 'authentic life'.[39] Those who recognize that the meanings of words are all, at some level, dialogized, think in a different way about truth claims. This paves the way for the ethical understanding of dialogism, because if one's own utterance is never absolute, but stands in relationship to other utterances, then truth can be contained only in the interaction *between* voices. This is what Bakhtin calls 'dialogic truth'. In a monologic work such as Ezra, the one utterance is (within the scope of the literary work) freed from relationship to other truth claims. Just as in the realm of politics monarchy brings with it the danger of abuse, so does monologism in the realm of literature.

The Historical Background

Despite the text's freedom from conflicting viewpoints, the argument here is that the monologism of Ezra was necessitated precisely by the presence of competing perspectives in the historical period of the book's authorship. To hear the text's true force takes a more careful listening than it sometimes receives; it also requires some historical context. As Richard E. Palmer commented:

> To focus purely on the positivity of what a text explicitly says is to do an injustice to the hermeneutical task. It is necessary to go beyond the text to find what the text did not, and perhaps could not, say… [A literary text] must not be seen as some independent and discrete entity but as the response to a question, as something whose meaning stands within a certain horizon of

that, for Dostoevsky, 'the ultimate indivisible unit is not the assertion, but rather the integral point of view, the integral position of a personality… Dostoevsky—to speak paradoxically—thought not in thoughts, but in points of view, consciousnesses, voices' (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 93). The novel was where this polyphony was developed and allowed to breathe freely.

   37. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 328.
   38. Michael Holquist, 'Dialogism', in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 426.
   39. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 185.

> thinking. Thus to interpret the work means to step into the question horizon within which the text moves. But this means also that the interpreter moves into a horizon within which other answers are possible.[40]

In the case of Ezra, understanding the historical context means stepping into the 'question horizon' of the text, so that the text can be understood as one possible answer among others. In a sense, historical study is in this case an attempt to reconstruct the dialogic, polyphonic nature of reality that is obscured in the biblical text. The fact that the complexity of historical reality is not reflected in Ezra demonstrates that the text participates in what Frederick Jameson called 'containment strategies'—it seeks coherence by minimizing ideological conflict.[41] What follows, then, is not a historical reconstruction for its own sake, but an attempt to survey the ideological conflicts that characterized the Persian period in Judah.

The challenges of reconstructing the history of the Persian period in Judah are well known to biblical scholars.[42] The nature of the Judean restoration and the nature of postexilic Judah are deeply contested, as is the literary history of the books that describe those events. The critical issues are well known: How much of the existing books is from the pen of the eponymous leaders? If the redaction or authorship is later, to what extent did the author rely on primary documents? In the absence of extrabiblical records, the literary issues lead inevitably to historical issues: How large was the group of returnees or the province's whole population? (The wide variance of the estimates itself calls into question whether a viable method exists.[43]) What was the structure of the Persian

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40. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

41. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Routledge Classics; London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 52-56; cf. also Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 102.

42. See Peter R. Ackroyd, 'Problems in the Handling of Biblical and Related Sources in the Achaemenid Period', in A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (eds.), *Achaemenid History*. III. *Method and Theory: Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1988), pp. 33-54; also H.G.M. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* (FAT, 38; Tübingen: Mohr–Siebeck, 2004), pp. 3-11.

43. See, for example, the discussion by Kent H. Richards in 'Reshaping Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah Interpretation', in James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent H. Richards (eds.), *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 211-24.

Empire's governance of Palestine? What was the sociological nature of the Jewish community? To the scholar of the Persian period, the conversations ensuing from these questions will be quite familiar.

Despite the pitfalls, it is impossible to proceed *without* historical assumptions; therefore I offer this background with the usual caveats regarding the paucity and difficulty of the sources. If it leans heavily on the biblical sources, it does not do so naively.[44] 'In the absence of any other viewpoint', wrote Pierre Briant, 'every attempt to understand the intentions and objectives of Cyrus's policy toward the Jewish community must be based on the Jewish literature'.[45] And despite numerous cautions and reservations, Briant is relatively sanguine about the historical value of Ezra and Nehemiah. Concurs H.G.M. Williamson, 'the more we learn about the system of Persian rule, the more the objections of an earlier generation of scholars to the substantial authenticity of the accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah may be seen to have been unwarranted'.[46] In any case, the difficulties are not crippling to the project at hand, since what is most important for our purposes is to recognize that, any way that it is reconstructed, postexilic life in Judah was full of cultural and religious tensions for the Yahwistic community that gave rise to the corpus of postexilic biblical literature.

In 539 BCE, the edict of Cyrus returned the exiled Judahites to their land. In accordance with the imperial policy of tolerance (and even support) of indigenous religions whenever it was expedient, Cyrus further allowed that the destroyed temple of Jerusalem should be rebuilt. Although Briant hedges about detail and dates, he concludes that 'the

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44. Naturally the appropriation of Ezra (and Nehemiah) for historiography is not universally accepted. For a brief summary of the history of and reasons for a negative assessment of the book of Ezra's historical value, see Lester L. Grabbe, 'Biblical Historiography in the Persian Period: Or How the Jews Took Over the Empire', in Steven W. Holloway, *Orientalism, Assyriology, and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp. 400-13. In order to reduce the volume of footnotes here I will omit further bibliography, but see esp. nn. 12 and 15 on pp. 402-403 of Grabbe's article.

45. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), p. 46. Note also Ephraim Stern, who notes that the Persian period 'is one of the most obscure eras in Palestine and its history remains practically unknown', adds that the Bible is the chief source of this history (*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, II [New York: Doubleday, 2001], p. 360). See similar comments by Joseph Blenkinsopp in *Ezra–Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 60-69.

46. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History*, p. 231.

measures ascribed to Cyrus appear legitimate, as a whole'.[47] Ezra 6 further claims that Darius authorized the use of funds from his royal treasury, a practice seemingly in keeping with Achaemenid records from Persepolis.[48]

According to the biblical account, those who had been left in the region—the עם הארץ ('people of the land') who are repeatedly described as 'the poor' (2 Kgs 24.14; 25.12)—had claimed the property left behind by the exiles (Jer. 39.10), and there was significant conflict between them and the returnees. Specifically, the rebuilding of the temple became an issue of contention (Ezra 4.1-5): the returnees refused a role in it to the people of the land, and so the latter instigated interference with the building to the point that it stalled, and did not resume until two decades later. The tensions between the groups were exacerbated by the exclusion of the 'people of the land' from representative assemblies.

It may be surprising that those who returned to rebuild the temple with imperial backing would have had such a difficult time of it. It was partly a question of numbers; by any estimation, postexilic Judah was not as populous as before the Babylonian conquest. Why would Jews not have flocked back to the land in large numbers to re-establish the nation? Partly because rebuilding Judah, which had been ravaged by the successive depredations of the Assyrians and Babylonians, would have been no easy task. Based on archaeological data, Ephraim Stern wrote that 'when the Persian domination replaced the Babylonian one, the whole of Palestine, and in particular the regions of Judah and the coast, were in a difficult economic and social situation'.[49] Indeed, Persian rule may have made it more difficult still; the remission of temple staff from paying 'tribute, custom and toll' (Ezra 7.25) suggests that everyone else *was* indeed paying those taxes to support the empire.[50] It also may be that despite the Bible's mournful portrait of exile (e.g. Ps. 137), Babylon was not such a bad place to live. The issue of Judahites' living conditions in Babylon during the exile is a controversial one, but Babylon in general was far more prosperous than Palestine, and, irrigated by its rivers, more fertile as well. Furthermore, the Murashu Archive suggests that by the

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47. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, p. 47.
48. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History*, pp. 220-22.
49. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, p. 580.
50. This distinction is also in keeping with common Achaemenid practice. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History*, pp. 223-24.

time of Ezra, Jews in Babylon found themselves in a 'prosperous situation', and that '[t]here seem to have been no social or commercial barriers between Jews and Babylonians'.[51] It has been surmised on the basis of Jer. 29.5 that 'from a material point of view, the exiles' condition had improved… They could build houses and plant fruit trees.'[52] The exiles had felt the lure of the big city, while their own former city was a shadow of its former self.

I take it that Ezra's mission took place in 458, the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7.7).[53] The fifth century was not a peaceful time in the Persian province that incorporated Palestine; it was a time of uprisings against the empire on the part of Babylon, Greece, and Egypt, resulting in great military losses all around. Even a group of cities in central Palestine was destroyed or deserted during this time, due to an unknown conflict, an uprising or a war between provinces.[54]

New cultural tensions also would have characterized the period. The influence of Babylon must have been felt even by those who returned. It is a commonplace to note the impact of Mesopotamian culture, language and mythology on the Hebrew scriptures—and these were compiled by a group of priests and scribes usually thought to be jealousy nationalistic for Israel. The effects of foreign culture were vast, and those who returned would have returned changed. They brought back foreign customs—and foreign wives. New and foreign influences came not only from within the returning community, but also from without. André Lemaire's study of minor inscriptions from Palestine in the Persian period suggests a significant cultural and religious diversity owing to non-Mesopotamian sources: the encroaching worship of foreign gods such as the Edomite Qôs, the growing influence of the Hellenistic cults

51. Edwin M. Yamauchi, 'The Archaeological Background of Ezra', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980), pp. 195-211 (199). See also M.D. Coogan, 'Life in the Diaspora: Jews at Nippur in the Fifth Century B.C.', *BA* 37 (1974), pp. 6-12, and Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 296. For a contrasting view, see William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 139-64, and references there.

52. Shimon Bar-Efrat, 'Love of Zion: A Literary Interpretation of Psalm 137', in M. Cogan *et al*. (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 3-11 (5).

53. This date is, of course, the subject of controversy. Others hold to the seventh year of Artaxerxes II (398) or the 37th year of Artaxerxes I (428). See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, pp. xxi-xlvii.

54. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, p. 577.

of Zeus, Heracles, and Hermes; and even references to theretofore unknown deities.[55] Even within Yahwism, there may have been tensions between the interests of Torah and temple,[56] perhaps an early precursor of the Pharisee/Sadducee division of later times.

The political situation was no more stable than the religious situation. Persia did not allow Judah to return to its prior state of independence. But despite Persian rule, there was conflict within Judah about how the restored state ought to be structured. This debate over politics is preserved in the writings of the postexilic prophets. A notable example is Haggai, who pressed the governor Zerubbabel, a descendant of the former royal line, to try to re-establish Israel as an independent monarchy at a moment when the Persians seemed distracted and weakened (Hag. 2.20-23).[57] Zechariah, by contrast, used a poetic metaphor that seems to have advocated a diarchy in which a prince and a high priest shared power (Zech. 4.11-14).[58] Ezra's mission, however, seems to have been intended to strengthen Persia's position in Judah, and it came at a time of serious danger for the Persian empire: Artaxerxes had acceded to the throne amid significant intrigue just a few years earlier, and he immediately faced an uprising on the border with Egypt, just south of Judah. It was 'one of the gravest crises at the western end of the empire', so that the Persians' support of Israel 'could be interpreted as an attempt on the part of the central government to assure stability in an area which was…strategically crucial'.[59] In a similar fashion, nations today regularly give favors and concessions in wartime to allies of convenience. Palestine found itself again (as in the pre-exilic period) at a strategic crux in the ancient world.

All this is intended only to serve as background, and to emphasize the numerous historical, religious, and ideological considerations that crowded in on Ezra. Many of the same pressures would have been felt by later Judean scribes in the fourth century, if that is who recorded his

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55.   André Lemaire, 'Épigraphie et religion en Palestine à l'époque achéménide', *Transeuphratène* 22 (2001), pp. 97-113.

56.   Cf. Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 335-39.

57.   For discussion, see David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 96-106; also *idem*, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 12, 207.

58.   Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, pp. 229-36.

59.   Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, p. 65. Briant (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, p. 48) suggests a similar political motive in Cyrus' earlier kind treatment of the Judeans.

story and edited it into its present form. In either case, the text gives almost no hint that Ezra's decision should be a controversial one; it narrows the 'question horizon' of the text until there appears to be only one option for the Judahites.

Conclusion: 'Stubborn Unity'

Some prominent studies of Ezra seem one-sided, either reading into the text more ideological complexity than is there, or attributing the lack of ideological complexity to simplistic writing. These might be natural assumptions, but neither is the case.

As an example of the first extreme, Eskenazi's highly sympathetic reading of Ezra portrays him not only as the hero of the Ezra–Nehemiah scroll, but as a 'multidimensional character in the full sense of the term'. She continues: 'The shifts of perspective between first- and third-person reports depict [Ezra] from within and without, a complex mode of representation that defies "flat" stereotyping'.[60] However, the analysis here suggests that *despite* the variety of compositional techniques, Ezra's character is not really very complex; only the means of portraying him are. He is precisely stereotypical; one of the Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of 'stereotype' is 'a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type', and Ezra, as we have seen, conforms very closely to pre-existing models of Judean leadership, such as Moses and the prophets.

Eskenazi points to the 'dialogic nature of Ezra's leadership',[61] but she is basing her assessment on the portrait within the frame of the text and not on the text's own monologic exclusion of dialogue *about* Ezra. In this instance, she blurs the lines between the literary character Ezra and the author of Ezra; she notices the many voices within the frame of the text, but not the way in which the framer has reduced all of them to a single message. Whether or not the text gives us access to the historical Ezra's leadership methods, it certainly gives us access to an implied author, and it is this implied author whose motivations are most accessible. A reader ought to be suspicious of Eskenazi's conclusion anyway, since her best example of Ezra's dialogic leadership is that he accedes to the people's request for a little extra time to send away their wives because of logistical issues! How can a reading of Ezra–Nehemiah which

60. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, p. 187.
61. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, p. 141.

concludes that 'diversity is incorporated'[62] not raise eyebrows, when both books culminate precisely in the banishment of diversity from the community? Eskenazi's literary analysis is sensitive, but her conclusions about Ezra seem to ignore ethical problems. Caught up in the artistic complexity of the text, she risks becoming complicit in its silencing of the women.

On the other hand, Fewell and Gunn hear Ezra's ideological message loud and clear, but their literary analysis is simplistic. They use the term 'monologic' to describe Ezra, and they are correct to remark that the book's persuasive rhetoric 'minimizes tensions and ideological plurality' and is likely 'to elicit a narrower range of responses from the reader'.[63] However, they go on to say that narratives such as Ezra are 'character-ized by a premium on "telling" through extended monologues', as opposed to '"showing" through characters' actions and dialogue'. That telling-vs.-showing distinction is straight from an introductory fiction-writing course, but the reading presented here contradicts their assess-ment that applies neatly to Ezra. In fact, the author of Ezra has done a lot of both telling *and* showing.[64]

A more critical use of the idea of monologism helps the reader keep both literary and ethical sensitivities intact. It has already been noted that an author's monologic truth might be 'dispersed through a variety of characters'. Bakhtin himself makes this caveat a bit broader: he warns that

> '[a]ll these compositional devices for eliminating or weakening authorial discourse [i.e. monologism] at the level of composition do not in themselves tackle the essence of the problem; their underlying meaning can be profoundly different, depending on the tasks they perform.[65]

Indeed, the various compositional devices in Ezra—which might *seem* to de-center the authorial voice—actually function to *reinforce* it or protect it because they mask the book's monologism. All the many speakers, genres, and even languages give the uncritical reader the sense that a polyphonic story is being told, when in reality the book merely strikes

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62.   Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, p. 154. I am deliberately taking this remark slightly out of context.

63.   Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, 'Narrative, Hebrew', in *ABD*, IV, p. 1024.

64.   Gunn and Fewell do use the term 'monologic' in a casual sense, but without reference to the details of Bakhtin's theory.

65.   Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 57.

the same key of the piano over and over again. Or, a better metaphor: it strikes the same note on the synthesizer being sounded, while buttons are pressed to change the voices and effects. But whatever the instrument, a critical listener hears the same note. In sum, the one-note message is this: Ezra is faithful, capable, law-abiding, and invested with all the authority in heaven and on earth. This is intended to force the reader to conclude that his program *must* be just and correct.

Because of Bakhtin's concern to weed out false examples of dialogism, he addresses just such a case. He writes that if an author loses touch with heteroglossia and dialogization,

> he may, of course, create a work that compositionally and thematically will be similar to a novel, will be 'made' exactly as a novel is made, but he will not thereby have created a novel. The style will always give him away. We will recognize the naively self-confident or obtusely stubborn unity of a smooth, pure single-voiced language (perhaps accompanied by a primitive, artificial, worked-up double-voicedness).[66]

The 'stubborn unity of a smooth, pure, single-voiced language' is the unity of Ezra. For Bakhtin, this may result either from the failure of the author to create polyphony and dialogism, or from his intention to avoid it. In Ezra, one can be relatively sure that the effect was intentionally created; the author did not lose touch with heteroglossia, he banished it. Morson and Emerson have a nice metaphor for this phenomenon: in monologic discourse, they say, the author 'can speak alone, and does not require interaction with other consciousnesses and with other languages in order to say what he wants to say. He selects his own society—he *is* his own society—and then he "shuts the door".'[67] The author of Ezra indeed shuts the door—right after he ushers out the foreign wives. But in the process he also excludes the true, dialogic nature of reality.

As I suggested at the outset, much of the Bible is quite dialogic, its ideology multivalent and complex. Why should Ezra be different? One answer may lie in the timeline of its composition and canonization. The interim between its events and its canonization is a relatively small one in comparison to other texts in the Hebrew Bible: probably less than two hundred years. There was no 'breathing room' to allow old conflicts and interests to settle, in the way that there might have been, for example, in the case of histories of the Israelite monarchies. The same familial and priestly lines would still have been intact, and there was no new social

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66. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 327.
67. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 320.

upheaval remotely comparable to the Babylonian exile. Bakhtin comments at one point that double-voiced prose is language that has been 'weathered in [the] process of becoming',[68] and this seems especially true of the dialogic truth of the Bible. It is a truth that is often the result of actual, historical voices of writers, editors, and tradents competing with one another. If there is any reason that the book of Ezra does not show internal evidence of dialogism, it may be simply that it is less weathered than others.

Postscript: The Polyphony of the Canon

If one looks at the larger biblical corpus, Ezra's monologism is radically undermined. The polyvocality of scripture (or to put it another way, the fact that so many claims from scripture can be countered from elsewhere in scripture) practically guarantees that dialogue will continue in an unending volley of testimony and countertestimony. If Ezra's central claim is that foreign wives are to be sent away, then how is a later reader to assess the story told in Numbers 12, in which the LORD punishes Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses because he married a foreign woman? How will one account for the fact that without Ruth the Moabite, the grandmother of David (Ruth 4.21-22), Israel would never have had its paradigmatic king? How are Christian theologians to make sense of Ezra's call to a narrowly circumscribed identity when Paul has said that in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Gal. 3.28)?

I will not try to resolve these dissonant notes into a sweeter chord. But the distinctiveness of the various notes must be pointed out, so that the loud and clear voices such as Ezra's throw the others into sharper relief rather than drowning them out. To return to our Clines-ian question ('What does the book of Ezra do to you if you read it?'), one answer would be: something rather different than what the canon as a whole does.

68. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 326.