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SPECIAL ISSUE ON MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

GUEST EDITOR
Clive Thomson

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Bakhtin and Buber: Problems of Dialogic Imagination.

Nina Perlina 13

Abstract. Recent publications of biographical materials on Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrate that he was familiar with the writings of Martin Buber. The philosophical and aesthetic verbal expression of Buber's ideas within the time-spatial universe of Bakhtin's own awareness allows us to discuss this obvious biographical evidence in a wider cultural context. The central opposition of Buber's and Bakhtin's systems is the dialogic dichotomous pair: "Ich und Du" (I and Thou), or "myself and another." Bakhtin's dialogic imagination is rooted in the binaries of the subject-object relations which he initially formulated as "responsibility" and "addressivity," that is to say, as individual awareness and its responsiveness of life. The basic words of Bakhtin's philosophical aesthetics can be understood as the "relation to the other," and their semantics and terminological meaning are directly related to Martin Buber (his work, *Ich und Du*, 1923). In the 1930s-60s Bakhtin developed the concepts of responsibility and addressivity into his universal dialogic theory of speech-genres. His hierarchy of speech-genres was built in order to establish relations between different sub-genres of the novel (various types of poetic utterances) and different species of individual discourse. However, the entire edifice of this dialogic system remained unfinished, and several types of dialogic relations between individual pronouncements of the characters and individual novelistic genres were not discussed by him. Buber's ideas on the dialogue can be used as a clue to

one possible interpretation of the function of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses in different sub-genres of the novel (the novel of confession, the *Bildungsroman*, the autobiographical novel). In this article, Buber's philosophical cycle is used as an aid in reconstructing the integral whole of Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination," as this dialogic mode of thinking goes through his unfinished works: "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism," "Toward Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book." (NP)

Bakhtin's "Theory" of Genre.

Clive Thomson 29

Abstract. The originality of Bakhtin's fragmentary and partial theory of literary genre is underlined in this article. Bakhtin's reflexion on genre is very different from that of his Formalist contemporaries. Instead of proposing elaborate typologies or generic categories, Bakhtin more often devotes his attention to showing that a meaningful approach to the topic must be diachronic. From an epistemological point of view, the possibility of *exact* duplication or repetition of the same generic device from text to text is denied. Each text (or reading of a text) is a new performance in which generic material is reworked and re-presented. There are affinities, therefore, between the positions of Bakhtin and Fredric Jameson (in *The Political Unconscious*). Generic categories are useful only if they are seen as diagnostic tools which help us to better understand how texts enter into dialogic relations with each other. (CT)

Characters in Bakhtin's Theory.

Anthony Wall 41

Abstract. A common focus in many modern theories of literature is a reassessment of the traditional view of the character in a narrative text. The position that this article defends is that a revised conception is necessary for an understanding of the means by which dialogism is said to function in novelistic discourse. Revising the notion does not, however, involve discarding it outright as recent theories of the subject would have us do. Nor can we simply void it of all "psychological" content as suggested by many structuralist proposals. To retain Bakhtin's concept of the notion of character, we must understand the term "psychological" in the context of his early book on Freud. In artificially combining Bakhtin's isolated remarks on the literary character, we arrive at a view which postulates textualized voice-sources in the novel. In such a schema, maximum variability and freedom is afforded to each separate source. Yet we

must use the term “separate” with extreme caution, for in Bakhtin’s writings all those beings which we might wish to view as separate entities are in fact intricately intertwined and inseparable. Viewing something as absolutely separate implies knowing intimately all of its boundaries and possibilities. This is surely a capacity which Bakhtin would deny us when it comes to human figures in texts. (AW)

Bakhtin and Tolstoy.

Ann Shukman 57

Abstract. This article is a study of the way Bakhtin compared and contrasted Dostoevsky and Tolstoy throughout his career. Special attention is given to Bakhtin’s two “Prefaces” of 1929 and 1930 to *Resurrection* and to the dramas in the *Collected Literary Works* edition of Tolstoy. Bakhtin’s view of Tolstoy is not as narrow as is generally thought. Tolstoy is seen as one of many figures of European literature that make up Bakhtin’s literary consciousness. He serves as a point of contrast with Dostoevsky and is described as belonging to an older, more rigid, monologic tradition. Bakhtin’s prefaces to Tolstoy’s works are not just immanent stylistic analyses but can be seen as well as one of the moments when Bakhtin turns to a sociology of style in the wider sense of examining the social-economic conditions that engender style. The prefaces represent a foretaste of Bakhtin’s historical poetics of the 1930s. (CT)

Polyphonic Theory and Contemporary Literary Practices.

M.-Pierrette Malcuzyński 75

Abstract. This paper briefly explores some of the ways in which Mikhail Bakhtin reaffirms the principle of the non-identity yet inseparability of theory and practice in literary criticism. The lesson is one which stresses the need to disentangle the critical discourse from idealistic theoretical issues and engage in a materialist practice of criticism. If polyphonical dialogism (especially with respect to contemporary polyphony) is not to be confused with dialectics, then the most urgent and perhaps the most difficult task for the critic facing a polyphonic narrative is to negotiate the text in terms of the socio-historical actuality of the transformation which that text proposes. An analysis of D.M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel* illustrates the ideological problems that arise when the operative system of the polyphonical narrative structure is stretched to the limit—as is moreover the case with many contemporary novels. And if the critic is to engage in a form of praxis, then he has to re-dialecticize the political (unconscious?) consciousness, in short, to politicize and not merely theorize its anticipated actualization. (MPM)

Narrative Discourse as a Multi-Level System of Communication: Some Theoretical Proposals Concerning Bakhtin's Dialogic Principle.

Paul Thibault 89

Abstract. This article attempts to show that the dialogizing of narrative discourse is a way of de-naturalizing the fictional process and its associated textual activities by reconstituting the material interplay of voices (in Bakhtin's pioneering sense). It is this interplay which is suppressed by the convention of a single, univocal narrative position. This corresponds to Bakhtin's notion of monologic discourse, which implies an already given, objectified identity lying behind the text. Dialogic discourse restores to textual practice the material interplay of frequently opposing and contradictory semantic and ideological positions which actively constitute the formation of discourse. These voices which are constantly re-interpreted and transformed in dialogic discourse will help to show that the Subject is not external to discursive practices, but it is continually re-constituted and transformed within specific discursive formations. The second part of this article contains a detailed analysis of an excerpt from Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Ada*. Following this are a number of proposals or strategies for understanding the processes of dialogic interaction which take place across levels in the narrative text. (PT)

The Relevance of the Carnavalesque in the Québec Novel.

Maroussia Ahmed 119

Abstract. The Bakhtinian concept of space is topological rather than topographic, and encompasses the cosmic, the social and the corporeal; its function in the Québec novel consists in debasing the hierarchical verticality of Lent and of the "official feast." As Carnival is an anti-law, "law" in the Québec novel will be defined as the chronotope of the sacred space (the land or "terre" of Québec) in the genre known as the "novel of the land" ("le roman de la terre"). Until the Second World War, this chronotope transforms an Augustinian political view of the *civitas dei* into literary proselytism, via the ideology of agricultural messianism. Sanctification implies closure of space and of the text; the "outside" is debased, as is textual "difference," that is, carnivalesque writing as it appears, for example, in *La Scouine* by Albert Laberge or in *Marie Calumet* by Rodolphe Girard. During the 1940s, the "introspective novel" (Robert Charbonneau, Robert Elie, Robert Choquette) also connotes the "upper" euphorically and the "lower" dysphorically, but at this historical point as a function of the sanctification of the individual according to a Thomist hierarchy. The quest of the hero can

be seen as the ascent of a vertical ladder of time/space/society/values. The novel of the 1960s takes on a carnivalesque air: former sacred spaces are diminished in number and importance or are debased; new spaces appear where the body communicates with other bodies and the world. The space of knowledge is not God, but the land. Novels of this period (by M.C. Blais, R. Carrier, A. Hébert) are constructed around two paradigms according to a Manichean view of the world, and bear a great predictability, thus leading to a new set of “upside down” clichés. The carnivalesque multiple is completely realized in Hubert Aquin’s first two novels. Space ceases to bear meaning other than as a metaphor for horizontal kinetic writing. The text becomes the open space of a continuous game between narrator and reader. The importance given to the margin/marginality (the footnotes), the masquerade of characters and of polysemic words, the narrative games that deconstruct the medieval Aquinian world create the space of carnivalesque scriptural relativity. But Aquin also gives a political dimension to his carnivalesque writing: his position is that only a writing of chaos can correspond to a nation which is obsolete (“révolu”) and imprisoned in stasis while still aspiring to a revolution. The mediation between stasis and movement is the text which acts as a detonator or pharmakon in the mind of the reader. The study of the carnivalesque in the Québec novel leads us to the discovery of an impressive number of heroes/writers/pharmakos/witches, all having the same kinetic transformatory function which is accomplished by the same medium: the word. They point to a society in transition during the 1960s and 1970s. (MA)

Dialogic Imagination in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Robert Polzin 135

Abstract. One of the profoundest insights into the syntax of narrative is the complex system of relationships between reporting and reported speech worked out in programmatic form by Voloshinov-Bakhtin in a number of groundbreaking studies (for example, in English translation, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* by V.N. Voloshinov and *The Dialogic Imagination* by Bakhtin). Interesting literary insights into texts that have been studied and interpreted over centuries and even millennia now await the application by present-day scholars of Bakhtin’s theories. The Book of Deuteronomy offers a unique opportunity within the Bible of applying the reported/reporting speech approach of Bakhtin. The entire book of thirty-four chapters consists of a series of reported speeches of Moses framed with only about fifty-six verses by the reporting speech of the Deuteronomic narrator. The dynamic relationship of these two voices in the book provides one with a reading of Deuteronomy that significantly departs from the predominant scholarly view. (RP)

Bakhtin and Intergeneric Shift: The Case of Boris Godunov.

Caryl Emerson 145

Abstract. This essay draws on the historical and artistic image of Boris Godunov to illustrate Bakhtin's concept of "re-accentuation," or the transfer of literary images to new contexts. Russia of the 19th century was particularly well served by the Boris Tale. It inspired her first great popular historian, her greatest poet, and one of her greatest composers. Nikolai Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* (1816-29) ended with the Time of Troubles, and Karamzin's treatment of Boris Godunov became a model for biography in this new "romantic-national" type of history. Out of Karamzin's portrait Alexander Pushkin created his "romantic tragedy" *Boris Godunov* (1825), intended as a specifically national, Russian response to imported neoclassical norms in drama. Modest Mussorgsky adapted both Pushkin's and Karamzin's texts for the libretto to his greatest opera *Boris Godunov* (1869-74), which he offered as a national alternative to western operatic models, the first step toward a Russian "people's musical drama." In its three greatest expressions, the Boris Tale was thus a vehicle for generic innovation. Each treatment asserted a specifically Russian concept of genre in opposition to the European models then reigning in the three disciplines: German historiography, French drama, and Italian opera. Such innovative re-accentuations, or intergeneric "transpositions," are not easy to assess. They are vulnerable, as are translations, to charges of infidelity to earlier and more authoritative texts. This essay will argue, with Bakhtin's help, that the dialogue among these three texts is both calculated and complex; at the end, some suggestions are offered for reading cultural history through transposed or re-accentuated themes. (CE)

M. M. Bakhtin in Russian Culture of the Twentieth Century (Translated by Ann Shukman).

M.L. Gasparov 169

Abstract. This article by M.L. Gasparov was first published at Tartu in the Soviet Union in 1979 and has been translated and edited here with notes by Ann Shukman. Gasparov emphasizes four aspects of Bakhtin's thought: "his zeal for expropriating 'the other's word' "; "his zeal for dialogue"; "a nihilistic selection of values"; "the opposition of the novel to poetry." Ann Shukman's commentary places Gasparov's article in context. (CT)