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The (Re)discovery of Bakhtin in Anglophone Criticism

1 Strange encounters

In a clever and well-known sonnet, John Keats compared the reading of Chapman's translation of Homer to the European 'discovery' of the New World. "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816) describes Chapman's translation as geographical revelation, the opening of "one wide expanse" that "deep brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne". Upon reading the translation, the poem's speaker feels like an astronomer when "a new planet swims into his ken" or like the Spanish explorer Cortez and his crew, when, having crossed Central America, they stare into the Pacific and look at one another "with a wild surmise" (Keats 1905, 36). It's a beautifully executed simile that effectively renders the awe we experience when reading a strange but wonderful new text.

The simile is striking, and it will survive the fact that we no longer think of people like Cortez (or the actual explorer who stared at the Pacific, Balboa) as merely awestruck explorers. We think of them today as the advance guard of colonialism, who may well be awestruck at what they see, but who have interest in the landscape only in so far as they may profit from it and who are interested in the peoples who inhabit that land only so far as they can pass on useful knowledge – if the latter have their own point of view, this is a problem, not an opportunity for the explorer. For better or worse, when we encounter translations of foreign texts we often have a similar range of mixed motives and interests. Such motives and interests help explain the curious encounter between the Anglophone world and the work, original and translated, of M. M. Bakhtin.

The encounter itself has not been straightforward: for one thing, it has depended on a great many middle-men, mediators who made it possible for the once repressed Bakhtin to republish his one book (*Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* from 1929 [*Problems of Dostoevskii's Art*]) and publish some of his remaining work in the 1960s and 70s. There were, it's true, a few early scattered references to Bakhtin's 1929 book in English, probably inspired by Vladimir Seduro's glowing summary of it in a study of Russian Dostoevskii criticism in 1957 (Seduro 1957, 202–232). But it was the publication of the revised version of his Dostoevskii book in 1963 and of his book on Rabelais in 1965 that gained Bakhtin attention, first in the Soviet Union itself and then in the world beyond (Bakhtin 1963; Bakhtin 1965). Slavists began to cite Bakhtin as a major 'formalist' critic of Dostoevskii, and some

of them made efforts to extend the notion of the polyphonic novel to other writers, such as Solzhenitsyn (Koehler 1969; Krasnov 1980). The new interest in formalism itself, spurred by Victor Erlich's book (Erlich 1955) on the one hand, and the emergence of the Lotman-Uspenskii school on the other, drew attention to Bakhtin as a sort of formalist fellow-traveller. The approach was appreciative – Bakhtin was considered a significant, important writer – but at the same time muted, in the sense that he was considered just one contributor to an established school of Russian criticism. It seemed entirely appropriate, therefore, that an extract from Bakhtin's *Problemy poëtiki Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevskii's Poetics*) (as well as a Voloshinov excerpt) was included in Matejka and Pomorska's excellent collection of translations of Russian formalist articles (Matejka and Pomorska 1971). In this respect it's worth comparing Bakhtin's reception in North America and Britain to the interpretation he received in France, which depended on the offices of two Bulgarian émigrés, Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva. In Kristeva's eyes, it was Bakhtin's break with the project of formalism that made his work valuable and interesting: her preface to the French translation of the Dostoevskii book celebrated his work as "the ruin of a poetics" by which she meant the destruction of the formalist-structuralist concept of a closed linguistic system (Kristeva 1970).

The Dostoevskii book remained the concern of Slavists until 1973, when it was translated for Ardis Press (Bakhtin 1973); the Rabelais book followed an entirely different trajectory. A mere three years after its publication in Moscow it appeared in English translation for MIT Press (Bakhtin 1968). Unsurprisingly, its extravagant and unorthodox claims for medieval popular culture provoked sharp reactions: a famously dismissive review by Frances Yates (1969), genuine enthusiasm from scholars beginning to work out the details and method of social history. It became, for all intents and purposes, part of the academic literature on Rabelais, cited by Rabelais scholars, and a provocation in the field of social history, where it provided both methodology and inspiration for the new "history from below" (in, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis [1971] and Carlo Ginzburg [1980]). The preface to the Rabelais book, however, written by Krystyna Pomorska, continued in the earlier vein, describing his Dostoevskii book as belonging "to the second phase in the development of the Russian Formalist school, the structuralist phase" (Pomorska 1968, viii).

2 The Bakhtin canon is shaped

But while American and UK Slavists were carefully assimilating Bakhtin into a recognizable, if evolving tradition of Slavic formalist-structuralist criticism, his

champions in the Soviet Union were busy establishing as much distance as they could between him and that very same tradition. Sergei Bocharov and Vadim Kozhinov valiantly fought to have more of his work published in book form: in 1975 – the year of Bakhtin’s death – a collection of his essays on the novel from the 1930s and 1940s, and in 1979 a kind of miscellany, that threw together abandoned philosophical manuscripts from the 1920s, more work on the novel from the 1930s, essays on linguistics from the 1950s, and a series of philosophical notes from the 1970s, artfully arranged in two collections. These two books would, in combination with the existing Dostoevskii and Rabelais texts, eventually constitute the Bakhtin oeuvre for the Anglophone world. The editorial decisions that moulded them were therefore crucial. The 1975 collection *Voprosy literatury i èstetiki* (*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*) included two long essays on the novel, destined to be mainstays of Bakhtin’s critical influence (“Slovo v romane” [“Discourse in the Novel”] and the “chronotope” essay), two transcripts of lectures on the novel, and a fifth piece that seemed wholly out of place, a philosophical critique of formalism from 1924, which had hardly anything to say about the novel at all. The 1979 *Èstetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (*The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*) collection looks at first glance innocent enough: early philosophy, more material on the novel, and a mix of later work. But that later postwar material, varied as it might be, is unified by a consistent polemic with Soviet structuralism as represented by Vinogradov in the 1940s and Lotman later on.

At the time, this slant may have looked like a mere byproduct of the attempt to get as much Bakhtin out into the world as possible; in retrospect, we can appreciate how much effort went into selecting and shaping the material that appeared. One of the sharpest articulations of Bakhtin’s distance from structuralism in the collection was a 1959–1961 piece on the philosophy of language titled “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Other Human Sciences: A Work of Philosophical Analysis”, which systematically distinguished the object of scientific linguistics, language, from the object of the human sciences, the concrete and dialogical utterance. When this work was republished in 1996, we learned that it was in fact something of a composite: the editors had attached half the contents of one Bakhtin notebook, dedicated to the reworking of the Dostoevskii book, to the contents of a slightly earlier notebook, in order to create one ‘work’ defining Bakhtin’s position on language. Similarly, the two powerful collections of philosophical notes that concluded the 1979 book, “K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk” (“Towards a Methodology of the Human Sciences”) and the “Notes from 1970–71” turned out – this time when the work was republished in 2002 – to be editorial creations (probably the work of Kozhinov) that lifted fragments from a series of notebooks covering a decade and cleverly blended them to create two new ‘works’ defining the distinctive tasks of the human sciences.

Bakhtin had died, and his editors wanted to make sure his position was clear and his originality not in doubt.

Editorial work, however, was only one front in this battle. Bakhtin's defenders in the Soviet Union had begun to create – and create is a fair word – a biography for him (which would turn out to be thoroughly unreliable). They made sure that the rumour that Bakhtin had written texts published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev was widely spread and communicated to American scholars. The claim had first been made public by V. V. Ivanov at a 1970 meeting celebrating Bakhtin's seventy-fifth birthday; it was later included in a footnote to Ivanov (1973, 44; in translation: Ivanov 1976, 366 n101). It would spread by means of conversation and not so subtle hints. So, for instance, the translator of Pavel Medvedev's book, Albert J. Wehrle, reported information passed on to him from the Russian academic V. N. Turbin (whom he met in 1976 on a research visit to Moscow and whose own evidence was recollections of conversations) (Wehrle 1985, xvi). Medvedev's son Iurii caustically described how these claims, which lacked any written backing, gained authority:

Passed onto the West as rumour, as the opinion of an authoritative person which it would be awkward for a courteous foreigner to dispute, it then returns to us as something having currency in the competent circles of judgment, to which those who launched it can refer and on which they can rely. (Medvedev 1992, 98)

Just as importantly, they began to propagate an interpretation of Bakhtin's life that would explain the evolution of his work. According to that interpretation, the abandoned manuscripts of the 1920s represented a truer, more philosophical Bakhtin, who wanted to compose an ethical theory grounded in both neo-Kantianism and Russian religious philosophy. The encroachments of Stalinism on culture had, the argument went, forced him to write for the rest of his life "in a mask," in a field – literary criticism – that would not have been his first choice and with a terminology, borrowed from linguistics and sociology, that was alien to his innermost convictions (see Bocharov 1993 for an exposition of this argument).

When, in the late 1970s, Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark set to work on a biography, they had to depend substantially on the oral testimony of Bakhtin's camp in Russia (Clark and Holquist 1984). When Holquist and Caryl Emerson started to translate the essays on the novel from the 1975 volume (sensibly excluding the odd man out, the critique of formalism), they had to work with the edited Russian texts rather than manuscript originals, which lay in a private archive. The translations came out as *The Dialogic Imagination* in 1981. In one sense, it's fair to say the Russian slant prevailed, for these two texts ensured that, from that point onwards, Bakhtin would cease to be part of a formalist-cum-structuralist tradition and would instead be regarded as an original master thinker. The encounters of

the 1960s and 1970s had been earnest and respectful: now theorists read Bakhtin and looked at one another “with a wild surmise”.

3 Early enthusiasms

The Cortezes of literary theory thought that the object of their awe was a new continent and not just an interesting outcropping of an older one. Bakhtin was not like structuralism: he saw language as ‘discourse’, perpetually ‘becoming’ and dynamic. But he was not like deconstruction, either, because the slipperiness of discourse seemed to depend on the slipperiness and ambiguity of context and the social dynamism of ‘heteroglossia’. Bakhtin had, it seemed, taken several of the leading melodies of Theory – the fact that we draw on an inherited linguistic system, the semiotic nature of all our ideas, the undecidability of linguistic utterance – and set them in a major key, so that they sounded like ringing humanist declarations rather than a resigned acknowledgement that intentions were futile and history inaccessible. In fact, for a brief moment it looked like the continent Bakhtin had discovered would combine the new language-modelled theories with the Old World of historical and ideological criticism. An early review by David Carroll in *Diacritics* – the Talmud, if not the Bible of post-structuralism – claimed that “[w]hat is most clear and forceful in Bakhtin is the way his work opens ‘the prison-house of language’ that most structuralist-formalist approaches have tended to construct without imprisoning us in turn in dialectics, in a history or metahistory” (Carroll 1983, 68). The neo-Aristotelian Wayne Booth would enthuse about how Bakhtin neatly combined interest in form with interest in textual ideology (Booth 1984). Terry Eagleton would join in the enthusiastic chorus with the claim that “Bakhtin recapitulates *avant la lettre* many of the leading motifs of contemporary deconstructionism, and does so, scandalously, in a firmly social context” (Eagleton 1981, 150).

Clark and Holquist’s biography, published in 1984, seemed to follow the Russian interpretative line faithfully: they described his early philosophical works – which they called “The Architectonics of Answerability” – as the core of Bakhtin’s program, setting out “an agenda of topics so basal and complex that even a lifetime would not suffice to think them through” (Clark and Holquist 1984, 64). They explained Bakhtin’s shift from philosophy to literary criticism – and his supposed authorship of the ‘disputed texts’ – as in part a response to his belief that “he was not going to be able to publish under his own name” (Clark and Holquist 1984, 117). Finally, they described P. N. Medvedev as a “Soviet careerist” (Clark and Holquist 1984, 114) and “Soviet establishment figure” (Clark and

Holquist 1984, 111), reinforcing the attacks being made on him by Bakhtin's Russian devotees. The biography was supported by a mass of contextual sources and the authors confessed to the difficulty of tracking down reliable documentary sources in their preface. Their reliance on unattributed oral testimony (in, for instance, the characterization of Medvedev) was striking, but, for scholarship on Bakhtin, unexceptional and understandable.

The apparent indebtedness to the Russian account, however, could not hide their indifference to many of its fundamental interests. Clark and Holquist were Slavists, but they had no deep commitment to the Russian religious tradition, nor did they have any particular attachment to phenomenology or neo-Kantianism (Bakhtin's main philosophical sources). Their interpretative frame for Bakhtin was accordingly secular and in many respects recognizably North American. In retrospect, the biography is deceptively structured: the bulk of it is devoted to Bakhtin's life and work until 1929, as if this were its formative period (no doubt, because this is the period about which the most information was available). But their understanding of Bakhtin's work is largely derived from the work following, not preceding, Bakhtin's linguistic turn (which they believe begins with the 'disputed texts' of Voloshinov, allegedly authored by Bakhtin). They acknowledged "the centrality of the self/other distinction in all of Bakhtin's work," (Clark and Holquist 1984, 94) but interpreted it as a piece of secular philosophical anthropology. It's characteristic that when introducing the distinction, they grounded it in what they call "an everyday, garden-variety fact [...]: if, as everyone would admit, no two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time, then my place in existence is unique" (Clark and Holquist 1984, 68). By contrast, for Bakhtin's Russian religious interpreters, the self/other distinction is grounded not in the intuitive truths of space and bodies, but in the relationship between God (the ultimate 'author') and the creatures he has created. As a result, in Clark and Holquist Bakhtin appears as a secular philosopher of language.

That philosophy promised to reconcile the systematic, semiotic aspect of language with the social relationships in which discourse always operated: whether it actually did so was another matter. To a certain degree Clark and Holquist, as well as Carroll, Booth, and Eagleton, were simply taking Bakhtin at his word. In the preface to the Dostoevskii book he had insisted that "a purely formal analysis", such as he was engaged in, "must grasp every element of artistic structure as a point at which living social forces are refracted", thereby overcoming the limitations of the "narrowly formalist approach" and "equally narrow ideologism" (Bakhtin 1929, 4). A few years later he would reiterate this methodological ambition in the opening pages of "Slovo v romane" ("Discourse in the Novel"):

The leading idea of this book is the overcoming of the split between abstract “formalism” and equally abstract “ideologism” in the study of artistic discourse, an overcoming on the ground of *sociological stylistics*, in which form and content are united in discourse, understood as a social phenomenon [...]. (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 10)

Of course, everything would then depend on what one meant by “discourse, understood as a social phenomenon”. At the minimum, it meant that every line of discourse, every utterance, displayed what Bakhtin would call ‘addressivity’: discourse didn’t signify directly, but was always framed and shaped by a situation or respondent. For the Russian religious camp, that respondent was God: the speaker or ‘hero’ of a discourse can never be understood on its own because it *needs* an author who can make up for its limitedness and mere worldliness (see Gogotishvili 1992; Bonetskaia 1993, 1998; Bocharov 1995). For liberal interpreters of Bakhtin, the ‘other’ addressed was other people: discourse was social or dialogical in the sense that it was always conversational, no matter how mediated and distant one’s conversational partner was. As one drifted further Left on the spectrum of Bakhtin criticism, the addressee appeared less and less like a *person*, and more and more like a structure or social situation which framed and re-voiced every instance of speech.

One could therefore believe that Bakhtin had made a decisive break with formalism and structuralism while holding an understanding of him wholly at odds with other equally unformalist interpretations. In the 1980s and 1990s a hundred flowers of Bakhtin interpretation bloomed, and they were wildly different in colour and shape. The Russian religious interpretation of Bakhtin, in which every interpersonal ‘dialogical’ encounter echoed the relationship of God to human, found sympathetic exponents in the work of Ruth Coates (1998) and Alexandar Mihailovic (1997). In the liberal tradition, exemplified by the critical work of Holquist, Gary Saul Morson, and Caryl Emerson, Bakhtin’s dicta on the ‘unrepeatability’ and uniqueness of the utterance, his insistence on the perpetual possibility of radical transformation, were understood not in religious terms, but as reworkings of a familiar emphasis on the need to attend to the particulars. In a detailed study of Bakhtin published in 1990, Morson and Emerson claimed Bakhtin provided new reasons for accepting that novels were “powerful tools for enriching our moral sense of particular situations” (Morson and Emerson 1990, 27). Dialogue itself was understood as an interaction between individual speakers, though these speakers might represent broader social languages. Its virtues were traditional liberal ones: novels staged “a complex play of values and tones, as discourses and their speakers orient themselves to each other” (Morson and Emerson 1990, 326) – they instantiated the kind of self-reflexiveness that was the hallmark of liberal tolerance. The concreteness of the utterance was assimilated to its everyday, ordinary quality.

The Left thought ‘concreteness’ meant something quite different. As early as 1974, Fredric Jameson, the controlling presence in American Marxist criticism, had seen in Voloshinov a theoretically sophisticated antidote to the abstractions of structuralism. It was in England and Scotland, however, that Bakhtin found his most dedicated left-wing audience. The Rabelais book had, as I mentioned above, offered a theoretical resource for the burgeoning interest in popular culture and it was enthusiastically taken up by Tony Bennett (1979), and by Allon White and Peter Stallybrass (1986). It was, however, the essays on the novel, with their talk of official monologism and dialogical-novelistic subversion, that ultimately drew the most attention. Critics like David Shepherd, Craig Brandist, Alastair Renfrew, Graham Pechey, Galin Tihanov, and the author of the present chapter, to the consternation of their Russian colleagues, took Bakhtin’s promise of a sociological stylistics seriously. Whereas the dominant Russian interpretation wanted to distance Bakhtin as much as possible from his surroundings, to position him above the fray, his socialist and Marxist enthusiasts understood him as a man of his time, deeply entrenched in the ideas and arguments that criss-crossed Russia and Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. As a consequence, if one wanted the kind of thick, contextual analysis traditionally associated with historicism, one turned not to liberal writers on Bakhtin, but to Tihanov (2000) and Brandist (2002).

That Bakhtin’s writings could inspire fervour based on strikingly different construals of what he actually said naturally raised some eyebrows. Edward Said confessed that he wanted to avoid using the term “dialogical” on account of “the cult of Bakhtin” (Williams and Said 1989, 181). Paul de Man admired and was intrigued by Bakhtin, but nevertheless wondered “why the notion of dialogism can be so enthusiastically received by theoreticians of very diverse persuasion” (de Man 1986, 107). Robert Young would coolly observe how Bakhtin worked, for liberal and for Marxist critics, as a kind of antidote to post-structuralism:

Rather than offering an alternative to Derrida in the sense of an oppositional position, Bakhtin seemed to allow the assimilation of some of the more compelling aspects of his thought while placing them within a more acceptable sociohistorical framework. Derrida himself could then be more or less indifferently rejected altogether. (Young 1996, 38)

Bakhtin, then, may not have been the critic who drew history and textuality into a perfect braid, but someone who allowed admirers to cut a few corners. Was the “wild surmise” of his supporters a matter of projection and wish-fulfilment? Did they simply find the solutions they wanted to find? In fairness, Bakhtin’s work invited the kind of ambiguities one finds in the wide range of Bakhtin criticism. The New Worlds they glimpsed reflected the ideologies they brought with them, but they were not mere imaginings.

4 Bakhtin's ambiguities

In part, the ambiguities of Bakhtin interpretation stem from the changes that characterized the development of Bakhtin's work itself. Religious interpretations of his work used the philosophical fragments of the 1920s, the Dostoevskii book, and various philosophical titbits from later years as the frame for their discussion of the literary and cultural theory. Liberal criticism was most comfortable with the Dostoevskii book, where dialogism is a matter of one voice confronting and provoking another. Marxist and socialist criticism, unsurprisingly, wanted the militant Bakhtin of the 1930s to do the heavy lifting. But there were persistent, structural ambiguities in Bakhtin's writing, and these made his dissonant and heterogeneous reception possible.

One, which we could call the question of the 'ontology' of the author, was particularly significant. Clark and Holquist had called *self* and *other* the primary categories in Bakhtin's thought, but that was not entirely accurate – Bakhtin preferred, even in the early work, to talk of *I* and *other* and, more tellingly, *author* and *hero*. The advantage of the latter terms was that they made clear the asymmetry of the relationship, the different roles played by each element of the dyad. Bakhtin had, indeed, used the model of one person looking at another, seeing the outside of that person (or that person as 'outside', as expression) to describe the author/hero relationship. But this was just one model, for in the very same essay he argued that author/hero relationships ultimately depended on faith in an ultimate or supreme outsideness, that is, on God as an author transcending and ontologically distinct from his creaturely heroes. And, of course, Bakhtin also used *author* to mean the author of texts: not the physical human being who composed a text, but the presence of an overarching consciousness in the text itself, a presence which would be more or less identical with the form or structure of the text.

This ambiguity, present in the initial formulation of "author and hero" (Bakhtin 2003 [1920–1924]), was made more insistent as Bakhtin swung towards literary theory and criticism. *Problems of Dostoevskii's Art* (1929) describes the author as a conversational partner to heroes, while continually reminding us that the author is, in fact, not a speaker at all: "The author speaks through the construction of his novel not *about* the hero, but *with* the hero" (Bakhtin 1929, 70). "Through the construction of his novel": which is to say that we are not talking about actual speech at all, but the way in which the form of a novel frames and shapes speech within it. The author is a silent partner, whose contribution is the provision of a context that colours or gives tonal nuance to the actual speech of heroes. "Discourse in the Novel" exacerbates the confusion yet further, by replacing the dyad of author and hero with that of the 'novel' and the 'languages' rep-

resented within it, while at the same time describing the intersection of these two dimensions as 'double-voicing'.

It was not, therefore, outlandish for Morson and Emerson, or Clark and Holquist, to think of dialogue as an interaction between individualized speakers. Nor was it outlandish for the present author and his comrades to think of authorship in broader, sociological terms. In the writing, Bakhtin presented novelistic structures as if they were voices and voices as if they were structures: which is to say that he, in effect, elaborated on a fundamental intuition – that novelistic frames and structures shaped the intentionality or directedness of the speech within them – but never clarified it theoretically. That was the task bequeathed to his interpreters (to recur to the ultimate authorship of God would not settle the questions, insofar as the divine is neither a person nor a structure).

5 Feminist and postcolonial voices

The individualist proclivity of American culture inclined its Bakhtin interpreters to reduce structures and languages to ‘voices’. In that sense, Bakhtin did, indeed, provide critics hostile to structuralism with a way to discuss novels as complex structures while imagining them as conversations. But the priority of ‘voice’ was not merely a feature of liberal individualism: it was characteristic of a different kind of Bakhtin criticism as well, which had emerged in parallel with so-called high theory. Feminist criticism and what would eventually be called postcolonial criticism were rapidly gathering momentum through the 1970s and 1980s and the publication of *The Dialogic Imagination* came at just the right time. In this case, however, the starting point was not individual dialogue but Bakhtin’s claim in “Discourse in the Novel” that in novels “double-voicedness extends its roots deep into an essential heteroglossia and multi-languedness” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 79).

In the case of feminist criticism, the timing of Bakhtin's translation could not have been more fortuitous. In the 1980s Dale Spender's *Man-made Language* and the translation of work by Hélène Cixous and other 'French feminists' had sparked a vigorous debate over whether and how the experience of women could be articulated, given the sexism built into the common language (see Cameron 1992). The idea that intentions might be 'refracted' in an inherited language, that a writer at odds with the linguistic resources available could appropriate them and use them 'against the grain', seemed to offer a middle way between dreams of a pure women's language and resignation before 'man-made language'. From the 1980s onwards feminist critics used Bakhtin to describe and explain how female authors

turned masculinist linguistic form to their own purposes (summarized very well in Pearce 1994, 100–111). Typical would be Patricia Yaeger's description of what Eudora Welty did with phrases and figures drawn from Yeats's poetry: "By 'stylizing' an alien text, by assimilating, that is, the other's word into her own heteroglossic style, Welty establishes a distance between the incorporated text and its initial meaning; she opens this text to another point of view" (Yaeger 1984, 962).

The idea that men and women spoke different languages, though powerful, was at least, to some degree, metaphorical. For postcolonial critics there was not the slightest need for metaphor: multi-linguagedness, in the perfectly ordinary sense, was the normal situation for nations that had been colonies. When Bakhtin staged a confrontation between a unified, centripetal language and the centrifugal world of popular heteroglossia in the early pages of "Discourse in the Novel" he had been thinking of how Latin related to the emerging European vernaculars; postcolonial critics had only to put those vernaculars, now the standard languages of powerful European states, in the place of Latin to create a useful model for postcolonial analysis. The question of which language to use, and whether the language of the colonizer could be and should be adapted for postcolonial or revolutionary purposes had been a pressing issue amongst colonial writers: Bakhtin could not have landed on more fertile ground (see Crowley 1989, for example).

Where postcolonial writers wanted to 'refract' their intentions through an imposed colonial language, Bakhtin's claim that novelists express their intentions through indirect double-voicing was a valuable resource. But there was a deeper affinity available between Bakhtin and postcolonial theory. In criticizing the very idea of 'race' and racial difference, postcolonial theorists emphasized the ubiquity, the normalcy of ethnic hybridity (as well as the fear and anxiety its possibility awakened in racists). In his *Colonial Desire*, Robert Young saw the analogy with Bakhtin's theory and moved to exploit it (Young 1995, 18–22). Bakhtin's discussion of hybridization in "Discourse in the Novel" suggested that impurity was the rule in language as in biology. Furthermore, the distinction between organic and intentional hybrid utterances suggested that just as ethnic hybridity was a rebuke to purist theories of race, so discursive hybridity undermined the purity required by authoritarian discourse. To close the loop Young needed only to point out that colonial authority itself required a monological singular language, untainted by the discourse of the colonized. But, of course, just as even the most ostensibly monological utterance is, at some level, a dialogical response to the discourse around it, so, Young observes (citing Homi Bhabha) "the single voice of colonial authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced" (Young 1995, 21). Despite its best efforts, colonial discourse ends up producing the very discursive hybridity it needs to repress.

In the United States, the postcolonial appropriation of Bakhtin moved along similar lines. DuBois's claim that black Americans were afflicted with a "double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others" (DuBois 1965 [1903], 2) uncannily mirrored Bakhtin's notion of a discourse directed "both at the referent of the speech, as in ordinary discourse, and at *the discourse of an other, at an alien form of speech*" (Bakhtin 1929, 105). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. would secure the alignment in his *The Signifying Monkey*, the opening chapters of which were prefaced with quotations from Frederick Douglass and Bakhtin. Gates shrewdly recognized the closeness between the American black vernacular tradition of 'signifyin(g)' – a tradition of rhetorical excess, parody and irony – and Bakhtin's theory of double-voiced prose (Gates 1988).

Bakhtin had argued, from "Discourse in the Novel" onwards, that the "double-voicedness" typical of novelistic prose derived its breadth and energy from popular genres and discourse:

It is precisely here, on a local scale, in the minor 'low' genres, on the popular stages, in the fairground squares, in street songs and anecdotes, that techniques were devised for the construction of images of language, for combining discourse with the image of a speaking person, for the objective display of discourse together with a person [...]. (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 156)

But Bakhtin did not follow the claim with detailed evidence for it: even the Rabelais study is more about Rabelais than the popular culture of the Middle Ages. Gates – although this was not his principal aim – makes good on the claim, albeit in an American rather than European context, by showing in detail how black vernacular traditions find themselves translated into African-American literary techniques. The association of double-voicing with black double consciousness and postcolonial hybridity set the stage for one of the most productive appropriations of Bakhtin's work (see Hale 1994).

Was the appropriation appropriate? Was the match between 1930s Bakhtin and postcolonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s as neat as it looked? As before, it would be wrong to say that postcolonial theorists were misinterpreting Bakhtin but fair to say they took advantage of a significant ambiguity in his work. And once again, the issue was the nature of the 'author' and the authorial position. When Bakhtin first delved into the novel – in the 1929 study of Dostoevskii – he went out of his way to point out that ideas in Dostoevskii's novels did not enter into dialogue in order to be tested for their truth-value, in the interest of what Habermas would call 'rational-critical debate'. Dostoevskii did not so much articulate ideas as represent them artistically and "[t]he artistic representation of an idea is possible only when it is posed beyond assertion or negation" (Bakhtin 1929, 76). The author in the Dostoevskian novel did not simply reproduce ideas or

ideologies, but aimed “to perceive every thought as an integrated personal position, to think in voices” (Bakhtin 1929, 85), which is to say that, as a dialogical partner, the author changed the form of ideas and ideologies, giving them the shape of ‘voices’. As we learn elsewhere in the Dostoevskii book, the crux of this form is that heroes and their ideas appear endowed with “their unfinalizability, their open-endedness, and indeterminacy” (Bakhtin 1929, 63). A few years later, in “Discourse in the Novel”, Bakhtin would make an analogous but expanded claim for what novels did to the languages within them: “the central problem of a novelistic stylistics can be formulated as *the problem of the artistic representation of language, the problem of the image of a language*” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 90). The image of a language was not a mere sample of it but an artistic elaboration, which could even include “the free creation of moments that are in the spirit of a given language but empirically alien to it” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 90–91). What characterizes the form of images of language is a version of indeterminacy and open-endedness that Bakhtin calls language’s “heteroglot becoming” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 111).

The author’s ability to endow ideas and languages with “becoming” echoed the claims Bakhtin had made for the author in the 1920s, where the author was a redeeming, religious figure, whose love of the hero made it possible for the latter to attain some state of grace. ‘Becoming’ and ‘unfinalizability’ were not meant to signify mere historical change, but the possibility of a dramatic, quasi-redemptive transformation. When a feminist or postcolonial critic uses the idea of dialogism to explain how one discourse relativizes another, how it undercuts its epistemological authority and sure-footedness, this dimension of Bakhtin’s argument is sidelined. In fairness, though, Bakhtin sidelined it, too. In the very same essay where he insists on the novelist’s need to represent language artistically, to provide “an *image*, and not a positive empirical sample of a language” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 110), he will also say that this artistic double-voicedness draws its strength from the “socially contradictory historical becoming of language” (Bakhtin 2012 [1930–1936], 84), as if the qualities bestowed on language by novelistic technique were actually already there to begin with. Sometimes literary representations are distinctive, remote from everyday practice; at other times they seem merely to reflect or intensify it.

Critics interested in how the novel undermines colonial or patriarchal authority by double-voicing or dialogized heteroglossia are therefore just playing variations on a theme from Bakhtin. Writers like Young or Bhabha can move with ease from literary to non-literary texts in their discussions of race and hybridity in part because they don’t draw a sharp line between the ‘artistic’ dialogism of the novel and the dialogism of ordinary language (a line Bakhtin himself smudges quite often). In fact, one could dispense with verbal art altogether, as in James Clifford’s

influential critique of colonial authority in ethnographic writing (Clifford 1983), which borrows and develops Bakhtin's idea of polyphony. If critical writing of this type seems to transgress the boundary Bakhtin establishes between artistic and extra-artistic double-voicedness, one is tempted to think so much the worse for Bakhtin. Nor should we imagine that the application of Bakhtin to social phenomena like colonialism or patriarchy can at best use his theory: if one is interested in what the concept of dialogism means for subjectivity, one should look not only to the works of Bakhtin himself, but also to the interpretative work of Young and Bhabha in postcolonial theory, or at Julia Kristeva's discussions of Bakhtin from the 1960s and 1970s (Bhabha 2004; Kristeva 1969; Kristeva 1970).

It would, ironically, be political upheaval in the Soviet Union that finally separated Bakhtin in Russia from Bakhtin abroad. The liberalization of Soviet cultural life in the 1980s and the eventual implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the end of censorship, the opening of archives, and a new era in Bakhtin scholarship in the former Soviet Union. As a consequence, a serious and scholarly *Collected Works* was published in Russia in six volumes, featuring new texts, dramatically new versions of familiar texts, the revelation that some older texts were editorial concoctions, and a strikingly detailed and careful philological commentary, mostly aimed at securing the religious interpretation of Bakhtin's work (Bakhtin 1996–2012). The archives were also, however, used by secular-minded critics in Russia like the late Nikolai Pan'kov and by scholars from the UK and the United States.

The new sources strengthened the hand of Bakhtin scholars in England, Scotland, and America who had kept a distance from the religious perspective. The general shift in opinion is exemplified by the change in attitudes to the so-called 'disputed texts' of Voloshinov and Medvedev. In the 1980s the common assumption in American circles was that these works belonged to Bakhtin, and when Harvard University Press re-issued Medvedev's *Formal Method* in 1985 its author was "M. M. Bakhtin/P. N. Medvedev". Twenty years later opinion had drifted steadily to the belief in Voloshinov's and Medvedev's authorship (see Brandist 2002, 4–9; Tihanov 2000, 7–8; Erdinast-Vulcan 2013, 216–217n8).

These substantial developments in Russian Bakhtin scholarship came too late to have an impact on Anglophone criticism. The Bakhtin surge in the UK and America had taken place in the 1980s and 1990s and the established lines of interpretation were more or less set in place before the publication of the Russian *Collected Works*. The result is an odd asymmetry: the Bakhtin corpus in Russia is not the same as the one circulating in the Anglophone countries, because the latter is based on earlier (and faulty) Russian texts. The excellent Bakhtin scholarship of the last 20 years, conducted by philologists in Russia and Slavist Bakhtin scholars abroad, hasn't made much difference to the view of Bakhtin put in place over two

decades ago. Like the colonizers with whom I compared them in the beginning, Bakhtin enthusiasts in the English-speaking world have moved on, having taken what was useful for them from the continent they travelled over. Unlike the colonizers, however, they've made a lasting and just contribution to its development.

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