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Mikhail Bakhtin's Heritage in Literature, Arts, and Psychology. Introduction

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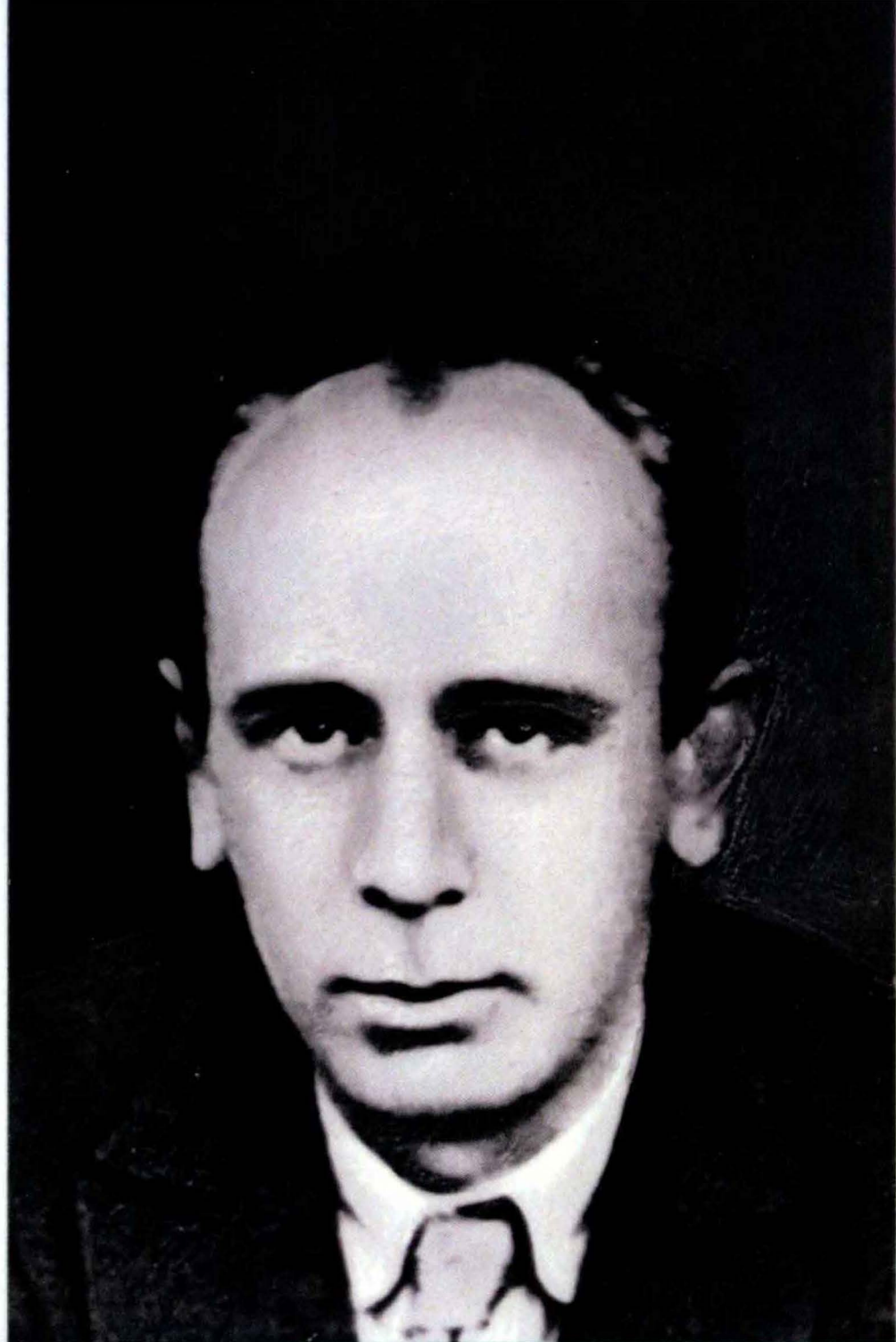
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ART AND ANSWERABILITY

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Introduction

Slav N. Gratchev and Howard Mancing

This volume celebrates hundred years of Bakhtin's heritage: in September 13 of 1919 in the literary journal *Den Iskusstva* (The Day of the Art) was published the first work of Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, the work that became his literary manifesto.

This book aims to examine the heritage of Mikhail Bakhtin in a variety of disciplines. To achieve this end, we drew upon colleagues from eight different countries across the world—United States, Canada, Spain, Great Britain, France, Russia, Chile, and Japan—in order to bring the widest variety of points of view on the subject. But we also wanted this book to be more than just another collection of essays of literary criticism. For this reason, we invited contributions by scholars from different disciplines—including theater, translation, and psychology—that is, those who have dealt with Bakhtin's heritage and saw its practical application in their fields. Therefore, some of these chapters are not written in a typical humanist academic, scholarly style. And that is as it should be.

Not for the first time, Mikhail Bakhtin will be discussed from the point of view of such a wide range of approaches and methodologies. A primary objective was to articulate the enduring relevance and heritage of the great and varied works of Bakhtin during more than half a century, from the early-1920s to the mid-1970s. His work in aesthetics, moral philosophy, linguistics, psychology, carnival, cognition, contextualism, and the history and theory of the novel are present here, as understood by a wide variety of distinguished scholars. In our case, we have chosen to minimize the editors' voices; we have imposed no strict definition of what we think Bakhtin's heritage should be on the contributors, but have given them complete freedom to discuss the concept in their own terms, in their own style, and in their own voice.

Much has been written on Bakhtin, and this book will take another look, from the angle of more than a dozen perspectives, at the heritage of one of the most prominent thinkers of the twentieth century, and perhaps open a new critical discourse that may well contribute to reshaping our current understanding of one of the most influential literary figures—Mikhail Bakhtin.

Part I is, par excellence, the largest in the book and consists of nine chapters that deal exclusively with Bakhtin's heritage in literature. In Chapter 1, Howard Mancing observes that in no single place does Mikhail Bakhtin explicitly propose a theory of the novel. As a result, he explains, critics and theorists have found it difficult to understand and describe how Bakhtin theorizes about the novel, and, therefore, they so often misrepresent his works. In his chapter, Mancing sets forth what he understands to be Bakhtin's theory of the novel: his concept of the novel as a literary genre; his approach to the centuries-long prehistory of the novel; his thesis that the novel emerges in the Renaissance, primarily with the works of Rabelais and Cervantes; the way he distinguishes between romance and novel; his idea of the heteroglossia, dialogism, laughter, parody, double-voicedness, and so forth that characterize the (modern European) novel; the idea of "novelization" of other genres; and, finally, his concept of the role of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel in this scheme.

In Chapter 2, Margarita Marinova turns our attention to Bakhtin's views on poetic language in the context of two rare documents: his notes toward a study of Mayakovksy's poetics, and the phono-document of his recorded conversations (1973) with Victor Duvakin. Most scholars rightfully argue, on the basis of his famous 1941 essay "Discourse in the Novel," that Bakhtin sees the richness of poetic language as being derived from the wealth of the trope rather than *from* the complexity of the dialogic word. According to this interpretation, the poet must remain isolated from his surroundings in order to retain full control over his own vision and ensuing monologic expression. In her chapter, Marinova argues that Bakhtin's unfinished manuscript about Mayakovsky's verse, in which he highlights the carnivalesque quality of the Futurist's writing, the importance of the poet's singular voice as a conduit for the multiplicity of the collective, and the recalibration of poetic distance, suggests that Bakhtin's understanding of the characteristics of poetic discourse was much more nuanced and complex than previously assumed.

In Chapter 3, Victor Fet introduces us to the world of *innumerable* translations of *Alice in Wonderland* that is, in Bakhtinian terms, an inherently diglossic process of re-accentuation. It is also a constantly evolving dialogue of the original text/author with the future languages and cultures. When the original text is itself highly dialogic, a translator faces the challenges stemming from its heteroglossia and polyphony. The author applies the

Bakhtinian approaches of re-accentuation, dialogue, and poly/di/heteroglossia to a case study of *the most translated English literary text in history* (over 200 languages!)—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). "What is a use for a book," thought Alice, "without pictures and conversations?" Lewis Carroll's imaginary characters ("pictures") are engaged in complex, polyphonic Bakhtinian dialogues ("conversations"), exploring the limits of identity, memory, knowledge, power, social and gender conventions, and language itself. The author asserts that *Alice* enjoyed over twenty translations into Bakhtin's native Russian, starting as early as 1879, and while, as Fet rightfully notes, the Victorian English is frozen, the target languages of translation keep evolving, including children's argot that also has changed dramatically, creating a temporal heteroglossia. Each generation deploys its own "domestication" (i.e., heteroglossic re-accentuation): wordplay, names, and parodies targeting both children and adults of a particular culture. Although Alice, notes Fet, might become a Russian Sonia or Ania, her adventures follow the game rules set by Lewis Carroll.

Chapter 4, written by Slav N. Gratchev, discusses how literary critics often use theory to explain important phenomena observed within literary artifact but have never suggested that the process can go in the opposite direction: the theory can grow and mature out of a certain literary artifact. The author suggests that it is the case of *Don Quixote* that played a singular role in the process of evolution Mikhail Bakhtin's literary views and the development of Bakhtin's theory of the novel. The author is fully aware that it might not be easy to tease out this idea, however, as Rabelais, Dostoevsky, and perhaps others are mentioned much more prominently in Bakhtin's work, but it is an undeniable fact that *Don Quixote* appears in his writings on the novel at crucial times and almost certainly played a crucial—perhaps definitive—role in his theory of the novel. This chapter, therefore, will show that at crucial moments, while he was formulating his theories of the novel, Bakhtin turned to and took examples and inspiration from Cervantes's great novel.

In Chapter 5, Ricardo Castells analyzes the Classics Illustrated graphic novel of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1943), one of many works that contradict Cervantes's claim that he enjoys sole possession of Don Quixote. Mikhail Bakhtin disagrees with Cervantes, claims the author, because he believes that the Manchegan knight exists within the complex forms of speech of the novel of the Second Line, which "makes it possible to re-accentuate the image, to adopt various attitudes toward the argument sounding within the image, to take various positions in this argument and, consequently, to vary the interpretations of the image itself." The Classics Illustrated *Don Quixote* was created and published during World War II, a time when popular genres such as movies and comics helped to rally American public opinion and maintain morale on the home front. This re-accentuation of Cervantes's novel

not only entertained younger wartime readers—both on the home front and those serving in uniform—but also emphasized the importance of Don Quixote's armed struggle, so as a popular form of propaganda it can be considered a cultural and artistic success despite its obvious textual inaccuracies.

In Chapter 6, Brian Phillips examines, interrogates, and problematizes Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque—the concept that arises frequently throughout the picaresque genre, and especially in Quevedo's deterministic take on the picaresque lifestyle by continually displaying his protagonist alongside degrading corporeal material or anatomy. He argues that the inter-relationship between the social and the bodily aspects that Bakhtinian research has produced provides the opportunity to expand upon the Russian theorist's well-known literary tropes by investigating the Carnivalesque and the Grotesque as related to the *pícaro* under a Bio-political lens—the study of social and political power over life. To this end, the author offers a brief analysis of a carnivalesque social manifestation, Salamanca's festival *Lunes de Aguas*, compared alongside grotesque displays of *La Pícara Justina*'s degrading corporeal performances. Since *Lunes de Aguas* finds itself rooted in the tradition of debates circulating prostitution, and the *pícara* Justina wields her sexuality as a tool to achieve greater power within the social construct, this chapter's ultimate goal is to underscore biopolitical control of female space under carnivalesque and grotesque circumstances. This chapter presents, therefore, a brief outline of contemporary picaresque studies displaying Bakhtin's widespread influence on studies of Francisco de Quevedo's *El Buscón* and *El Lazarillo*, Francisco López de Úbeda's *La Pícara Justina*, and other *pícaros*.

Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, in Chapter 7, aims to demonstrate the relevance of Bakhtin's theory concerning the end of grotesque realism, which, according to him, occurred shortly after the publication of Francois Rabelais's masterpieces. More specifically, the study seeks to respond to Bakhtin's ideas pertaining to the end of grotesque realism by putting them against historical and theological backgrounds of the sixteenth-century Europe. The chapter's aim does not, however, consist in applying historical scrutiny to the concept of grotesque realism, which has been done before. Rather, the study, which relies on Bakhtin's own hints and directions found in *Rabelais and His World*, argues that the theological assessment of the sixteenth-century aesthetic revolution that Bakhtin describes, in his own idiosyncratic terms, in his book validates several aspects of his theory. The author thoroughly discusses and analyzes a number of Bakhtin's ingenious insights, which, when placed in concrete context of theological and aesthetic views brought about by sixteenth-century Protestant and Catholic Reformations, acquire new meaning and reveal new depth of his thought.

In Chapter 8, Yumi Tanaka shows how the Nobel Prize winner Kenzaburo Oe has used Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque in his novels set

in a peripheral village in the woods, which is associated with his hometown. Bakhtin's observation of subversive and regenerative aspects of the carnivalesque made Oe realize the literary possibility of his experience and the folklore of his hometown. The author believes that Bakhtin suggested to Oe a way of approaching the universal through novels about a local and marginalized place in Japan in contrast to the West, and the Oe's novel *The Infant of Mournful Countenance* deeply follows *Don Quixote*. In her chapter, Tanaka suggests that the novel's protagonist imitates Don Quixote but avoids the knight's repentant end and, instead, demonstrates a hope for regeneration. This ambiguous relationship between the two texts is, argues the author, a result of Oe's desire to rewrite *Don Quixote* using carnivalesque aesthetics, that is from a Bakhtinian perspective, and to cover "the relative absence of Cervantes" (Walter L. Reed) in Bakhtin's theory.

Chapter 9, written by Melissa Garr, nicely closes Part I of the book by discussing the current cultural discourse in the West that frequently invokes the concept of privilege—societal power structures that systemically benefit some and oppress others. Privilege, argues the author, is understood to be intersectional in that one can benefit from some systems but not others, such as being a member of a privileged group in race but not gender. Discourses of privilege, continues the author, certainly echo Mikhail Bakhtin's legacy of examining voices of resistance in cultural artifacts; however, to date, the work that has linked Bakhtin's discussions of power and discourse to the concepts of privilege and intersectionality has been primarily in the fields of sociology, psychology, and pedagogy, rather than literary criticism. This chapter extends this connection to examinations of discourse and privilege in literary studies. By analyzing works by twentieth-century Latin American authors who are outside privilege groups in race, gender, and sexuality, the study demonstrates that Bakhtin's discussions of power and discourse in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" and "Discourse in the Novel" clearly converge with and can inform contemporary literary criticism on intersectional hegemonic discourse.

Part II consists of four chapters and deals with Bakhtin's heritage in arts and philosophy.

Michael Eskin, in Chapter 10, will engage us with the work of Francophone Alexandre Jollien (born in 1975)—arguably, the most important contemporary Swiss philosopher—through the prism of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical anthropology. The chapter aims to achieve two objectives: first, hermeneutically "unlocking" Jollien's idiosyncratic form of a biographically inflected "ethics of disability and overcoming" with the help of the interpretive "apparatus" elaborated by Bakhtin, *and* second, presenting an exemplary instance of the latter's philosophical anthropology *in actu*, as it were. Focusing on Jollien's first book—*Éloge de la faiblesse* (1999; translated to English

as *In Praise of Weakness* in 2017)—in conjunction with Bakhtin's early works (*Art and Answerability*, *The Philosophy of the Act, Author and Hero*) in particular, the author argues that Jollien's ethics can be said to point-edly instantiate Bakhtin's major existential-dialogical postulates such as "outsidedness," "surplus of vision," "completeness," "incompleteness," and "answerability," to name only a handful. Jollien's ethics thus demonstrates its ability to work in intimate concert with actual human reality, while at the same time be productively and inventively illuminated by them. Jollien's philosophical project, argues the author, reveals itself as living "proof," as it were, of the sheer realism and veracity of Bakhtin's anthropological insights.

Chapter 11, written by Pablo Carvajal, examines a series of quixotic films: the canonical adaptations by Pabst, 1933; Gil, 1947; Kozintsev, 1957; the free versions by Welles, 1992; Ah Gan, 2010; and some super-hero parodic films by Stebblings, 2009; Gunn, 2010; and Iñárritu, 2014. The author analyzes those films through the lenses of Bakhtin's key concepts—the polyphony, heteroglossia, carnivalization, and re-accen-tuation—to determine in which of these films the essence of Cervantes's work is best collected. The chapter re-examines some of Bakhtin's major writings and attempts to analyze how the specific features and character-istics of the novel, including some of its fundamental literary components, have been adapted to the screen with quite different, sometimes striking, results. The chapter shows that the dialogic, polyphonic, and carnival character of the novel is best preserved on those parodic superhero films, while certain classical and more prestigious adaptations appear as *monological* versions where the work of Cervantes is reduced to its mere romantic interpretation.

Dick McCaw, in Chapter 12, demonstrates how many of Bakhtin's con-cepts resonate with recent research into embodied cognition, which itself is making an important contribution to how we can understand an actor's work. The ideas discussed in this chapter are mostly drawn from Bakhtin's early philosophy where he explores how meaning and value relate to a person's unique spatial and temporal situation. The author argues that Bakhtin's theory of morality is based on the nontransferability of our physical situation; that we act and answer with our body; that for Bakhtin the meaning is ineluctably embodied; that he basically rejects a purely theoretical approach—perhaps, a purely "cognitive" approach—that always results in a kind of meaning without meaning. The author further argues that Bakhtin's early philosophy touches on contemporary debates about and research into embodied intel-ligence and meaning and that Bakhtin's insistence on particularity sets forth principles rather than analyzing specifics. A cognitive turn in theater studies,

suggests the author, has inspired a number of practitioners and academics to draw on embodied cognition to better understand the work of the actor and performer. The chapter is both a critique of Bakhtin's early ideas about body, space, time, and meaning, which were presented as static rather than dynamic categories, as well as a discussion of how his early philosophy anticipated and is being vindicated by contemporary studies in embodied knowledge.

Steven Mills in Chapter 13 argues that scholars have built Bakhtin's legacy on various schools of thought often based on the Cartesian premises; this approach facilitated the rise of dehumanizing theories and the abstraction of human cognition. This chapter revisits revisits Bakhtin's works and philosophy and shows that his ideas, in fact, reject dualistic deconstructed perspectives of literature and culture that emerged from Rene Descartes's mind/body dualism and that paved the way for modern philosophy. The author revisits the Cartesian theories that, he believes, have grown eager to separate mind and its cohort of abilities (thought, reason, perception, consciousness) from the embodied elements that accompany, but are distinct from, intellect. This chapter argues that Bakhtin overturned traditional dualism in literary and cultural studies because it is insufficient to account for the full impact of human productions and interactions. Instead, Bakhtin reformed the thinking subject within a context that accurately stems from embodiment—where mind and body are inseparable, not distinct—to lay a human foundation for engaging thought and subjectivity. Therefore, this study intends to propose a new direction for Bakhtin's legacy because his ideas restore humanity to the dehumanizing theories of form.

Part III of the book is dedicated to Bakhtin's heritage in psychology. In Chapter 14, Greg M. Nielsen suggests that the simultaneous reading of works of the young Mikhail Bakhtin, Soren Kierkegaard, and George Simmel on subjectivity opens avenues of exploration into key sources and influences well into later works on dialogue and speech genres. The author argues that in both *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity," the young Bakhtin focuses on the anticipation of rejoinder in the event as key to understanding what he and his colleagues would latter call the dialogical quality of the utterance. According to the author, in these early works, Bakhtin crafts a variety of concepts that establish his phenomenology of intersubjectivity, develops the idea of transgredience around the inner and outer subject and describes the principles of ordering, organizing, and forming the subject and the principles of rendering it. This chapter proposes an immanent reading and elaboration on a selection of these concepts that can be made clearer when read alongside Soren Kierkegaard's discussion of

becoming subjective in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* and Georg Simmel's' essay on individual law.

Chapter 15, written by Michael Gardiner, turns our attention toward the comparative literature on Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Michel Foucault. The chapter suggests that this literature is both modest in extent and relatively dated, and perhaps needs reassessment. The present chapter proposes to bring Bakhtin and Foucault into closer theoretical dialogue by engaging the latter's use of the ancient Greek notion of *parrhēsia* in these posthumous texts— a concept usually rendered as "truth-telling" or "fearless speech"—with Bakhtin's complementary idea of "free and familiar" speech, through which "terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette" are suspended, and genuine dialogue made possible. The author argues that although Bakhtin links this impulse to Medieval and Renaissance carnival culture, he simply follows Foucault in tracing its ancient wellsprings to Greek philosophy, especially Cynicism, a shared inspiration that has been overlooked in the extant literature. The chapter argues that their respective approaches to the Cynic tradition of fearless speech are marked by striking congruences: both valorize Diogenes's "cynical" laughter and suggest that the comic inversion is not dissimulation or trickery for its own sake but rather integral to truth-telling's counterpower. The author believes that whereas many earlier comparisons pitted a presumptively anti-humanist Foucault against Bakhtin's "dialogical" humanism, the new Collège de France materials raise the possibility of more commonalities in their respective projects than has been entertained hitherto—not least because Foucault discusses Bakhtin's carnivalesque in the final series of these lectures, so that we might better master what Foucault calls the art of "not being governed so much."

Chapter 16, written by James Cresswell and Andrés Haye, closes the book with a critical look at the discipline of psychology, that has often directed its focus toward studying humans as self-contained monads. They argue that in the 1990s, critical psychologists raised concerns with this practice and how it bypassed and trivialized the folk psychology of everyday life. According to the authors, Bakhtin is one of the figures that inspired these critical psychologists to turn to everyday culture and discourse with the aim of understanding how mind is shaped in dialogue. Therefore, in this chapter they discuss how Bakhtin, in his early work on aesthetics and Rabelais's and Dostoevsky's poetics, offers a rich view of dialogue that can help us understand everyday phenomena, including unconscious aspects of mind. The challenge they see is that Bakhtin's view contains an unsolved paradox: drawing on phenomenology while simultaneously denying the self-contained model of the mind entailed therein. Therefore, the chapter suggests that Bakhtin's theory of culture can be understood in line with the critical discussion on consciousness given earlier by William James who is re-emerging as another inspiring

figure within contemporary psychology. The chapter explores the contribution of James's dynamic notion of *self* that is alternative to phenomenology and divorced from self-contained individualism, as well as its underdeveloped understanding of language, where he connects with Bakhtin. Cresswell and Haye aim to show how James's pluralistic approach to experience and Bakhtin's dialogical approach to language Bakhtin complement each other.

This is the book that we are pleased now to offer to your attention.