

BUCKNELL REVIEW

# Bakhtin and the Nation

Edited by the San Diego Bakhtin Circle

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ANTHONY WALL is Head of the Department of French, Italian, and Spanish at the University of Calgary where he teaches contemporary French and Québécois literature. He has published several works related to Bakhtin and his thinking: *A Broken Thinker* (1998), *How to do Things with Bakhtin in German* (1999), and a translation, from the German, of Renate Lachmann's *Literature and Memory: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism* (1997).

## Introduction: Bakhtin and the Nation

THE end of the century is marked by historic changes in nation-states and in the concepts of the nation and of nationalism. The essays in this volume give to the reader an inquiry into the problem of the nation with, and sometimes surpassing, the help of Russian philosopher Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. Bakhtin died a quarter century ago, and much has happened since in history and in scholarship, so it is not unusual that we exceed our guiding thinker; it is in any event in the spirit of Bakhtin that we refuse to be disciples even as we try to think with his categories.

In line with current debates and scholarship on the nation, national identity, and nationalist projects, we have found it useful to divide the topic into three general categories: 1) the nation as a cultural entity; 2) the nation as a civil state; and 3) the nation within the global community of nations—the issue of the transnational. According to modernization theorists Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, the nation is the first modern form of collective identity. That is, nationness is based on a communal sense of shared traditions and beliefs, instead of merely a community founded within geopolitical boundaries. Following on from Gellner and Hobsbawm is Benedict Anderson's influential concept of the nation as an imagined community: while generating new scholarship, including passionate refutations, Anderson's book reminded scholars of all the ways in which identity is developed and kept going, in a kind of collective unconscious of a nation's citizens. The scholarship spurred by Anderson's book tries to break with traditional forms of thinking, which looked to the past to track the foundations of political institutions through one kind of history of great men. Much cultural criticism today takes up such aspects of the nation as everyday life, popular culture, and the marginal voices often ignored by dominant narratives.<sup>1</sup>

While thinking about the nation as a cultural entity allows otherwise marginal figures, often not seen as participants in the creation of the nation, to become visible and powerful agents, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the nation has been and remains a civil and political institution. The state plays a role in forming any national

identity. This process of identity-building often originates and remains within the boundaries of the nation, for example in the various nationalist projects in Europe in the early twentieth century; at other times, such projects are also exported to other cultures, other nations, through colonialism.

Today questions are being raised about a supposed crisis of the nation; that is, its disappearance due to the rapid expansion of huge companies and electronic networks, the famous global community. This transnational community is created, the argument runs, by a new kind of economic base which simultaneously produces and commercializes technological advances. Indeed for many writers, such as Leslie Sklair and Masao Miyoshi, the boundaries of the nation (and of national literatures) become rather meaningless in our age of global economy and a borderless electronic information superhighway.<sup>2</sup>

Technology, as in other centuries, is perceived by many as the means to accelerate communication to the point of shattering national and ethnic identities. The rise in the use of mass communication, specifically increased use of the Internet, is often now seen as an opportunity for the creation of an utopian community, of easy speech between people from all parts of the world. When we begin to think with terms like transnationalism and globalization, the debates surrounding nation as a) cultural entity and b) civil state will lose their centrality.

Nevertheless, we see a countervailing force: transnationalism fueling the export and import of national and cultural identities, and therefore maybe even reinforcing those distinctions. More specifically, such an understanding of the global community is related to the general theme of migration and migrant cultures: the possibility of a portable national identity. Perhaps as Étienne Balibar has said with respect to nationalism, the concept of nation never functions alone, but is always part of a chain in which it is both the central and weak link.<sup>3</sup> As our editorial group prepared to usher in the essays that follow here, we became certain of one general postulate: any comprehensive study on the nation must be interdisciplinary, and should explore intersections of race, class, and gender in the formation of national identities and power structures.

### The San Diego Bakhtin Group

Although we found it challenging to define the nation systematically, we seemed to know what makes a nation and how a feeling of



belonging or not belonging is expressed intellectually and personally. Each one of us has decisive feelings about our roles in the dominant cultures of the various nations in which we were born and the countries with which we have come into contact: places we visited, studied in, lived in and sometimes adopted; places of gritty reality and, admittedly, sometimes of selective memory.

Perhaps it is no accident that an early topic of discussion adopted by the San Diego Bakhtin Group (founded in 1995) centered around the nation. Even though members of the group study different literary traditions (British, Italian, Latin American, Russian, U.S.), we all share the specific conditions of the San Diego-Tijuana border region. Although the University of California, San Diego, our campus, is a half-hour's drive from Mexico, the border's culture, its people, cuisine, politics, is part of our daily life. Because we always register the differential presence, we wish to understand the tensions between the nation as cultural entity, as civil state, and as part of a global community.

How can the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin engage with those tensions, to help theorize and form a discourse that enriches nation studies? We offer here a brief sample of our initial speculations:

1) Bakhtin has produced a theory of language which moves beyond Russian formalism to a more materialist consideration of the stratification of speech. This perspective permits textual studies which try to hear the polyphony present in any one national language, thus specifying particular speech genres, be they class-, race-, or gender-based.

2) Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is a humanistic project which acknowledges the exchange of contestatory voices in a specific cultural or political space. For him, monologism is a power structure which can replace dialogism in a society, where one voice or worldview is given superiority over all others.

3) Though Bakhtin has been hotly contested in his celebration of popular culture, he does give a reading of the carnivalesque which perhaps challenges the dominant ideology, and certainly questions the production of a single national identity.

4) Last and not least, we may approach these questions of the nation through Bakhtin's own relationship to Russia, thus acknowledging Bakhtin's biography as a complement to his theoretical work.

### The Call for Papers

Our initial purpose was to explore Bakhtin's ideas about the nation, hoping to spur critical dialogue. We wanted to see how Bakh-

tin's thought could inform contemporary studies of the nation and how a focus on national questions could enrich Bakhtin studies. Some respondents argued that Bakhtin never had a sound platform on the nation, but, we argued, he considered power relations instrumental in his understanding of language. In our call for papers we noted:

Since Bakhtin's theory foregrounds language, and since language has historically been (for good or ill) used as a major determinant of national consciousness, we are taking "utterance" in all its transformations as the focus of this issue. . . . Specifically, we want to investigate in what ways his terms can be marshaled to examine how cultural productions call attention to the nation, and how these writings engage with national discourses. Moreover, we question the meaning of these monologues and dialogues: are these utterances positive, negative, voluntary, involuntary? We are open to studies with the widest range of historical and geographical placement, as long as Bakhtin's terms are brought into play in the analytical work. We are also open to criticism of Bakhtin's terms and ideas, something we consider a normal part of working within his tradition.

From the numerous proposals we received, we accepted the following papers.

Dale E. Peterson studies the "culturally symptomatic confessional monologue," and finds a "sense of relatedness . . . in the cultural arts practiced by nineteenth-century Russians and by American blacks in the twentieth century." Late in the twentieth century, partly enabled by Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s use of the linguistic theories and discourse analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin, the African American canon returns to a more gritty sociological language that it possessed in the Harlem Renaissance era, and earlier still in the flourishing of W. E. B. Du Bois. Peterson employs a careful comparison of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* with James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* to show a similar "double-voicing" or undermining of the narrative voice; Dostoevsky's and Johnson's speakers are examples of "anti-heroic self-betrayal," due to their "shared inability to accept . . . their internalized biculturalism"; so these authors become the "first writers in their cultures with the courage to make audible the ruminations of a symptomatic postcolonial double-mindedness."

An area of Bakhtinian studies neglected in the pursuit of its two dominant lines of inquiry is resolved by Galin Tihanov: cultural studies, group rights and postcolonial analysis on the one hand and comparison of Bakhtin's thought with that of other major intellectuals

on the other. Tihanov argues that putting Bakhtin into dialogue with his contemporaries, specifically two major figures of the Russian Eurasian movement—Nikolai Trubetzkoy, and Petr Savitsky—uncovers Bakhtin's implicit theory of nationalism. It also demonstrates that his thought emerged in a controversial climate of debate over Russia's identity and place in world history. Bakhtin's writings on the novel and on chronotope form the central nodes of comparison with these lesser-known figures, who sought for the logic and key to the dominance of ethno-cultural types.

The third essay, by Simon Dentith, explores the problem of how the epic genre, as understood by Bakhtin—monologic, distanced from the present, about times of high cultural heroism—can survive in novelized, heteroglossic nineteenth-century Britain. Addressing the problem of how one might “forge a diction” which meets the criteria of epic, Dentith looks at the tradition of Homeric translation in nineteenth-century Britain, and he offers a concise reading of William Morris's epic poem, *Sigurd the Volsung*. He approaches the text with an eye to the problem of how the language of the epic might avoid archaism and eccentricity, and speak to a nation, for a nation, across the heteroglossic reality of Victorian England's empire. Dentith finds answers in Newbolt and Kipling, and in a theory of atavism as it is related to ambivalence over the imperialist politics of epic.

Drawing largely on Bakhtin's thinking about the convergence of epic genre and monologic consciousness, Colin Graham offers a theoretical discussion of the symbiosis of epic poetry and nationalism. Pointing to the ability of epic poetry to help readers to “imagine” the nation, Graham asks whether Bakhtin's objection to epic (by contrast to his heavy sponsorship of the novel) should not be surpassed in a postcolonial context, where complexity and hybridity seem ever at odds with community and identification. Graham asks the reader to question sympathies with Bakhtin that would lead one to celebrate the dialogic and also almost automatically to demonize the monologic. The essay carefully makes a case for a reading strategy which values epic and its potential to imagine nation, at a time when the pressures of the postcolonial context make nationalism so problematic, its relationship to empire so paradoxical, and genuinely epic poetry a near impossibility.

Mara Scanlon argues that Derek Walcott's 1990 poem, *Omeros*, and Bakhtin's writing on genre and heteroglossia may be put into a dialogic relationship with one another. This setup reveals *Omeros* as a heteroglossic epic. While Bakhtin's work on language helps us theorize Walcott's narrative tactics, his genre definitions are proven

too restrictive by the example of *Omeros* as an epic defying his conception. After situating Walcott in his relation to a traditional language of epic, namely standard English, and presenting the particular Caribbean contexts of his endeavors, Scanlon explores several examples within *Omeros* which demonstrate that the poem is simultaneously heteroglossic and epic. It cannot be considered merely a novel in verse. In a world experiencing crises of authority and losing once-assumed centers of normalcy, Nobel-prize poet Walcott gives a stunning example of how the epic as genre need not die of these changes: *Omeros* has changed with the tide, and made the ocean its very theme and method.

In the following essay Epifanio San Juan Jr. finds the most important Bakhtinian emphasis in the third party implicated in communicative acts, a "higher superaddressee . . . whose absolutely just understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee)." San Juan Jr. argues that the third party or intermediary participant can shed light on the idea of the nation, and on why nations and nationalism continue to survive despite the standardizing drive of global/transnational capitalism. He asks: "Can 'nation' be a multiaccentual sign?" and delivers tentative answers. In the final third of his essay, San Juan describes the utterances and actions of the Cuban revolution under Castro, and brings forth an example of third-world nationalism as "utterance-becoming-apostrophe" in the Filipino-American War—translating from Tagalog documents of that era which mock American colonialist manifestos. Anti-imperialist militants address a third participant, the insurgent nation/people.

In the seventh essay, Peter Hitchcock begins by situating his essay within a potential conflict between the Derridian critique of phonocentrism, and the concrete exigencies of inscribing the voice and making audible the mode of the gendered production of silence under oppressive structures of power. The context is North African decolonization. Hitchcock employs Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia, dialogism vs. monologism, answerability, and the special place of enunciation of the speaker: bringing these to bear on Assia Djebar's multivocal techniques, to show how this Algerian novelist struggles against the monovocality of a posited Algerian nationhood in the current postcolonial era. He links Bakhtin's questioning of the boundaries of utterance to an implicit interrogation of the reality of national boundaries—given that the enunciation of nation as unitary, contained, takes place across the supposed boundaries while erasing the inconvenient, difference-making boundaries of an utterance.

J. Christopher Bittenbender's essay argues that Scottish writer James Kelman, winner of the Booker Prize for fiction in 1994, explores in his novels the identities of characters who are not self-determined. Their frequent response to external cultural authority is self-censorship, silence. Bakhtin has spoken of censorship in open and guarded ways throughout his work as philosopher, and Bittenbender invokes Bakhtin on laughter as a response to fear in the Rabelais book, and the notions of participatory thinking and the non-alibi in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* as relevant to our explaining the "linguistic laughter" of Kelman's characters. Bakhtin's development of the typically Russian storyteller-speech of *skaz*, especially in the Dostoevsky book, proves to be a splendid analytical tool for describing how dialect-speaking Scottish characters like Kelman's bus conductor Hines either trick or succumb to their inner censors: eventually Hines exhausts the possibilities of inner dialogue and "opts for the unfinished sentence, the absence of words."

The Bakhtinian concept of the "chronotope of the road" is applied to the question of defining Canadian nationhood by Anthony Wall. Through this chronotope he traces the reconfigurations of cultural space which seek to define the "center" of the Canadian "nation"—a highly contentious issue in a country of great cultural and linguistic diversity. He examines political discourse, the history of terms by which "nations" within Canada identify themselves (for example, the cultural nation of the "Québécois"), and how definitions of cultural space and political identities have shifted over time. He suggests that Canada is a rich subject for studying the interaction between centripetal and centrifugal sociocultural and linguistic forces, and that the chronotope helps to describe and understand Canada's struggle for an "impossible" nationhood.

The collection closes with Robert Bennett, who develops a nuanced model of the relationship between national identity and cultural production through Bakhtin's dialogical theory of the novel by conceptualizing national identity as a narrative construction. Bennett takes as a starting point Fredric Jameson's conception of third world literature as a national allegory. He argues that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* exceeds Jameson's model by carnivalizing traditional, monological narratives and, furthermore, challenging the notion of traditional narratives as a unified, collective voice. Through his analysis of Rushdie's novel, Bennett reevaluates the function of novelistic discourse and critically examines the conceptual object of the nation.

In the inevitable selection process, two topics very relevant to nation studies receive less of a showing here than they deserve. The

first concerns the tension between the nation as a cultural-civil community and the forces of globalization. The second, considered in detail in Peter Hitchcock's essay, is the question of gender. It is to be hoped that our single and superb intervention in this arena, regarding gender and nation in the Algerian context, will provide a fulcrum around which other work with Bakhtin on this subject may be conceived and with which it may be compared.

### Nation Studies: A Closer Look

Here we reconsider several ways in which Bakhtin's concepts clarify the discursive building of national identity and by extension the building of the nation. While most of these links emerge from *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* and *The Dialogic Imagination*, our collection shows that the idea of the nation is not limited to these classic texts. We divide these links into three categories: heteroglossia, the utterance, and the question of language as a unified discourse.

1) **Heteroglossia:** For Bakhtin heteroglossia is the basic condition governing the operation of meaning in any one utterance. It is the site where centrifugal and centripetal forces fight for meaning. But in opposition to structuralism, Bakhtin is not interested in determining the site's discursive potential, but in attempting to understand how heteroglossia expresses the conditions governing a sociohistorical moment.

Thus in any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form.<sup>4</sup>

He is aware that without the safety net of heteroglossia a nation runs the risk of permitting the centralization of cultural expressions. Thus, for many, heteroglossia becomes a somewhat idealistic condition, one which guarantees a perpetual production which "guards against the hegemony of any 'single language of truth' or 'official language' in a given society, against ossification and stagnation in thought."<sup>5</sup>

2) **The Utterance:** Bakhtin is helpful when considering how a single speech act is not a product of a single individual, but rather comes from and responds to the language of a community.<sup>6</sup> In order

to understand the emergence of this phenomenon, Bakhtin looks at language's most basic unit, the utterance: "The very problem of the national and the individual in language is basically the problem of the utterance" (*SG*, 63). For example, if one were looking for sites of resistance in either textual representation or historical reality, the countervoice would not only express a single view, but the perspective of other marginal voices. Thus, the history of any one nation could be reread by unearthing the previously covered forces within language: scholars working within the field of postcolonial studies or subaltern studies are currently engaged with these ideas.

3) *The Question of Language as a Unified Discourse: In the Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin challenges the idea of language as unified discourse. For Bakhtin, a national language is not static and uniform; rather it is a historical confrontation between different worldviews striving toward uniformity. In his words: "a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the process of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (*DI*, 271). Thinking along this line, Bakhtin imagines national languages as the result of multiple voices and yet they remain opposed to heteroglossia: "Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical process of linguistic unification and centralization, as expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is . . . opposed to the realities of heteroglossia" (*DI*, 270–71). Bakhtin makes us aware of the centripetal and centrifugal forces that produce friction and in turn give a national language its vitality. As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist conclude, "centrifugal forces compel movement, becoming, and history; they long for change and new life. Centripetal forces urge stasis, resist becoming, abhor history, and desire the seamless quiet of death."<sup>7</sup> The extent to which centripetal forces coincide with nationalizing forces has often meant the success or failure of a national project. We can think, for example, of several instances in history when dialects of an official national language were marginalized, suppressed, or outlawed.

### Bakhtin's Relationship to His Nations

The relationship of Mikhail Bakhtin to the questions of the modern nation begins with his life in the states that governed him and the national conditions under which he wrote. Those states were Russia and later the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. They have

been defined variously and they may be defined without contradiction as empires, federations, republics, united states, even dynasties. But can they be defined as nations? The areas in which Bakhtin lived now lie in Russia proper, Lithuania, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Moravia. Each now stands as a testament to the mutability of national status, the longevity of national sentiment and the elusiveness of definitions that would describe and intone "nation" with stable meaning and identity. Whether the Russian empire or the USSR can share even in that unstable intonation will surely be a problem for future historians and political scientists.

During his lifetime, Bakhtin knew, to different degrees, the nation as a cultural entity, that constantly interpellates its subjects, and as a civil state often invested in excluding particular groups.<sup>8</sup> Under the Russian empire, he had been born into a family of formerly landed nobility. Though the lingering prestige of this former status was undoubtedly waning by his birth in 1895, when his father had to work as a bank manager, such a position carried with it a status of its own. Access to the middle and higher levels of the banking industries of Russia, as in other areas of the world during this same period, gave such men a power that was more or less implicated in the power of the state as well as the power of international capital. Perhaps more importantly in Bakhtin's case, it gave their children entry to areas of empire, such as education, that would be closed to those of lower class and lesser means.

By 1917, such education and familial background had become a potentially lethal liability, no matter one's political leanings. Bakhtin avoided the student and faculty purges that swept through the University of Petrograd in the early 1920s, having graduated in 1918 and moved to Nevel to teach school. But in 1929, just as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* was published, he was relegated in exile to another area of the former and present empire—Kustanaj, Kazakhstan. This time the move was involuntary. He had been charged with active involvement in the Russian Orthodox Church, which had gone underground in the aftermath of the revolution. His friends' connections to the Marxist state proved his good fortune, for he had originally been assigned to a death camp on the Solovetsky Islands. Thus by the middle of the 1930s, Bakhtin's relationship to his "nation" had gone from modest privilege to quiet anonymity to fledgling and fugitive fame to outright denial and hostility. Ironically, access to parts of the state outside Russia proper in his early life had turned into enforced habitation in an area that was simultaneously outside the nation and inside (and under the close surveillance of) the



state. This movement from official inclusion to literal exclusion would have its final pendular swing.

Bakhtin gradually found his way out of exile, teaching in Saransk in 1936 and then laying low in Kimry the following year when rumors of new purges began. He lived near Moscow until just after World War II. Then he returned to Saransk and remained there until 1961. But between 1946 and 1949 came another event in which his relation to the state and the nation of the Soviet Union provokes attention: the defense of his dissertation on *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Bakhtin's reliability was under close scrutiny as he approached the day of the defense by certain of the official opponents who had established themselves as gatekeepers against Western decadence.<sup>9</sup> While those hearing the defense voted unanimously to award the expected degree of Candidate, the vote to recommend the further degree of Doctorate to the higher committee in charge barely passed.<sup>10</sup> However, it is by no means clear that those opposing this unusually rapid second step were all Party loyalists. Those favoring it were apparently his official opponents. The more traditional scholars asked him challenging questions and seem to have requested revisions to an even greater extent than the party hacks whom, as Emerson has noted, he was more successful in deflecting.<sup>11</sup> A commission of experts on Western philology provoked the higher committee to return the dissertation for revision and resubmission, and yet the transformations of the text were determined by the prevailing socialist ideology.<sup>12</sup> So Bakhtin's unusual work was caught between two opposing camps shaped mercilessly by the struggle over the Soviet "nation."

By the late 1950s, Bakhtin had been rediscovered by a generation of scholars newly released from the Terror. This recognition of his importance within the Soviet Union led to the publication of several manuscripts, a "cult" of admiration and tutelage and a new investment of his work in the identity politics and international profits of the Soviet and now Russian nation. Bakhtin's name was invoked in defense of all sides of debates within the Soviet Union about semiotics and structuralism. Some have claimed that these debates were undergirded by Russian nationalism and that Bakhtin was turned into a kind of authorial imperialist—a nation unto himself and then some—in the effort to defend one view or the other.<sup>13</sup>

### The Role of the Nation in the Present Formations of Bakhtin Studies

Bakhtin's return to public prominence in the 1960s leads us to another aspect of his relationship to the nation. It is not concerned

with his own relation to the nations in which he lived, but with the real, apparent or uneven structuring of Bakhtin studies by nations and by how these nationally constructed trajectories are implicated in resolving the outstanding questions raised about that first relation.<sup>14</sup> The dominant trends in the U.S., British, and Russian schools may be characterized as follows: to those adherents of the dominant British trend, the U.S. school seems overly formalist and too adherent to liberal humanism.<sup>15</sup> It neglects the radical Bakhtin for a unified and consistent Bakhtin, thus reinstating the human subject for individualist goals, and it emphasizes a friendly, polite and respectful dialogism over a contesting, oppositional and subversive one. On the other hand, representatives of Russian Bakhtin studies have faulted U.S. Bakhtin studies (as well as others) for using Bakhtin too promiscuously. The argument runs thus: on the one hand, these scholars use his terms with little or no philosophical rigor; on the other, the terms are engaged in the service of social issues that Bakhtin himself did not recognize and which, as they claim, he would not have considered worthy, namely feminist studies, queer theory, and cultural studies.

The vital mediating role of Russian Bakhtin scholars as natives in the philosophically rich language in which Bakhtin wrote and as experts on the social, political, and intellectual background of his writing is unanimously acknowledged.<sup>16</sup> But they also may appear to both U.S. and British scholars as too eager to define, protect, and police the official archives and the authorial intent of an author—Bakhtin—who decisively throws intent into question in some instances, while assuming it in others.

As for the dominant British school, some U.S. Bakhtinians have accused its adherents of appropriating Bakhtin for their own Marxist agenda. Such a move, as thus interpreted, appears to them out of step with Bakhtin's equivocal or hostile relation to Marxism and to Russian scholars a denial of the "failure of Marxism" in the former Soviet Union. Such claims often assume a single Marxism, closely identified with the political regimes in that country rather than acknowledging that a critical Marxist scholarship could have survived even in the orthodox climate of Soviet Marxism. The atrocities of the Soviet state do not necessarily lead to a total shunning of Marxist scholarship and thought among all its victims. But these claims also capture a real problematic in ascribing to any line of Marxist thought a thinker whose relationship to Marxism is inconclusive, or even oppositional.

To characterize the field in this way is, of course, nationally reductive and we should swiftly move in to correct any notion that the

nation in which scholars work determines the relation they will have to Bakhtin. There is a heterogeneity of approaches to his work in all countries, not to mention thriving Bakhtin research going on in Canada, the many nations of Central and South America and the Caribbean, France and Germany, to name just the largest groupings. Using the instance with which we are most familiar, there are many New Left scholars in the United States who work with Bakhtin directly or who rely directly or indirectly on his ideas, as well as many others of nondominant affiliations. Much excellent work has come out of these critical engagements. On the other hand, it is not to be denied that the nation and the political-philosophical tenor of its public sphere influences the shape of Bakhtin studies within a nation, particularly on the basic material level of institutional support and receptive publication venues. (It should equally be noted that on a global level institutional support for Bakhtin and the studies of the humanities in general is far from being at a peak.) This national shaping also changes with time and one's line of sight. Can there be a Soviet Bakhtin now that that nation has broken into several? In what sense can Scottish Bakhtinians be claimed for British Bakhtinology, and has such a claim ever arisen?<sup>17</sup>

In our view the dominant trends, the heterogeneous underbellies and the cross-national alliances of nationally shaped Bakhtin studies signal a certain state of health, though, rather than a state of crisis. It should not be ignored that each of the positions attributed to a particular national dominant represents a philosophically defensible stance with respect to Bakhtin. Such division is not new but normal in the realm of intellectual work. It is in the contestation between these positions, whether heated, moderate, or cool, that new scholars learn to define their allegiances in ways that shift provisional boundaries and to refine their critical terms in ways that undermine national hegemonies and monologisms.

It must also be said that the dominant lines of contestation among these three schools have been marked by some unnecessary staking of oppositional claims. Those who wish to appropriate Bakhtin are set against those who read the genuine Bakhtin. Because of the abuses of Marxist governments, Marxist scholarship has been particularly vulnerable to accusations of appropriation. Those who embrace or make use of Marxist discourses have been associated unfairly with Marxist societies that stifle dialogic openness.

Marxists and non-Marxists alike attempt to appropriate Bakhtin to their particular causes. These causes can significantly affect our interpretation of the subject discussed above: Bakhtin's relation to the USSR, and particularly to its Marxist power centers and philoso-

phers. Did Bakhtin, in fact, espouse a form of critical Marxism despite the pressures of the orthodox state? Our own relation as scholars to our respective nations and their approved political philosophies is likely to shape our response, notwithstanding evidence to the contrary. However, a fine line exists between appropriation of Bakhtin and intellectual argumentation and evidentiary demonstration of his relation to various Marxisms. The definition of what constitutes appropriation and the will-to-appropriate varies internally even in the writings of the most careful scholars. Marxist scholars have by and large been given less credit for moderation and concession in these disputes than they have often earned. It should be remembered that Marxist societies are not the only societies to stifle dialogic openness and not all Marxists are guilty of such silencing.

This collection of essays is not a Marxist collection, though some of the contributors espouse particular lines of Marxism and leftist thought. However, we do stand firm against another dichotomy that may potentially be constructed in international Bakhtin studies. That is the proposed distinction between archival studies in Bakhtin's texts and contexts and applied studies of Bakhtin to historical or contemporary issues. It is related to the perceived need to prioritize Bakhtin studies. In our view as editors, this dichotomy is decidedly false. We see both types of research as needed, valuable, and dialogically necessary to one another. In fact, to say that they are dialogically related implies that they are individuated, and it is not clear in all cases that they are. Much work in Bakhtin can be characterized as both archival and applied, as the discussion above illuminates. We do not defend the notion that search after authorial intent is intellectually invalid in this postmodern era; but we do dispute the rhetorical moves in which scholars interested in an applied Bakhtin, defined as such by those who disavow it, are excluded from the intellectual work of all directions and methodologies. Nevertheless the essays we present in this collection are decisively applied; the extent to which they are also archival or advance archival interests may be judged by the individual reader.

### Conclusion

Perhaps the dominant feature of these articles is how many of them reach back into the past to grapple with up-to-date questions. Whether it is an epiphany about the existence of ancient scripts or retrospection into the pre-Roman European North, it seems that na-

tional projects cannot be invented or vexed without some sort of historical continuity, whether recovered or surviving.

Another significant presence in these articles lies in the function of genre in nationalism. Much contemporary criticism calls attention to the role of the novel in this respect. Though working with the major champion of the novel, many of our contributors took roads less traveled, particularly the roads of epic, speech genres, and political summits. Simon Dentith, Colin Graham, and Mara Scanlon all tackle the problems raised for epic by the intersections of Bakhtin and the nation. Epifanio San Juan Jr. uses Bakhtin's foregrounding of intonation in "The Problem of Speech Genres" to remind us that "nation" and "nationalism" are intoned globally in a variety of ways and that they are not all equally tainted with the intonation that nationalism takes on in a Western European context.

Our contributors also take up questions of power in relation to Bakhtin and the nation. We recognize that the borders of an utterance depend upon the medium of its production and reproduction. Peter Hitchcock asks us to consider carefully what the borders of silence are and who has the right to script them. Dale Peterson carries Bakhtin's Dostoevsky into an African American context to remind us of the circumstances under which we witness or experience the mind as an occupied zone. Simon Dentith uses Bakhtin to illuminate the national past as an arena of contestation rather than uniformly and unquestionably heroic. Similarly, J. Christopher Bittenbender shows how human and economic transnational commerce erects borders between the people who reside within less powerful nations. Finally, Robert Bennett, Galin Tihanov, and Anthony Wall all touch, in one way or another, on the vexing question of ethnicity—or the problems that arise when many nations find themselves together within a single nation, vying for supremacy or recognition.

Another aspect we notice in nearly all our essays was that empire arose from the subject of nation with due persistence. The empires raised as specters or in full corporeal garb in this collection include the ancient Roman and Greek (Dentith), the Spanish (San Juan Jr.), the British (Bennett, Scanlon, Wall), the French (Hitchcock, Wall), and the Ottoman (Hitchcock); the imperialist practices of the United States (Peterson) and the USSR (Peterson, Tihanov) may also be counted here. It would not be too much to add India (Bennett) and Canada (Wall) to this list, inasmuch as both nations have been affected by the forces of empire. Even where no specific empire is an issue (Graham), empire remains a formidable presence.

The study of both nation and empire in contemporary literary criticism tend toward the modern era. However, we can claim that

our collection modestly assembles some prospects for future work that might link the study of ancient, medieval, and lesser-studied empires to the production and frustration of national identities in ways that might implicate the modern era, so often assumed as a break from the past.

THE EDITORS

### Notes

The editors would like to thank Natalia Chan and Joel Farson for their assistance in this project at its earliest stages, and Caryl Emerson for providing a copy of her unpublished conference paper, "The Wondrous Career of Bakhtin's Carnival."

1. The theorists referred to in this paragraph are: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso Books, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For other critical examinations of "nation," see: Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso Books, 1996); Omar Dahbour and Mcheline R. Ishay, eds., *The Nationalism Reader* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995); John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Other texts consulted in the preparation of this introduction were: Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso Books, 1992); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

2. See such works as Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 726–52, and Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System* (London: Prentice Hall, 1995).

3. Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso Books, 1991).

4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 291. Hereafter *DI*, cited in the text.

5. We quote from Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 22.

6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), examines this relationship: "Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere. . . . Each utterance refuses, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, pre-supposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account" (91). Hereafter *SG*, cited in the text.

7. Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 7–8.

8. Michael Holquist, "Introduction," *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxi–xxvi; and Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), xiii–xviii, inform (except where noted) the broad outlines of this biographical sketch; the interpretive claims and conclusions remain ours.

9. Michael Holquist, "Introduction," *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), xx, presents this discussion.

10. Nikolai Panjkov, "Creative History," in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, eds. Carol Adlam, Rachel Falcones, Vitalii Makhlin, and Alastair Renfrew (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 198.

11. Caryl Emerson, "The Wondrous Career of Bakhtin's Carnival: Sacralization, Demonization and Laughter as a Literary Device" (paper presented at the Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, June 1997), 2-4.

12. Panjkov, "Creative History," 198-99.

13. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 103.

14. From our perspective as editors working from the United States, we see most often the debates about Bakhtin between scholars in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia. Therefore, we draw our examples here from those debates. The scope is evidently much wider.

15. The broad outlines of this discussion have been drawn from Craig Brandist, "British Bakhtinology: An Overview," in *Dialogue, Carnival, Chronotope* 10, no. 1 (1995): 161-71; Ken Hirschkop, "A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin," in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 73-80; Gary Saul Morson, "Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social: A Reply to Ken Hirschkop," in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues*, 81-88; and from formal and informal sessions at the Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, June 1997. Specific papers are: Caryl Emerson, "The Wondrous Career of Bakhtin's Carnival: Sacralization, Demonization and Laughter as a Literary Device"; Peter Hitchcock, "Bakhtin/'Bakhtin': The Real, the Relevant and the Reified"; Miha Javornik, "Dialogism and the Internet"; Vitali Makhlin, "Questions and Answers: Bakhtin from the Beginning, at the End of the Century"; Gary Saul Morson, "Bakhtin and Tempics"; Nikolai Panjkov, "A Textological Analysis of the First Version of the Rabelais Book"; Régine Robin, "Bakhtine et le Cyborg"; David Shephard and Craig Brandist, "From Saransk to Cyberspace: Towards an Electronic Edition of the Bakhtin Circle"; Clive Thomson, "Cultural Studies and the Dialogic." All interpretive claims and conclusions are ours.

16. Some U.S. Slavists are aligned with the Russians with respect to this role.

17. For Bakhtinian interpretations of Scottish issues, see Craig Brandist, "British Bakhtinology," 161-71; Alastair Renfrew, "Them and Us? Representation of Speech in Contemporary Scottish Fiction," in *Exploring Bakhtin*, ed. Alastair Renfrew (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 1997); or Donald Wesling, "Scottish Narrative since 1979: Monologism and the Contradictions of a Stateless Nation," in *Scottlands* 4, no. 2 (1997): 81-98.

BUCKNELL REVIEW

# Bakhtin and the Nation



# Underground Notes: Dostoevsky, Bakhtin, and the African American Confessional Novel

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. . . every word smells of the context or contexts in which it has  
lived its socially intense life . . .

—“Discourse in the Novel”

**A**MONG the many controversial matters raised by Mikhail Bakhtin’s lifelong engagement with the sociology of language is the vexed question of whether a sense of nationality is dependent on, or constructed from, socially specific genres of expression. In his seminal study, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin names and celebrates Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novelistic discourse in terms that privilege it as nothing less than Russia’s national narrative voice:

all the elements of novelistic structure in Dostoevsky are profoundly original; all are determined by that new artistic task that only he could pose and solve with the requisite scope and depth: the task of constructing a polyphonic world and destroying the established forms of the fundamentally *monologic* (homophonic) European novel.<sup>1</sup>

The underlying notion here (as in Bakhtin’s brilliant discussion of *Notes from Underground* as an internalized and unresolved polyphonic utterance) is that this newly created non-European form of discourse could only have emerged from a specifically Russian sensibility finely attuned to an inherent national societal condition. And, in fact, a few pages later that claim for the “Russianness” of this internally plural discourse is made: “Here in Russia the contradictory nature of evolving social life, not fitting within the framework of a confident and calmly meditative monologic consciousness, was bound to appear particularly abrupt . . . In this way the objective precondi-

tions were created for the multileveledness and multivoicedness of the polyphonic novel."<sup>2</sup> Whether or not one agrees with Bakhtin's culturally specific attribution of a "dialogic imagination" to Russian national consciousness, the literary history of the Russian novel is intimately attached to the theme of the reflexive or "superfluous" hero whose characteristic mode of expression is a confessional narrative of rich inner ambivalence and irresolution.

Apparently it does sometimes occur that a collective sense of national identity is distilled in a specific expressive form. It has often been noted, for instance, that the tradition of African American writing has its foundation in a specific autobiographical genre, the slave narrative. The invisibility of the race's humanity under condescending American eyes was in part rectified by the capacity of literate black individuals "to tell a free story" about the African American condition.<sup>3</sup> But the full emergence into visibility of a veiled nation within the American nation (of a hidden "intranationality") has required African American writers to turn inward toward a fuller representation of interior discourse. It has been necessary to experiment with a form of utterance that strives to convey a collective sensibility through an invented autobiographical narrative.<sup>4</sup> Modern African American literature, not unlike the Russian literary tradition, has gravitated toward the problematic poetics of a specific and peculiar genre, the "notes" of a native mind or the national confessional novel.

Twice in the present century proclamations of a culturally distinct African American literature have been accompanied by a generous acknowledgment of Russian precedents. What is perhaps even more remarkable than this sensed affinity between modern black and Russian modes of expression is how little the phenomenon has been remarked upon. Clearly, something already shaped in the cultural self-awareness of African Americans prepared them to respond to the call of Russian literary forms once they became available in translation. What W. E. B. Du Bois famously named as the "double consciousness" of the Negro American—"this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, and measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity"—seemed to resonate sympathetically with an analogous "double-voicedness" that could be heard in the words and notes of Russia's best-known authors and composers. Yet the underlying reasons for this attractive force between two geographically remote modern literatures have rarely been investigated. In this essay, I hope to be able to suggest a few reasons for the sense of relatedness that appears to exist in the cultural arts practiced by nineteenth-century

Russians and by American blacks in the twentieth century. Before concluding, I shall attempt to demonstrate that African American writing had independently evolved its own parallel example of the culturally symptomatic confessional monologue well before writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison discovered and emulated Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* in works like "The Man Who Lived Underground" and *Invisible Man*.<sup>5</sup>

The first serious movement to assert the autonomy of African American culture formed a sympathetic alliance with Russian forms of expression. In 1925 Alain Locke issued the manifesto of the modern Black Arts movement, *The New Negro*. At first glance there could not have been a clearer call for the direct expression of a purely native voice: "we have lately had an art that was stiltedly self-conscious, and racially rhetorical rather than racially expressive. Our poets have now stopped speaking for the Negro—they speak as Negroes."<sup>6</sup> Yet this liberating word of the Harlem Renaissance was also uttered with a sideward glance at the prior success of nineteenth-century Russia's "soulful" literature and music. Locke cites the example of Jean Toomer, the author of the brilliant modernist prose-poem, *Cane*: "for vital originality of substance, the young Negro writers dig deep into the racy peasant undersoil of the race life. Jean Toomer writes: 'Georgia opened me . . . There one finds soil, soil in the sense that the Russians know it—the soil that every art and literature that is to live must be imbedded in.'"<sup>7</sup> Here originality of substance (black "soul") is understood to reside in the undersoil of a peasant vernacular culture, the same subcultural layer that Russian artists had so successfully turned into literate rows of print. Similarly, Locke called for the evolution of a new musical idiom that would carry far and wide the strains of Negro spirituals: "their next development will undoubtedly be, like that of the modern Russian folk music, their use in the larger choral forms of the symphonic choir."<sup>8</sup> Here, too, the New Negro art quite openly shares the ambitions of a Russian cultural nationalist like Musorgsky, whose grand operas were intent upon making a resounding and technically distinctive music emerge from the denigrated speech and song of an ancestral folk culture. American Negro artists of the Harlem Renaissance were being encouraged to fashion verbal and musical texts that would achieve a refined synthesis of artistic genres commonly found in the separate and unequal cultures of orality and literacy. The New Negro manifesto was thus as much steeped in the artistic ideology of Slavic nationalism as Dvorak's New World Symphony was grounded in the musical idioms of Negro spirituals.<sup>9</sup>

During the last few decades, a more recent generation of black

intellectuals has brought about a major revision in our culture's perception of what is truly distinctive in African American writing. In a remarkable reassessment of cultural worth, once ignored or marginalized writers like Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison have become prime exhibits in a rearranged display of literary Black Power. To put it bluntly, university-trained readers have shifted the center of gravity of the African American canon away from a sociological literature of protest toward artfully crafted texts that march to a different drummer, performing in public print the sly words and alternative rhythms of black vernacular culture. Once again, however, a powerful assertion of the African American cultural difference has been aided and abetted by a perceived Russian ally.

The manifesto of this revived Black Arts movement is Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s enormously influential study, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988).<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps fairly described as a postmodern version of *The New Negro*; like its predecessor, it makes claims for the cultural particularity of black America that are informed and enabled by a Russian precedent. Significantly, the terminology that Gates employs to express his sense of the African American expressive difference is derived from the linguistic theories and discourse analysis of the Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin. The fundamental premise of Gates's argument is that African American speech has always necessarily been constructed as a "double-voiced" discourse. In a pun that Bakhtin would have appreciated, Gates argues that black folk invented a practice of witty, behind-the-back *signifyin(g)* at the expense of what the master's standard dictionary was *signifying*. In short, the expressive culture of African Americans has always conducted a hidden insubordination and a knowing contestation of the dominant culture's assigned meanings: "Free of the white person's gaze, black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms . . . Whatever is black about black American literature is to be found in this identifiable black Signifyin(g) difference."<sup>11</sup> Read in this light, it became possible to hear the oral undertones and overtones (the "soul music") that literary black artists had smuggled into their published narratives. By this means, a new generation of readers managed to remove the sign of marginality from those African American texts that speak in fanciful indirection, that engage in all manner of verbal play and cross-cultural trickery.

In a long-overdue correction of past critical practices, literary theorists like Gates and Houston Baker Jr. have protested against the reductive reading of black writing as nothing but a protest literature

that dramatizes how each and every Negro is “nothing but a man.” To quote Gates, “Because of this curious valorization of the social and polemical functions of black literature, the structure of the black text has been *repressed* and treated as if it were *transparent*.”<sup>12</sup> What is called for is an end to the tone-deaf and word-blind blotting out and bleaching of African American literature. The new obligation rightly placed upon contemporary readers of these texts is to respect their specific verbal texture and to watch closely for signs of the subversive double entendre—the essence of “the African American expressive difference.” If the thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance had encouraged the “elevation” of spirituals and folktales into hybrid narrative and symphonic forms, the new cultural theorists would seem to be advocating the “decolonization” of high culture by taking over the genres of literacy and complicating their meaning with distinct notes from the underground of vernacular and/or ghetto languages.

There is a further complication, however. As readers of Bakhtin will know, the process of semantic appropriation is never a done deal. The “double-voiced” word is accomplished by “inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation”; by Gates’s own admission, signifyin(g) is a prime instance of what Bakhtin has called “internally polemical discourse”—that is, it indicates a word that is uttered with a side-ward glance at someone else’s hostile word.<sup>13</sup> Inescapably, the psychology of “double consciousness” is thus built into any such act of linguistic subversion. The existence of a wholly “decolonized” or “reaccented” language of “blackness” is complicated by the brute fact that any so-called substandard speech, and especially any ethnically marked discourse, is by definition reactive to the pressure of an outside word, an imposed cultural norm. To acknowledge fully this struggle that is constantly being waged between one’s own and another’s inflection of a word is also to admit the impossibility of a resolved, unitary meaning attached to one’s utterance.<sup>14</sup> The public world of contested meanings is an impure environment, full of polluted words. Bakhtin’s unsentimental view of language as *utterance* always striving to insert its private intention into a prevailing discourse and always taking shape from the anticipated response of an internalized Other derives, of course, from his close reading of Dostoevsky. But I would claim that this “existential” truth about language is also very well understood by those who know from daily experience what it is like to be perceived under a veil, to be named by words other than what one applies to oneself from within. As Du

Bois knew without reading a word of Dostoevsky, under certain hostile bicultural circumstances, "one ever feels his twoness."

In retrospect, the classic literary expression of a peculiarly modern unhappy self-consciousness, of a relentless inner dualism, is unquestionably Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.<sup>15</sup> Over many years, it has meant many conflicting things to many readers: a philosophical tract in defense of human freedom; a case study in existentialist psychology; a satire against scientific determinism; a rogue's progress that exposes to view a pathological irrationalism. But first and foremost, as Bakhtin so sensibly points out, this famous text is, from beginning to end, a speech act of a most unique and peculiar sort. It is a written confessional self-definition in which each of the narrator's confident assertions is directed at an internalized Other and then immediately qualified by "a loophole:" "From the very first sentence, the hero's speech has already begun to cringe and break under the influence of the anticipated words of another with whom the hero . . . enters into the most intense internal polemic."<sup>16</sup> The very form of this utterance is paradoxical; the discourse is exclusively solipsistic and self-directed yet it constantly addresses absent interlocutors. We are in the presence of an odd and inauthentic communicative gesture: the confessional soliloquy. Such an autobiographical act must necessarily be both endless and futile. Why? Because the initial impulse to confess a description of the inner self is motivated by a need for some acknowledgment of an unexpressed identity, and the required confirmation of that previously invisible self cannot be attained in solitude. To be sure, a confessional narrative may arise from motives of pride or shame. The speaker may be seeking either affirmation or compassion, may be struggling to achieve self-justification or self-acceptance. Confession is essentially an imploring of an Other's understanding, but Dostoevsky's pathetic narrator is writing underground notes to himself, beseeching a self-absolution that can never be granted. No wonder, then, that one of the few genuine realizations this compulsive scribbler arrives at is the depressingly late-dawning illumination: "This is no longer literature, but corrective punishment."<sup>17</sup>

But of course *Notes from Underground* is literature because the closeted diary-writer has been placed on public display by the actual author, Fyodor Dostoevsky. In the signed footnote that greets readers of the first page of his invented narrative, Dostoevsky tells us: "Such persons as the composer of these *Notes* not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed." Despite the fact that the Underground Man constantly writes to assert his autonomy, and

his belief (for better or worse) in his rebellious individuality, he is presented to us as a socially constructed phenomenon. Thus, what Dostoevsky has framed for exhibit is a *symptomatic* antiheroic personality whose every unique word embodies a social pathology. The linguistic and grammatical quirks so brilliantly outlined in Bakhtin's discourse analysis are themselves placed within a larger frame of social reference that accounts for the narrator's representative act of evasive confessional self-definition. As we read Dostoevsky's excruciating transcript of a mind that experiences itself as an occupied zone, we begin to suspect that the underground man is, as Joseph Frank has so aptly put it, a "parodistic persona" whose convoluted autobiography "exemplifies the tragi-comic impasses resulting from the effects of [outside] influences on the Russian national psyche."<sup>18</sup> This sense that Dostoevsky's fictional confession is actually exhibiting a Russian variant of a widely shared modern self-consciousness has riveted the attention of English-speaking readers (and writers) ever since Constance Garnett's popular translation became available in the early 1920s.

Dostoevsky's unhappy citizen of Petersburg, that "most abstract and intentional city on earth," is forever measuring his dwarfed self-esteem against the grandiose architecture and terrible symmetries of a European mentality that distorts and obscures his given nature. In the *Notes* themselves, we watch an unsuccessful and unpersuasive rebellion against two internalized images of man that have plagued the narrator from his youth well into middle age. In the first part of the Petersburg diary we overhear a tirade of self-justifying "philosophizing" against the smug calculations of a Western rationalism that defines mental maturity as "enlightened self-interest." But this prolonged argument with utilitarian measurements of reasonable conduct is finally a defensive screen erected to hide a deeper-laden insecurity about measuring up to certain other imported Western notions, particularly the seductive literary models of Romantic heroism and willed self-transcendence. As Slavic scholars of Dostoevsky have pointed out, the underground man is conducting a bitter critique of two sharply contrasting Western ideologies that had attracted Russian thinkers in Dostoevsky's lifetime.<sup>19</sup> First, a withering irony is directed at scientific materialism's utopian systems of rational behavior modification, then bitter mockery is hurled at the sublime egotism promoted by the poetry and prose of literary Romanticism. The voice from the Russian underground launches a powerful double attack against imported Western theorems that human nature can be shaped by a "rational egoism" or an "egoistic altruism." But Dostoevsky also saw fit to entangle this sincere protest in the

twisted coils of an unattractive and pathetic personality. As the narrator rightly suggests at the delicate moment when he turns from the philosophical and anthropological arguments of part one to the intimate biographical details of part two: "There is, incidentally, a whole psychology in all this."<sup>20</sup>

It can be called, for the sake of brevity, the psychology of postcolonial resentment. More than anything else, the humiliated pride of the underground man rages against his frustrated attempt to demonstrate that he is self-determined, that his identity is willed and autonomous. As Bakhtin's close attention to the language of underground discourse shows: "The work does not contain a single word gravitating exclusively toward itself and its referential object; there is not a single monologic word . . . precisely in this act of anticipating the other's response and in responding to it he again demonstrates to the other (and to himself) his own dependence on this other."<sup>21</sup> This endless campaign to refute any and all imagined rejoinders to his self-assertive monologue results in a compulsive irrationalism that is as far from an assertion of human freedom as "whim" or "spite" (two of his favorite reasons for acting) are demonstrations of free choice.<sup>22</sup> The underground man settles protectively into his own solipsistic mousehole because he cannot bear to expose to public view evidence of that swarm of "contrary elements" within him that demands to be acknowledged as his "living life." The character who foolishly imagines that his free will can be demonstrated by desperate rejections of all conceivable self-characterizations is the same character who foolishly thinks he displays his indifference to others by stamping his feet as he parades his turned back on those who spurn him. Most pathetic of all, the underground character feels shame and hostility even in the presence of the genuine empathy extended to him by the humiliated prostitute Liza, who is capable of accepting and understanding the inner contradictions of a suffering self-consciousness. Dostoevsky's underground notes express the interminable misery of one who forever feels his twoness and yet refuses to accept the divided consciousness which he culturally inhabits. Paradoxically, we witness the spectacle of a mind that is embarrassed and ashamed of its own complex mentality.

Something very much like Dostoevsky's culturally symptomatic display of a self-canceling confessional narrative emerged out of African American writing in 1912. In that year, a curious document entitled *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* first appeared.<sup>23</sup> Written anonymously, the text's title hinted appealingly at a dark mystery made transparent and a preface issued by the publishers promised that the work would live up to its titillating title: "In these pages it is



as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, is initiated into the 'freemasonry,' as it were, of the race." Making an obvious allusion to Du Bois's more impassioned and opaque *Souls of Black Folk*, the publishers were offering their readers quite a different book—a "dispassionate" narrative that would make "no special plea for the Negro" while helpfully unriddling the sphinxlike thoughts of Negroes in relation to each other and to the whites. Yet the same book was also lauded for not treating "the coloured American as a *whole*" and for offering instead a "composite and proportionate presentation" of all the various groups of Negroes. The advertising underlined something tricky about this apparently straightforward book—it purported to unveil both "Negroness" and the true multiplicity of Negroes. As things turned out, the book had even more surprises in store than its first readers could have suspected.

When Alfred A. Knopf published the second edition of the *Autobiography* in 1927 at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, the reading public learned that the original document was actually a novel, the fictionalized confession of a racial antihero. Its true author was the young multitalented lawyer, diplomat, and songwriter, James Weldon Johnson, who was himself taking on the colors of a "chameleon" who had chosen to pass for white. The text is, in fact, a complex act of subtle duplicity throughout, since both the fictional narrator and the actual author are in different ways and for different reasons passing for what they are not.<sup>24</sup> Both Johnson and his nameless protagonist know what it is to be a cross-over artist, but only one of them can truly be said to have repudiated his color.

Although the bland surface of the ex-colored man's prose is wholly unlike the agitated scribblings of the underground man, Johnson is, like Dostoevsky, practising a double-voiced narrative irony that exposes the moral failure of an antihero in the very form of his speech. *The Autobiography of an ex-Colored Man* is written in a deliberately evasive, "colorless" prose that is designed to deflect attention from startling contradictions and shifts of attitude.<sup>25</sup> The first two paragraphs of Johnson's novel serve, in fact, as fair warning that the narrator is "divulging the great secret" of his life without quite understanding or caring to understand his motives in doing so. He says he may be led by the impulse of "the un-found-out criminal to take somebody into his confidence" even though that act is likely to lead to his undoing. Then again, this urge to confess might simply express the thrill of exposing his transgression in public. Is the primary motive unconscious penitence or a perverse pride in personal bravado? At the start of the confession, we have all the po-

tential complexity of a Raskolnikov, but without his mental energy or inclination to be introspective—"back of it all, I think I find a sort of savage and diabolical desire to gather up all the little tragedies of my life, and turn them into a practical joke on society. And, too, I suffer a vague feeling of unsatisfaction, of regret, of almost remorse, from which I am seeking relief."<sup>26</sup> This trailing off into unexamined or ignored ambiguities becomes the true signature of the studiously faceless narrator who settles for a protective imprecision rather than revealing his true colors. But Johnson cleverly sees to it that his narrator's prose quietly displays what it is he chooses not to see, what it is he identifies with, but disowns.

Much as Dostoevsky managed both to impersonate and undermine the voice he heard emanating from Russia's underground self-consciousness, Johnson dons the mask of his ex-colored man in order to tell a double-voiced tale in which he can signify upon the career of a self-betraying Negro American artist. Basically, we eavesdrop on the rationalizations uttered by a fair-skinned African American who has chosen to pursue the path of a colorless self-interest by passing for white and by denigrating or denying his visceral attachment to colored culture. As Eric Sundquist has shrewdly remarked, James Weldon Johnson is "ragging" on a failed double of himself, narrating the story of a biracial composer who has sold himself short and given up on negotiating between two oppositional cultural worlds.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Johnson's own composition, like ragtime music, maintains two syncopated textual lines alluding to a "rags to riches" American story and to buried black subtexts, both of which are contained within a standard picaresque narrative form.<sup>28</sup> Johnson's performance thus becomes emblematic of a hybrid artistry that demands a nuanced hearing of its own unique voice.

Johnson's "colored" narrator is the product of a hidden biracial connection. In his childhood, he was carefully taught by his kept and well-kept middle-class Negro mother to identify with the white patriarch behind the scenes who sponsors, yet disclaims him. It is tempting to view Johnson's protagonist as an ironic representation of the "progressive" Negro elite in post-Reconstruction America; he proudly wears around his neck a hollowed-out gold piece given him by his absentee white father. It insidiously suggests the yoke of his collusion with neoslavery, his acceptance of a false worth offered by white patronage. Yet Johnson's white-identified narrator also imbibes from his Southern mother's improvised songs a cultural blackness which he forever associates with his "natural" expressive genius: "I used to stand by her side and often interrupt and annoy her by chiming in with strange harmonies . . . I remember I had a partic-

ular fondness for the black keys.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout his many travels and chameleonic shifts of attitude toward the lower-class blacks he encounters, Johnson’s narrator cannot repress his visceral response to vernacular black culture. Significantly, his prose only becomes colorful when it conveys in supple sentences the highly original, bicultural artistry of African Americans dancing the cake-walk, playing ragtime, preaching their improvised sermons, and performing gospel music. Equally significantly, the final chord in the narrator’s movement toward self-betrayal occurs at a piano. He pledges his love to a classic white beauty at a “progressive card party” by “involuntarily closing” Chopin’s thirteenth nocturne on a major triad instead of the minor chord it requires.<sup>30</sup> In a futile attempt to resolve a complex internal tension, he strikes a fraudulent final harmony, “thus silencing the minor key of his black life” and the music of his black soul.<sup>31</sup>

Ironically, just before Johnson’s pale-skinned coward finally resolves to become an ex-colored man, he had been attempting, like Johnson himself, to be a successful cross-over artist mediating between mainstream tastes and the black arts. The crucial difference, however, between a genuine African American artist like Johnson and his false double is revealed in the advice the narrator chooses to give black people in the paragraph that precedes his description of the lynching that drives him in terror and shame from identifying with blackness: “In many instances a slight exercise of the sense of humor would save much anxiety of soul . . . If the mass of Negroes took their present and future as seriously as do most of their leaders, the race would be in no mental condition to sustain the terrible pressure which it undergoes; it would sink of its own weight.”<sup>32</sup> This attitude is perfectly consistent with the internalized condescension toward black expressiveness that has trivialized the artistic talent demonstrated by Johnson’s narrator. As a performance artist, our narrator’s greatest success is achieved by playing Mendelssohn’s Wedding March in ragtime; as a racial politician, his best advice to American blacks is that they, in effect, “lighten up.” In the hierarchy of values replicated in the bleached and bland language of the ex-colored man, a black cultural identity needs to be underplayed or, if expressed, only allowed to perform entertaining variations on white themes and melodies.

An extensive critical literature has been produced in the effort to define the precise degree and direction of the irony present in the evasive sentences and strange nonsequiturs that characterize Johnson’s narrator.<sup>33</sup> Some readers detect a consistent authorial ironizing at the expense of the narrator’s reliability; others protest that

the naive narrator is, ironically, often a rather reliable index to the internalized class and racial conflicts in American society. The interpretive difficulty is much like what faces the reader of *Notes from Underground*: how are we to understand a patently antiheroic protagonist who often voices opinions we think we recognize as the author's, but within a large-scale narrative riddled with contradictions and corrosive ironies? Good readers will understand, whether they have read Bakhtin or not, that Johnson and Dostoevsky are writing sentences that bear double messages, that speak for the narrator and the author in a tricky hidden dialogue. The narrative as a whole belongs to the genre of parody, but of a complex type in which an unresolved contest of implications replaces a simple undermining of any one character or style of expression.<sup>34</sup> The total speech act demonstrates a truth about cultural identity that cannot be summarized in simple dualisms (either/or) or crude ironies (this, not that). Looked at in this Bakhtinian manner, the discourse of Dostoevsky's underground man articulates a complex subjectivity that experiences itself both as a cultural construct and as a moral agent. Similarly, the ex-colored man's confession offers testimony to the difficult truth that he is not essentially either black or white, though he at various moments passes for one or the other. James Weldon Johnson composed *The Autobiography of an ex-Colored Man* in a "double-voiced discourse" that insinuates the indelible seriousness of an African American expressive tradition whose hybrid forms of speech and music speak for a substantial and sophisticated culture that has been denigrated but cannot be denied.

Independent of English translations of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, and well in advance of Bakhtin's discourse analysis, African American writing had generated an indigenous literary form that closely intersected with the Russian genre of the culturally symptomatic confessional monologue. Perhaps it should not seem too surprising that "double-voiced" narratives emerged from the midst of two different nationalities which were both similarly entangled in an inextricably dual identity that was partly Western and partly not.

What finally makes Dostoevsky's underground man and Johnson's ex-colored man pathetic and pathological examples of an antiheroic self-betrayal is quite simply their shared inability to accept and creatively affirm their internalized biculturalism. In an earlier draft of Johnson's novel, the last (and perhaps too conclusive) line was: "I know now that the very soul-trying ordeals that I have avoided would have brought out of me all the best that was in me."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the author of the miserable underground man was able to celebrate

Pushkin as Russia's national genius precisely because the poet had discovered an artistic shape and a fascinating beauty in the anguish of his hero Onegin's divided identity: "with surprise and veneration and, on the other hand, almost with a touch of derision, we first began to understand what it meant to be a Russian . . . all this happened only when we began to be properly conscious of ourselves as Europeans and realized that we too had to enter into the universal life of mankind."<sup>86</sup> Dostoevsky and James Weldon Johnson were the first writers in their cultures with the courage to make audible the ruminations of a symptomatic postcolonial double-mindedness. After them, much of the best Russian and African American writing has continued to emerge from "soul-trying ordeals" that affirm the pain of divided minds being stretched to accommodate the birth of a cultural hybridity, a multiple culturedness that more and more is becoming the measure of our common humanity. To paraphrase the conclusion of Ralph Ellison's famous novel that so successfully merged Russian and black underground notes: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, they speak for us?"

### Notes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 8.
2. *Ibid.*, 20.
3. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
4. See Richard Yarborough, "The First-Person in Afro-American Fiction," in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Patricia Redmond (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 105-21 for a stimulating discussion of the delayed, but powerful, turn toward fictionalized autobiographies in the twentieth-century tradition of African American prose. He speculates that an apt representation of the psychological tensions inherent in African American experience was repressed by the historic necessity for "true" accounts of self-liberation by ex-slave narrators. Ultimately, though, the need for truth-telling representations of the complex consciousness and self-masking of an African American persona became the cultural task of black writers, especially in what was ostensibly the land of the free.
5. The profound imaginative and formal impact of Dostoevsky's writing on the major works of Ellison and Wright has long been evident. For recent summaries of this well-documented connection, see Joseph Frank, "Ralph Ellison and Dostoevsky" in *Through the Russian Prism: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 34-48 and Dale E. Peterson, "Richard Wright's Long Journey from Gorky to Dostoevsky," *African American Review* 28 (Fall 1994): 375-88.
6. Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Boni, 1925), 48.
7. *Ibid.*, 51.
8. *Ibid.*, 202.
9. Dvorak's example as composer and propagandist of classical musical forms created

from native folk melodies exercised enormous influence in the "New World" and among "New Negroes." See, for instance, his *Harper's Magazine* article, "Music in America," of February 1895, reprinted in *The Negro and His Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 263-73.

10. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

11. *Ibid.*, xxiv.

12. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 6.

13. *Ibid.*, 110-11.

14. A more extended version of this critique of prevalent (mis)readings of Bakhtin's discourse analysis, particularly of the notion that "reaccenting" is itself a sign of emancipation and empowerment rather than a necessarily unstable and incomplete attempt to expropriate verbal meaning, may be found in Dale E. Peterson, "Response and Call: The African American Dialogue with Bakhtin," *American Literature* 65 (December 1993): 761-74. For a similar, even more elaborate criticism of contemporary attempts to invoke Bakhtin's "double-voicedness" as a triumphant inflection of Du Boisian "double consciousness" that equalizes power relations through racial self-expression, see Dorothy J. Hale, "Bakhtin in African American Literary Theory," *English Literary History* 61 (1994): 445-71. I disagree, however, with Hale's assumption that Bakhtin's notion of "voice" functions to elide "the paralyzing dualisms that plague philosophical accounts of subjectivity" (445). Even where Bakhtin speaks of attempts to "appropriate" a word, he is fully aware that language is a living socio-ideological phenomenon and that "the word in language is half someone else's." In Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.

15. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).

16. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 227-28.

17. Dostoevsky, *Notes*, 151. Here, as elsewhere, I have consulted the Russian text in volume 4 of the 1956 Moscow edition of Dostoevsky's collected works. In Russian, the narrator's revelation is especially telling: *ne literatura, a ispravitel'noe nakazanie* underlines his unwelcome discovery that the very attempt to invent a shapely narrative of the autonomous self has proven to be an involuntary exercise in moral discipline.

18. Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, 3 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3:314.

19. Joseph Frank's chapter on *Notes from Underground* in his definitive biography of Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, 3:310-47 is unsurpassed as a reading of the polemics of the narrator and as a guide to the ideological contexts which inform them. Some additional detailed information on the literary and polemical contexts, plus a chapter-by-chapter commentary on the unfolding argument and plot of *Notes*, is usefully provided by Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993).

20. Dostoevsky, *Notes*, 46.

21. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 229.

22. The underground man's tirade against utilitarian and deterministic theories of human conduct reaches its self-defeating climax at the end of chapter 7 when he claims that everywhere and always man's "most advantageous advantage" is his *need* for his own independent volition. Thus, the claim that the "free" personality is not to be denied rests upon arguments that ironically locate autonomy in a compulsive obedience to "whim" [*prikhot'*, *kapriz*] or "spite" [*zlost'*], terms which signify uncontrolled and/or reactive behavior.

23. James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

24. To compound the levels of deliberate deception operating in this "double-voiced" text,

Johnson himself dictated almost verbatim the language of the preface signed by "THE PUBLISHERS," thus miming and exposing the desires of white outsiders peering in on his invented exemplary Negro's life. Consult Donald C. Goellnicht, "Passing as Autobiography: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," in *African American Review* 30 (Spring 1996): 17-34 for this revelation, along with a superb interpretation of the preface's ironies when it is read as Johnson's performance in white face.

25. Howard Faulkner, "James Weldon Johnson's Portrait of the Artist as Invisible Man," *Black American Literature Forum* 19 (Winter 1985): 147-51 and Valerie Ann Smith, *The Singer in One's Soul: Storytelling in the Fiction of James Weldon Johnson, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1985) are two critics who pay particular attention to how the style of expression adopted by the narrator manifests a "structured pattern of defensiveness and evasion." For an earlier Adlerian reading of the narrative manner's display of neurotic "avoidance behaviors," see Marvin P. Garrett, "Early Recollections and Structural Irony in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *Critique* 13 (Summer 1971): 5-14.

26. Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3.

27. Eric J. Sundquist, *The Hammers of Creation: Folk Culture in Modern African-American Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).

28. Superficially, the autobiography passes for an American success story, although it is also a rogue's progress purchased at the price of racial disguise. The narrative itself is constructed with frequent ironic variations on specific motifs from African American slave narratives (see Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979]) and observes the structural features of the Spanish picaresco's journey through the strata of society, a tradition the bilingual Johnson knew well (see Simone Vauthier, "The Interplay of Narrative Modes in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 18 [1973]: 173-81).

29. Johnson, *Autobiography*, 5.

30. *Ibid.*, 208-9.

31. Sundquist, *Hammers of Creation*, 45.

32. Johnson, *Autobiography*, 183.

33. Beginning with Robert E. Fleming, "Irony as a Key to Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *American Literature* 43 (1971): 83-96, there has been a spate of articles correcting naive readings of Johnson's novel as a trustworthy, "dispassionate" reflection of the author's stance on race relations. But most of them present the novel's irony in starkly black or white terms. Either the protagonist is truly a failed black masquerading as a successful white, or he is a mulatto nonentity trapped by white values. See Stephen M. Ross, "Audience and Irony in Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *CLA Journal* 18 (1974): 198-210. Joseph T. Skerrett Jr., "Irony and Symbolic Action in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *American Quarterly* 32 (1980): 540-58 presents a sophisticated biographical reading of the irony, identifying the narrator as an exorcized alter ego of the light-skinned Johnson. To their credit, Maurice O'Sullivan Jr., "Of Souls and Pottage: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *CLA Journal* 23, no. 1 (1979): 60-70, Faulkner, "James Weldon Johnson's Portrait of the Artist," and Roxanna Pisiak, "Irony and Subversion in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *Studies in American Fiction* 21 (Spring 1993): 83-96 approach the text as the ironic story of the self-effacement of an African American who is truly a dual self.

34. Goellnicht, "Passing as Autobiography," invokes Bakhtin's concept of "parodic stylization" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic*, 363-64) to good effect. He offers an impressive reading of Johnson's intertextual references to prior slave narratives as "a two-way conversation between texts that interrogate one another," the notion being that the narrator's unwitting revisions of African

American autobiographical motifs function as a double-edged irony, exposing both the original version and the deviation to a mutually subversive critique.

35. See Skerrett, "Irony and Symbolic Action," 557.

36. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Occasional Writings*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Random House, 1963), 146.



# Cultural Emancipation and the Novelistic: Trubetzkoy, Savitsky, Bakhtin

Galin Tihanov

**A**PPROPRIATING and interpreting Bakhtin has over the last two decades been a business more willing to inscribe him in current debates than to contextualize his thought in its historical ambience. The latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s saw the rise of two different approaches to Bakhtin, one of them seeking to apply his ideas to the urgent agendas of cultural studies, group rights, and postcolonial analysis, the other one concerned to attain a better grasp of his thought by extensive comparison with other representative figures of the century. It is only since the mid-1990s that his writings have been actively placed in the vital contexts of his own intellectual formation. In this study I would like to read Bakhtin's essays on the novel and his key concepts of cultural heteroglossia and chronotope as an implicit response and an alternative to some of the most significant texts of Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938)<sup>1</sup> and Petr Savitsky (1895–1965), the central figures of the Russian Eurasian movement. I want to suggest that Bakhtin's thought has emerged out of an atmosphere of growing concern with problems of cultural relativity and emancipation and that his writings of the 1930s reflected a strong belief found widely in various fields of scholarship that the principles of locality and temporality have to be synthesized in every act of theorizing culture.

## The Eurasian Movement and Bakhtin

Bakhtin seems to have remained largely silent on matters of foreignness and nationalism throughout his work. He never left Russia in his life, but there is evidence that he has stated otherwise on occasion. In 1920, for example, he submitted a curriculum vitae in which he claimed two years of university studies in Marburg and Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Having been raised in the cosmopolitan traditions of sound re-

search without national boundaries, he retained throughout his life a respectful attitude toward scholarship produced abroad. Against this background, an episode narrated in the memoirs of Vadim Kozhinov, one of the main figures responsible for (re)discovering Bakhtin in Russia in the early 1960s, appears to be particularly striking. Kozhinov describes Bakhtin as a scholar whom the foreign translations of his own work “did not touch at all.” This harmless feature is supplemented by Kozhinov’s surmise that “obviously, Bakhtin did not like meeting foreigners.”<sup>3</sup> Introduced by the Russian *mezhdubroshim* [by the way], this conclusion is meant to sound as if it were no more than a marginal detail. Yet in the context of the whole a recognizable rhetoric of logical unavoidability and ‘obviousness’ asserts itself. In addition, and as an example, Kozhinov narrates the story of Bakhtin’s cool-blooded escape from Roman Jakobson’s ever more insistent attempts to meet him in Moscow. Bakhtin’s inventiveness in avoiding the encounter is so extraordinary that one is left with the suspicion that the story might be a figment rather than a real episode. Jakobson being an émigré and a Jew at the same time should have sufficed to make him in Kozhinov’s eyes the perfect target for Bakhtin’s alleged xenophobia. Curiously, in his talks with Duvakin Bakhtin himself mentions Kozhinov as a neoslavophile and seeks to correct his interviewer’s notion of Kozhinov as an anti-Semite.<sup>4</sup> One should clearly read this anecdote with some caution and alertness to the ways Bakhtin’s life and work can be utilized to promote implicit ideological messages.

If we cannot state for sure whether Bakhtin liked to meet foreigners or not, even less encouraging are bound to appear the attempts to establish any direct connection between him and the Eurasian movement. One reliable trace is the presence of Bakhtin in Nikolai Trubetzkoy’s work on Russian literature, albeit well after the movement had reached its acme. Trubetzkoy, one of the founders and most active figures of the movement, knew Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky of 1929 and in a study of *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment* written in the 1930s as a part of his course on Dostoevsky at Vienna University he drew approvingly on Bakhtin’s ideas of the polyphonic novel.<sup>5</sup> Again in the 1930s, G. Florovsky, who was initially a participant in the movement, but soon after that became one of his most intelligent critics, referred to Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky book in the first edition (1937) of his *Puti russkogo bogosloviya*. Trubetzkoy was informed also about Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* by Roman Jakobson, who praised the book in a letter to him.<sup>6</sup> Trubetzkoy’s reply of 1 May 1929, however, suggests unambiguously that he had not read the book.<sup>7</sup> Also Medvedev’s *The Formal Method*

in *Literary Scholarship* attracted the attention of one of the less known adherents of the Eurasian movement at the time when it was already divided. In 1929, Emiliya Litauer (1902–1941) published a review of Medvedev's work in the weekly *Eurasia*,<sup>8</sup> emphasizing both the usefulness of Medvedev's criticism of formalism and the fact that Medvedev failed to appreciate the new positive trends within the Formalist school which were leading toward a better understanding of and support for the "stylistics of production" in Russian culture. The rest of the Bakhtin circle's work was published too late to be known among the Eurasians. The movement evolved in emigration from 1920–1921 onwards and although its painful demise was protracted until 1938, by 1929 it was already fatally split.<sup>9</sup> It is even less likely that Bakhtin might have read anything by the Eurasians, although the movement was not unknown in Russia in the 1920s, the time when Bakhtin was still active at large before being sent into exile to Kazakhstan.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1921 the influential journal *Pechat' i revolyutsiya* (Press and revolution) published information about the movement,<sup>11</sup> which had gradually become the target of serious work on the part of the secret services which strove to destroy it from within.<sup>12</sup> As part of these efforts, they organized in Moscow an Eurasian congress in which Savitsky, one of the main ideologists of the Eurasians, took part.<sup>13</sup> We also know for certain that Trubetzkoy's collection of Eurasian articles *On the Problem of Russian Self-Knowledge*<sup>14</sup> was read in Russia soon after its publication by the prominent linguists Durnovo,<sup>15</sup> Shcherba, and Vinogradov.<sup>16</sup> The evidence of the availability of information about the movement in the Soviet Union should not be overrated though. As Trubetzkoy himself stated, for example, only "a few copies" of his other important book, *Europe and Mankind*, ever entered Russia.<sup>17</sup> The impossibility of confirming the hypothesis of Bakhtin's knowledge of any of the movement's publications motivates, then, the more prudent choice of considering Bakhtin's ideas of the novel and the Eurasians' ideas of national identity as parallel and largely coterminous series, each of which can provide a framework for elucidating and problematizing the other.

### Europe, Mankind, and the Dialogue of Cultures

The founding text of the Eurasian movement is Nikolai Trubetzkoy's book *Europe and Mankind*, published in 1920 in Sofia.<sup>18</sup> The book preceded the appearance in 1921, again in Sofia, of the first volume of the movement entitled suggestively enough *Exodus to the*

*East. Forebodings and Accomplishments: The Self-Assertion of the Eurasians.*<sup>19</sup> Trubetzkoy did not mention the term *Eurasia* in his slender book at all, but it nevertheless laid the ideological groundwork of the movement, for it succeeded in outlining forcefully some of the central points of what was to become the cultural doctrine of the Eurasians.

At bottom, Trubetzkoy's book is, if anything, a theory of nationalism. The urgency of its formulation made itself acutely felt in the time of political and cultural crisis after the Revolution of 1917 and the end of World War I. Yet Trubetzkoy's doctrine had a long intellectual prehistory. In a letter to Jakobson of 7 March 1921 he wrote that the book was conceived as early as 1909–1910 as a first part "of the trilogy *A Justification of Nationalism*" (*LN*, 12). Its roots, however, go even further back to impulses originating in Danilevsky's *Russia and the West* (1871) which declared concepts such as "humankind" or "universal civilization" to be no more than idle talk. "Universal civilization does and cannot exist" insisted Danilevsky;<sup>20</sup> even the sheer wish to establish such a civilization is malign, because it aims at the promotion of colorlessness and barrenness. Instead, he argued, "the natural system of history should rest on the differentiation between the cultural-historical types of development as the main foundation of this system's division, on the one hand, and the degrees of development, on the other" (*RE*, 73). It is not history as a whole that advances through the various stages of evolution, but only the particular cultural types. We cannot compare one type with another, Danilevsky submits; comparisons can only be meaningful if they refer to the different points along the path followed by the same type.

Danilevsky lists ten cultural-historical types which have enjoyed domination in chronological sequence, the latest of them being the so-called Germano-Romanic or European type (*RE*, 74). Russia is not even present in this list. The Slavic type, which should coalesce around it, is posited by Danilevsky as a task for the future (*RE*, 105). Russians and the other Slavic peoples have yet to prove that they are not merely a "tribe of the Aryan race" but a potential (and potent) cultural-historical type. At present, however, the dominant type is the Germano-Romanic one. Its mastery leads to the representative substitution of the accomplishments of the Germano-Romanic civilization for the whole of the European cultural wealth (*RE*, 97). Another unfair step is the identification of European civilization with the civilization of the world. The European (Germano-Romanic) type, Danilevsky protests, is only one of the many discrete forms of civilization which will inevitably recede into the background of his-

tory when Russia's star rises. Logically, then, Germano-Romanic Europe cannot be a friend of Russia, and Russia should not seek to imitate Europe. One of the five ambitious laws, which Danilevsky formulates in order to reveal the mechanisms governing the development of the cultural-historical types, sets rigid limitations to the attempts of cultural interaction: "The principles of the civilization of one cultural-historical type cannot be transmitted to the peoples of another type. Every type works out these principles for itself under the greater or lesser influence of foreign—preceding or coterminous—civilizations" (*RE*, 77). Danilevsky discusses at length the opportunities for cultural exchange between civilizations only to conclude that they are rather limited. Colonization is for him a more feasible way for cultural interaction, and he seems to assert it as a more reliable practice that would be more likely to attain what the patient process of "grafting" fails to achieve (*RE*, 84).

Both Trubetzkoy and Savitsky take for granted Danilevsky's fragmentation of history into relatively insulated cultural types. Trubetzkoy inherits from Danilevsky the idea of the unconditional domination of the Romano-Germanic type and its elevation to a core of the European civilization. He also retains Danilevsky's mistrust in and indignation at the substitution of the European civilization for human civilization in general. European cosmopolitanism is no longer considered a noble humanitarian idea but rather an insidious instrument for the imposition of well defined national values. In *evaluating European cosmopolitanism*, Trubetzkoy warns, "one must always remember that terms such as 'humanity,' 'universal human civilization,' and so forth, are extremely imprecise and that they mask very definite ethnographic concepts."<sup>21</sup> He concludes that the concept of cosmopolitanism conceals the fact that European culture is the product of the history of a specific ethnic group—the Romano-Germanic—and is designed to conceal its egocentricity and chauvinism (*LGK*, 13).

Against the background of Danilevsky's writings Trubetzkoy's arguments do not appear very surprising. There is, however, a crucial difference. Danilevsky imagines history as a string of flourishing and fading cultural types each of which supplants its predecessors. For him, the question of the co-existence of different types is not so vital; he assigns Russia and the other Slavic peoples a place in the *future* history of the world, rather than in the ongoing struggles for cultural and political domination. Unlike him, Trubetzkoy is concerned to inscribe Russia (although its name is only very seldom directly mentioned) in the synchrony of the extant tensions following the end of World War I. Essential for him are the relations between

the Romano-Germanic type (Europe) and the rest of the world in the wake of the upheavals caused by the latest events.

Trubetzkoy seeks to overturn the domination of the Romano-Germanic type by championing stubbornly the idea of cultural relativism. If we assume for a moment that humanity consists of Europeans and "savages" (a view attributed to the "Romano-Germanic scholars"), we have eventually to realize that "savages" are not lower in development than Europeans, but that "their culture is not developing in the same direction." Europeans and "savages," Trubetzkoy insists,

differ fundamentally from one another in the basic patterns of their everyday lives and in the psychology produced by these patterns. Since the psychology and culture of "savages" have almost nothing in common with the psychology and culture of Europeans, complete assimilation of these alien spiritual and material patterns is impossible for both sides. Because this impossibility is mutual—it is as difficult for a European to become a "savage" as it is for a "savage" to become a European—one cannot reach any conclusions here about who is higher and who is lower in development. (*LGK*, 21)

Two points deserve to be made here. Firstly, put in the perspective of the prevailing philosophical paradigms in Europe in the first quarter of the century, Trubetzkoy's argument sounds slightly old-fashioned. Not because of its loyalty to Danilevsky's law of untransmittability of cultures beyond the scope of action of the respective cultural-historical types but because of the refusal to make use of the current neo-Kantian distinction between civilization and culture. The two remain interchangeable terms for Trubetzkoy and this may well be the reason why Spengler, despite his fondness of the idea of cultural types, declined Trubetzkoy's suggestion to write the preface to the German translation of his book.<sup>22</sup> The confusion between the measurable aspects of material advancement and the immeasurable accomplishments of the spirit is a clear source of dissatisfaction with Trubetzkoy's book in the first review devoted to it. Savitsky, while welcoming Trubetzkoy's critical stance toward the arrogant expansion of the European culture, does not accept the idea that progress in economy and technology, on the one hand, and development in art, religion, or mores, on the other, are equally immeasurable. His is a more qualified defense of relativism, which admits the existence of spheres where backwardness really matters and should be opposed.<sup>23</sup> In the postscript to the German translation of his book Trubetzkoy assayed to repudiate this charge, but the attempt remained weak and inconclusive.<sup>24</sup>

More importantly, Trubetzkoy's apology of relativism cannot be recognized as being sufficiently sincere. His sympathy for the small (and weak) nations is a manifesto of fears in the face of a possible colonization of Russia's culture and economy after the World war. The October revolution is seen as an accelerating factor: the Bolshevik party is for Trubetzkoy only the logical extension of a growing willingness to accept the Western domination under the guise of internationalism and cosmopolitanism. From the point of view of the loser, the small nations are urged to blame the West for the aggressive export and imposition of Romano-Germanic values. But very little is left of Trubetzkoy's relativism and anticolonialism when he is faced with the question of the role of Russia in the projected revolt against the West. Here is what he has to say about the division into great and small cultures in his already cited letter to Jakobson:

You say that you do not believe in "the world as a reservoir of peacefully coexisting little cultures." Neither do I. If at some time my dreams come true, I can envisage the world consisting of several big cultures with "dialectical variants," as it were. (*LN*, 16)

The rhetoric of the private letter is thus different from the official ethos of relentless relativism and incommensurability proclaimed in *Europe and Mankind*. A universe of equally valuable small nations and cultures does not exist: the most one may hope for is their preservation as "dialects" of the dominant cultures. This turn in Trubetzkoy's argumentation becomes highly visible when in the later years of the movement he became involved in discussions of the blueprints for a future Eurasian state. His polemic (1927–1928) with D. Doroshenko on the place and significance of Ukrainian culture is particularly revealing for the transition from cultural relativism and anticolonialism to ambitious nationalism and new colonialism. The task for Ukrainian culture, Trubetzkoy insists, is to be "a special, individualized Ukrainian variant of all-Russian culture" (*LGK*, 267).<sup>25</sup> After Doroshenko's bitter response, Trubetzkoy attempted to give the term "individualized variant" [*individuatsiya*] a more neutral meaning and to explicate its roots in the Eurasian doctrine of nations, but he nevertheless arrived at the conclusion that those Ukrainians "who want to go out onto the grand road" of culture cannot do that outside the "common context of Russian culture."<sup>26</sup> This rather dispiriting recipe confirms the appetite of the Eurasian movement to assert the Russian nation as the natural leader of the nations of Eurasia in their struggle against the domination of the West. These nations remain equal only while under oppression; when cultural

advancement is put on the agenda, the discourse of internal evaluation and classification ousts the vision of equality and relativism. In this respect the Eurasians strikingly resemble the Bolsheviks: in either case Russia is proclaimed the center of resistance to the oppressive forces of the West, in national and in class-relevant terms.<sup>27</sup>

That relativism and the dialogue of cultures have their limits transpires from the way the Eurasians treated the problem of religious self-determination. This turned into a real test for their project for cultural diversity. While the ethnic multiplicity of Eurasia (roughly coinciding in terms of territory with the USSR) was enthusiastically celebrated by the movement, the religious issue caused trouble. Even Trubetskoy, known for his genuine tolerance and accommodating views, occasionally displayed reluctance to accept that religions may be equal in value. In his article "The Religion of India and Christianity" (1922), he singles out Orthodoxy as the only religion which represents Christianity in its purity; Trubetskoy blames Catholicism for having "succumbed to the Satanic temptation of mundane dominion" and Protestantism for yielding to "the lure of the pride of the human mind and of the resurrection against authority."<sup>28</sup> If all nations united in the Eurasian state unfold their creative potential, this will lead them to embrace Orthodoxy as a matter of course. While with Trubetskoy this is no more than a naive hope and a surmise, others in the movement underscored religious fundamentalism in stark defiance of the idea of tolerance and plurality of values. This is especially true of Lev Karsavin who in 1925 criticized Catholicism severely and in a rather sectarian fashion.<sup>29</sup> The Eurasian assault on Catholicism met with discontent on the part of V. Zen'kovsky, Prince G. N. Trubetskoy (Prince N. S. Trubetskoy's uncle), and other influential thinkers. Of these, the criticism coming from Berdyaev was the hardest to swallow. Berdyaev rejected the Eurasian attitude to latinity and Catholicism (especially that of Karsavin) as "false, non-Christian" and as "deeply provincial and obsolete." He disclosed the contradictions obtaining between the ideals of cultural relativism and the practice of religious aggressivity. Characteristically, Berdyaev based his critique on no more than a different type of nationalism: with their primitive attacks against Catholicism the Eurasians were acting to the detriment of Orthodoxy; they were eroding its world-wide importance and the calling of Russia as the great spiritual power of the "East-West" [*Vostoko-Zapada*].<sup>30</sup> We can thus better appreciate the dual nature of the Eurasian movement as both a reaction to the unfavorable position of Russia after World War I and as the manifesto of a new Russian colonialist nationalism seeking to expand its presence in Asia.



If we now move to Bakhtin, with the Eurasian doctrines in mind, we will be surprised to see to what large extent Bakhtin's theory of the novel can be seen to function as a latent theory of nation and nationalism. Bakhtin's disapproval of narrow nationalistic values and his promotion of cosmopolitan dialogue between cultures is documented in his hypothesis about the rise of the novel.

It was not until the 1890s, in the writings of Alexandr Veselovsky, that a serious account of the origins of the novel was attempted in Russia. Veselovsky is particularly representative of the theoretical tradition from which Bakhtin emerges.<sup>31</sup> Although usually seen as a solitary figure, deprived of predecessors and even more original for this reason, Bakhtin has his roots in a strong Russian tradition of scholarship representing the rise of the novel as the product of multiethnic developments and cultural heteroglossia.

Veselovsky's essays, which have to be discussed here in more detail in order to appreciate Bakhtin's debt to them, are not of theoretical design. In his own words, Veselovsky found himself unable to answer the question why the novel had gradually become the dominant expression of modernity. Instead, he chose to contemplate the "how" of this process. Even after setting this restrictive framework, Veselovsky is still remarkably cautious about letting causal explanation govern his discourse. Thus he belies the received opinion that his endeavors were of a strictly genetic nature. What he offers in his "Iz vvedeniya v istoricheskuyu poetiku" (From an introduction to historical poetics) (1893) is a "parallel, which, perhaps, could clarify for us not the genesis of the novel, but the features of the social environment, capable of cultivating it."<sup>32</sup> Since Veselovsky's reconstruction of the way the novel arose is of particular relevance to Bakhtin's own views, I shall allow myself here a longer quotation:

In Greece, the drama is still in the zone [*v polose*] of national historical development; the novel belongs in the time when Alexander the Great's conquests disturbed this development, when an autonomous Greece has dissolved into a world-wide monarchy, mixing East and West; the tradition [*predanie*] of political freedom darkened, together with the ideal of a citizen, and the individual, having felt lonely in the vast space of cosmopolitanism, went back into himself, taking interest in matters of the inner life in the absence of social ones, building up utopias for lack of legends [*predanie*]. Such are the main topics of the Greek novel: there is nothing traditional in them, everything is intimate in a bourgeois fashion; this is a drama transferred to the hearth, from the stage—into the conditions of the everyday round of life [*obikhod*].<sup>33</sup>

It is essential to note Veselovsky's vivid interest in a continuous history of the novel, stretching from antiquity up to the Renaissance

period. With Veselovsky's dauntingly erudite studies of Boccaccio and Rabelais in mind, Boris Engel'gardt scrutinized Veselovsky's affection for the Renaissance in terms other than those of sheer personal predilection: "Now, the very designation 'Renaissance' shows that here the literary historian has to do above all with certain old intellectual and artistic currents, which have been muffled for some time by other phenomena of spiritual culture and are now reviving for a new life in social and individual consciousness."<sup>34</sup> Veselovsky evidently insisted on the importance of the prebourgeois and early Renaissance novel and did not champion the idea of a crucial break in the history of the genre, after which it takes on an allegedly new identity. For him, the rise of the novel is inseparable from contradictory historical developments allowing for the discovery of an inexhaustible and cosmopolitan outer world along with the private and everyday dimensions of a life by the hearth. Thus the novel is already endowed with Protean features: it can stimulate the exploration of the world while fostering a sense of solitude; it can broaden the horizons of human existence while making people more sensitive to their own selves.

Similarly, Bakhtin's account of the origins of the novel rests on the supposition that its rise was facilitated by the transcendence of a narrow national tradition. We can see Bakhtin replacing drama with epic in Veselovsky's scheme and producing a rigid distinction between the nation-bound epic and the cosmopolitan novel which subsists on the mixture of languages, on the enfeeblement of the national legends, and the introduction of a new agenda which takes into account the diversity of historical and cultural experience. Bakhtin's debt to Veselovsky may become even more visible in the following quotation from Bakhtin's 1940 doctoral thesis on Rabelais which he dropped in the 1965 edition of the book: "A. N. Veselovsky said that the epic emerges 'on the borderline of two tribes.' It can be said about the novel of modern times that it emerged on the *borderline of two languages*."<sup>35</sup>

Bakhtin's theory of the novel, one can infer, is predicated on multiculturalism and the transcendence of national boundaries. The novel has its sources in the previously neglected and oppressed genres of the low and the demotic. Gathering together their ideological energy and crowning their historical existence, the novel exhibits its own versatility and asserts its supple and adaptive nature. Being the liberator of formerly underground and scattered forms of utterance which now assume a status of legitimacy, the novel informs a discourse of emancipation in which a genre previously

thought to be dismissable and vulgar ascends to prominence and domination.

It is particularly important for our reading of Bakhtin through the legacy of the Eurasians that he interpreted the generic profile of the novel in a way that would allow him to remain loyal to the emancipatory premises of his discourse. Unlike the ardently propagated culture of Eurasia, bound as it is to become the instrument of a new colonialism, the novel appears to be impervious to this threat. Bakhtin, like Friedrich Schlegel, Lukács, and Shklovsky before him,<sup>36</sup> insists that the novel is able to negate itself, giving birth to its self-parody. The novel, he claims, is the only genre which never constitutes a restrictive canon of its own. It is true that Bakhtin's essays of the 1930s do not stipulate a canon within the novel but, on the other hand, they do assume that the novel can be a canonical genre within the vast realm of literature as a whole. The idea of novelization indicates Bakhtin's belief—or rather hope—that novel and literature can become, in a truly Schlegelian manner, interchangeable entities. The ideology of this benign and painless colonization of literature by the novel rests on the assumption that the genre of the novel is inwardly decentered and diversified, so as to be unable to impose the order of centralization and subjection. The agent of colonization, then, is the novelistic rather than the novel. Its fluidity and un-arrestable nature transform the regime of generic domination into a regime of timeless struggle between constant principles of human culture (heteroglossia and monoglossia, dialogue and monologue). By gaining the upper hand in this conflict, the novelistic ennobles literature in general. The forces of colonization are thus represented by Bakhtin as the mild agents of an acceptable large-scale program for universal cultural advancement. Bakhtin's theory of the novel imagines an innocent process of colonization in literature and dreams the illusory dream of an emancipation which does not issue in renewed subjection.

### *Mestorazvitie* and Chronotope

Bakhtin's concept of chronotope is of recognizably Kantian origins.<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin himself also alluded to its foundation in contemporary scientific debates, notably those on the notion of dominant in biology and physiology. He gladly admitted his debt to the Russian biologist Ukhomsky, whose lecture on chronotope in biology he had attended in 1925.<sup>38</sup> At roughly the same time, Petr Savitsky, once the second most significant figure in the Eurasian movement and

currently enjoying a slow recovery from a long period of oblivion,<sup>39</sup> set forth his idea of *mestorazvitie*, a term which translates only too reluctantly into English but could be, with some loss, rendered as a combination of “the place of development” and “the place that develops,” synthesizing thus the dimensions of relative spatial stability and the dynamics of social development.

Savitsky’s argument takes up an established line of reasoning dating back to the sociological and philosophical treatises of the Enlightenment (Montesquieu), according to which changes and growth in society are hugely influenced by the geographic milieu in which the life of the social organism takes place.<sup>40</sup> Trained as a geographer, Savitsky gradually moved toward an understanding of nature and history which looked embarrassingly anachronistic even in the 1920s but was nevertheless strongly provocative. He came to regard himself as a “geosophist” [*geosof*] and this clearly suggested his drift to a type of knowledge which is less rigorously scientific than philosophically inspirational.

Savitsky formulated the theory of *mestorazvitie* in his little book *Russia—A Specific Geographic World* written in 1926 and published the following year in Prague.<sup>41</sup> *Mestorazvitie* is a synthetic category expressing the broad idea of the unity of social development and geographic environment. Savitsky revives Danilevsky’s notion of cultural-historical types and establishes a close link between it and *mestorazvitie*. It is not the life of society as such that evolves in a specific environment; rather it is the cultural-historical type that needs spatial concretization and materialization in a respective environment. Thus Savitsky allocates each of Danilevsky’s ten cultural types a specific *mestorazvitie* which furnishes the material ground for the development of the respective type and for the realization of its cultural uniqueness.

While inextricably associated with the notion of cultural-historical types and thereby serving as a weapon in the struggle of the Eurasian ideologues for the dominance of the Russian (Soviet) empire in an increasingly multicultural world, the concept of *mestorazvitie* is nonetheless applicable even to the smallest human environment. Savitsky explicitly warns that, strictly speaking, “every yard, every hamlet is a *mestorazvitie*” (R, 30). In an organic way, never dwelt upon in any detail, the many smaller *mestorazvitiya* unite and fuse into greater *mestorazvitiya*. Thus each sociohistorical body (the family, the village community, the nation, the multinational empire) and its territory are “bound to merge for us into an organic whole, into a geographic individual or a landscape” (R, 29).

Savitsky is particularly concerned to establish the bilateral depen-

dence of historical development and geographical environment. He does so by suspending judgment about the causal relation between the two: it would be equally metaphysical (and hence wrong), Savitsky suggests, to claim that social bodies shape their environments or that environments govern the developments of social organisms. Rather, these processes flow together and each of them blends with the other (*R*, 31 n. 7). The concept of *mestorazvitiie*, then, is designed to help us to steer clear of the metaphysical preponderance of human activity over environment or of space over social praxis and development for that matter.

Savitsky's theory suggests an equally strong aversion to staple materialistic accounts of history. Savitsky insists on the overcoming of both the metaphysical peril of disregarding the bond between social development and human environment and the "offensive" idea that all aspects of human praxis are affected by a specific geographical location. Religion, in compliance with the Eurasian program, is accorded a special status: as the foundation of human life it is considered an extra-local [*вне-местный*] phenomenon that exists regardless of "local clothes" (*R*, 67). The vivid feeling for the material aspects of life captured in the concept of *mestorazvitiie*, Savitsky concludes, ought not to inhibit but rather to enhance the feeling for the spiritual principles of life.

Savitsky's theory did not enjoy the tremendous career of Bakhtin's category of chronotope, although Savitsky himself was characteristically moving toward the recognition of the inseparability of space and time in literature.<sup>42</sup> Neither the dubious scholarly reputation of its progenitor who was known for his extravagant belief that the entire history of Russian culture can be interpreted through the polarities of nomadism and settlement<sup>43</sup> and through the interaction of civilizations based on steppe and woods, nor the relative isolation of the Eurasian movement in exile could have rendered it influential or fashionable.<sup>44</sup> But all peculiarities aside, Savitsky's theory does reveal a wider context in which Bakhtin's original ideas of the unity of time and space in the novel cease to look so unforeseen. This is not to suggest that Bakhtin was familiar with Savitsky's work but only that Bakhtin's own writings on chronotope clearly shared some of Savitsky's foundational premises.

Above all, for Bakhtin chronotope is the constitutive element differentiating one (historical) type of the novel from all others. His panorama of European literature from antiquity to Goethe and Dostoevsky is built upon a succession of chronotopes, each of them procuring a distinctive artistic representation of the spatial and temporal aspects of reality. Thus chronotope determines generic variations

and the diverse literary images of man. Not unlike Savitsky's *mestorazvitie*, which supports the various cultural-historical types canceling each other in the course of human civilization, Bakhtin's chronotopes embody changing views of the world at different stages in the history of European literature.

This is, however, only one aspect of Bakhtin's understanding of chronotope. On the problem of chronotope his thought displayed some inconsistency even over a rather short period of time. In the introductory passages from "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1937–1938), Bakhtin demonstrated awareness of the heterogeneous nature of literary history. Chronotopes arising at various stages of human history are confirmed here in their co-existence ("FTC," 85). At precisely the same time, by presenting literary history in his text on Goethe and the *Bildungsroman* (1936–1938)<sup>45</sup> as the drama of transitions leading to ever more appropriate chronotopes rather than interpreting it as the product of a merciful, unjudgmental and all-preserving memory, Bakhtin appears to have been trapped, voluntarily or not, in the obligation of declaring some authors (especially Goethe) more progressive and more relevant to the contemporary state of art than others (Dostoevsky).<sup>46</sup>

A couple of years later, in his "Epic and Novel" essay, Bakhtin adds a significantly new element to this contradictory understanding of the chronotope. It is only at this point that the chronotope becomes a distinctly (neo-)Kantian category in Bakhtin. Drawing on Cassirer, he points out that the definitions of time and value in the epic are inseparably linked "as they are also fused in the semantic layers of ancient languages."<sup>47</sup> Here the immanent *axiological* dimension of the chronotope is for the first time clearly brought into relief. The same thought is then evolved in the "Concluding remarks" to the chronotope essay (written in 1973) and extended to cover not only the epic but any chronotope: "the chronotope in a work always contains within it an axiological [*tsennostnyi*] aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. . . . Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values*" ("FTC," 243). Later in the same essay, Bakhtin finally acknowledges Cassirer's role in the formation of his own views by referring to the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* and rehearsing the vital proposition of its first volume about the chronotopicity of language as a "treasure-house of images" ("FTC," 251).

Being a value-charged and in this sense a Kantian category, the chronotope for Bakhtin is nevertheless embedded in a Hegelian structure of reasoning. Indeed, it furnishes a splendid opportunity for transcending the recently established inclination to regard Bakh-

tin as either a neo-Kantian or a Hegelian (Marxist) thinker. His mode of thought is indebted to *both* neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism. The different value of each particular variety (type) of the novel is measured by the progression of human consciousness as it gradually moves toward a recognition of the historical and social nature of time. Thus, the discussion of the chronotope for Bakhtin becomes eventually a discussion of the peregrinations of the novel as an instrument of a growing human awareness of time. Bakhtin's description of the different chronotopes appears to be the counterpart of Hegel's exploration of the various stages in the history of Spirit in his *Phenomenology of Mind*.

We can already see that while Savitsky's concept of *mestorazvitie*, stressing as it is the unity of history, social praxis, and environment, was used predominantly as an instrument for the encouragement of a new nationalist ideal of culture, Bakhtin's idea of chronotope served more to spell out the answers to questions posed by a Hegelian agenda of philosophy of consciousness. One should not assume, however, that Bakhtin's loyalty to this Hegelian paradigm was boundless. For Hegel, consciousness of life is also a separation from life, an "opposing reflection." A necessary phase in the history of consciousness is the long period of "misfortune," which is finally transcended in the synthesis of being-for-itself and being-in-itself embodied by the Spirit. Before this stage is reached, however, human consciousness is profoundly "unhappy" and this "unhappiness," dating back to Hegel's early theological writings, is one of the underlying themes of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>48</sup> As Hegel asserts, consciousness of life is achieved at the cost of a crucial rupture of naïveté and innocent happiness. Consciousness of life remains for a long time "merely pain and sorrow" over human existence and activity.

Characteristically, Hegel sees the naïve happiness of consciousness embodied precisely in Greek life of the classical era. The well-known motifs about the Greeks remaining "in the bosom of life," in a "harmonious unity of self and nature, transposing nature into thought and thought into nature,"<sup>49</sup> are Schillerian and Hegelian in their origin. The Greeks do not as yet know the conflict between the immutable and the changeable, between essence and nonessence that comes to the fore in Judaism. In Greek life essence (God) is not yet posed beyond the existence of man. Time for the Greeks is still a feeling of a stable and unalterable natural rhythm rather than a concept describing the mutability of the world and the discontinuity of the self.

While for Hegel this condition of naïveté and happiness has to be

abandoned in the name of a future which through grief and labor will gradually transform the condition of "division, sin, torment . . . into one of reconciliation and beatitude,"<sup>50</sup> for Bakhtin the loss of this state of organic happiness is far more painful. Sober-minded as it is, and determined to hail the modernist acceptance of transitoriness and change, Bakhtin's account of the different chronotopes at the same time articulates a nostalgic celebration of the ancient, the traditional, the venerable. A strong case in point is the obvious emphasis placed by Bakhtin on the so-called folkloric chronotope of the novel. Heavily indebted to Ol'ga Freidenberg and the ongoing debates in Russian folkloristics of the early 1930s, Bakhtin sees in folklore a golden age of harmony and social cohesion. Moreover, like Freidenberg and Marr, he assumes that later forms of human culture can preserve the features of earlier stages of culture by way of what Bakhtin, following Marr and Freidenberg, calls "sublimation" [*sublimatsiya*].<sup>51</sup> Thus, the ancient novel can be shown to have retained the features of folkloric unity in the folds of its generic memory. Bakhtin submits that the self-identity of the hero in the Greek novel is only a sedimentation of a universal human self-identity to be found in folklore ("FTC," 105).

The developments of the (auto)biographical novel that Bakhtin traces further in this essay are marked by an apprehensive awareness of the inevitable dwindling of organicity. It is no accident that both in this essay and in his well-known book about Rabelais Bakhtin dwells so lovingly on his prose, for he sees in him the author who restores the folkloric chronotope and reinstates the condition of intimate overlap between public and private, nature and culture. Thus, the utopian spirit of the past, officially expelled by the negation of the epic, is surreptitiously called back in this extolling of folklore and antiquity.

Our analysis of the central theoretical arguments of the Eurasian movement reveal that Bakhtin's ideas of cultural heteroglossia and chronotope were shaped in a rich intellectual context and are inseparable from the prevalent concerns with the legitimacy and the prospects of the new Soviet culture. Bakhtin's theory of the novel, of dialogue and chronotope can be read as a tacit response to the preoccupations with center and periphery, with cultural domination and subjection. The ideal state of dialogue and cosmopolitan exchange we find in Bakhtin's essays on the novel and his use of chronotope to address the problems of the growth of human consciousness beyond national constraints were responding to a climate of ideas shaped by the controversial views—both official and subterra-



nean (the Eurasians)—of Russian culture as possessed of uniqueness and originality and at the same time as a phenomenon which has to negotiate its own emancipation and uniqueness in the process of setting the model for a universal world culture. Bakhtin's implicit theory of nationalism privileges an imagined freedom of cross-cultural contacts over the narrow existence of insulated national traditions. Alien to the political dimensions of nationhood and cultural exchange, Bakhtin's theory remained in the realm of the ideal without moving beyond the sphere of ennobled reverie. Although his book on Rabelais exhibits him in a more complex light and generates suspicion as to whether his subscription under the values of folklore culture was ideologically harmless, his ideas of cultural heteroglossia appear to sublimate the tensions of vital social debates in the 1920s and 1930s into the harmony of a detached humanistic sanguineness.

### Notes

I want to thank Gerry Smith and Barbara Heldt, who were the first to kindle my interest in the Eurasian movement, and Gerry Smith and Caryl Emerson for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

1. Despite the established norms of transliteration of Russian proper names, I use throughout the text this form of Trubetzkoy's name, for it has received currency after the translations of his work by Anatoly Liberman.

2. A. G. Lisov, E. G. Trusova, "Replika po povodu avtobiograficheskogo mifotvorchestva M. M. Bakhtina" (A remark on Bakhtin's autobiographical myth-making), *Dialog, Karnaval, Khronotop* 3 (1996): 165.

3. Cf. Vadim Kozhinov's talk to Nikolay Pan'kov on Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialog, Karnaval, Khronotop* 1 (1992): 116.

4. *Besedy V. D. Duvakina s M. M. Bakhtinym* (V. D. Duvakin's conversations with M. M. Bakhtin) (Moscow: Progress, 1996), 218. Interestingly enough, in recent years Kozhinov established for himself the reputation not only of a great expert on Bakhtin's life and legacy but also of a supporter of Eurasianism; a good example thereof is chapter 2 of his book *Istoriya Rusi i russkogo slova: Sovremennyy vzglyad* (Moscow: Moskovskii uchebnik-2000, 1997), 40–79.

5. Nikolai Trubetzkoy, *Writings on Literature*, ed. and trans. Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 96.

6. On Jakobson's role in the Eurasian movement see Jindrich Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995) and N. S. Avtonomova and M. L. Gasparov, "Jakobson, slavistika i evraziistvo: Dve kon'yunktury, 1929–1953" (Jakobson, slavic studies and Eurasianism: Two conjunctures, 1929–1953), *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (New literary review) 23 (1997): 87–91.

7. N. S. Trubetzkoy's *Letters and Notes*, prepared for publication by R. Jakobson with the assistance of H. Baran, O. Ronen, and Martha Taylor (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 130. Hereafter LN, cited in the text.

8. E. Litauer, "Formalizm i istoriya literatury" (Formalism and the history of literature), *Euraziya* (Eurasia) 18 (23 March 1929): 7–8. A graduate of the Sorbonne, Litauer published in *Eurasia* numerous reviews of books by Lukács, Croce, and Mannheim, among others, and

a couple of articles on the prospects of unorthodox Marxism in Russia. Her review of Medvedev's work has been totally neglected so far by students of the Bakhtin circle; I thank G. S. Smith for directing my attention to it. For short biographical information on Litauer see Mael' Feinberg and Yurii Klyukin, " 'Po vnov' otkryvshimsya obstoyatel'stvam . . . , ' " *Bolshevo* 2 (1992): 156–59.

9. For an overview of the genesis and the history of the movement see, above all, O. Böss, *Die Lehre der Eurasier* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1961); N. Riasanovsky, "Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy's *Europe and Mankind*," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge 12 (1964): 207–20; N. Riasanovsky, "The Emergence of Eurasianism," *California Slavic Studies* 4 (1967): 39–72 (from the point of view of intellectual history, this remains the best study of Eurasianism); Georges Nivat, "La 'Fenêtre sur l'Asie' ou les paradoxes de l' 'Affirmation Eurasienne,' " *Rossiia/Russia* 6 (1988): 81–93; the introductions to *Evraziya: Istoricheskie vzglyady russkikh emigrantov* (Eurasia: The historical views of the Russian emigrants), ed. L. Ponomareva and V. Khachatryan (Moscow: RAN, Institut Vseobshchei Istorii, 1992) and to *Russkii uzel evraziistva: Vostok v russkoi mysli* (The Russian knot of Eurasianism: The Orient in Russian thought), ed. Sergey Klyuchnikov (Moscow: Belovod'e, 1997). See also O. V. Manikin, "Evraziistvo. Predchuvstviya i sversheniya," *Sovetskaya Bibliografiya* 1 (1991): 78–86; W. G. Westeijn, "Aspects of Eurasianism," in *Structure and Tradition in Russian Society*, ed. R. Reid et al. (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of Slavic Languages, 1994), 171–86 and the exhaustive commentaries and annotations in G. S. Smith, *The Letters of D. S. Mirsky to P. P. Suvchinsky, 1922–31* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1995). The best bibliography of texts on the Eurasian movement and by its members is *O Evrazii i evraziitsakh (Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' )* (About Eurasia and the Eurasians [a bibliographical index]), ed. A. V. Antoshchenko and A. A. Kozhanov (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 1997).

10. The question whether Bakhtin may have known the work of the Eurasians, particularly that of Trubetzkoy, was first asked by Charles Lock in his astute review of J. Toman's book *The Magic of a Common Language* (see above n. 6) in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 3–4 (1995): 574–76; for a passing suggestion of similarities between Trubetzkoy's cultural doctrine and Bakhtin's antimonologism see S. Khoruzhy, "Sud'ba slavyanofil'skoi idei v dvadtsatom veke" (The destiny of the slavophile idea in the 20th century), in *Evraziiskaya perspektiva* (The Eurasian perspective) (Moscow: Russkii Mir, 1994), 16.

11. N. Meshcheriakov, "O novykh nastroeniakh russkoi intelligentsii" (On the new attitudes of the Russian intelligentsia), *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* 3 (1921): 33–43, esp. 37–39.

12. For an account of the work of the secret services based on archival material see A. Sobolev, "Knyaz' N. S. Trubetzkoy i evraziistvo" (Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy and Eurasianism), *Literaturnaya ucheba* (Literary education) 6 (1991): 121–30, and Irma Kudrova, *Gibel' Mariny Tsvetaevoy* (The death of Marina Tsvetaeva) (Moscow: Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1995), 95–156.

13. For details on Savitsky's trip and for the different accounts of when precisely the congress took place as well as for the control exercised by the Soviet secret services see Irina Shevelenko, "K istorii evraziiskogo raskola 1929 goda" (On the history of the Eurasians' split of 1929), in *Themes and Variations. In Honor of Lazar Fleishman*, ed. K. Polivanov et al., *Stanford Slavic Studies*, vol. 8 (Stanford, 1994), 376–416, esp. 415 n. 31, as well as S. L. Voitsekhovskiy, *Trest: Vospominaniya i dokumenty* (The trust: Memoirs and documents) (London, Ont., 1974), 28–29, and the references in A. Liberman, "Postscript," in Nikolai Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russia's Identity*, ed. Anatoly Liberman (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1991), 345. Savitsky, in what is most probably an overrated estimate, was proud of a 400-strong network of supporters in the USSR. See A. B., "Evraziitsy i Trest" (The Eurasians and the trust), *Vozrozhdenie* (Resurrection) 30 (1953): 118; on the possible links between the movement and the mainland see also Riasanovsky, "The Emergence of Eurasianism," 48 n. 20.

14. N. S. Trubetzkoy, *K probleme russkogo samopoznaniya* (Paris: Evraziiskoe Knogoizdatel'stvo,

1927). For an overview of Trubetzkoy's later activities in the movement and his reluctant leadership, see Ol'ga Kaznina, "N. S. Trubetzkoy i krizis evraziistva" (N. S. Trubetzkoy and the crisis of Eurasianism), *Slavyanovedenie* (Slavonic studies) 4 (1995): 89–95; see also G. Wyrzrens, "Fürst Trubetzkoy als Kulturphilosoph," *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch* 11 (1964): 154–66.

15. See M. A. Robinson and L. P. Petrovsky, "N. N. Durnovo i N. S. Trubetzkoy: Problema evraziistva v kontekste 'dela slavistov'" (N. N. Durnovo and N. S. Trubetzkoy: The problem of Eurasianism in the context of the "Slavists' case"), *Slavyanovedenie* (Slavonic studies) 4 (1992).

16. Cf. A. P. Chudakov, "V. V. Vinogradov: Arest, tyur'ma, ssylka, nauka" (V. V. Vinogradov: Arrest, prison, exile, scholarship), in *Sed'mye Tmyanovskie Chleniya* (Moscow, 1995–96), 464–94, esp. 472.

17. Krystyna Pomorska, "N. S. Trubetzkoy o perevode ego knigi *Evropa i chelovechestvo*" (N. S. Trubetzkoy on the translation of his book *Europe and Mankind*), *Rossii/Russia* (Torino) 3 (1977): 236.

18. Kn. N. S. Trubetzkoy, *Evropa i chelovechestvo* (Sofia: Rossiisko-Bolgarskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1920).

19. *Ishkod k Vostoku. Predchuvstviya i sversheniya. Utverzhenie evraziitsev. Kniga Pervaya* (Sofia: Rossiisko-Bolgarskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1921).

20. Nikolay Danilevsky, *Rossiya i Evropa*, 6th ed. (St. Petersburg: Glagol and St. Petersburg University Press, 1995), 104. Hereafter *RE*, cited in the text. Danilevsky's words echo Herder's discontent with the universalism of the Enlightenment philosophy of history; only a year later, in 1872, Dostoevsky's character Shatov from *The Possessed* would voice this idea with respect to religious and moral values: there can be no gods "in common," Shatov maintains.

21. Nikolai Trubetzkoy, "Europe and Mankind" in Trubetzkoy, *Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 6. Hereafter *LGK*, cited in the text.

22. Trubetzkoy extended this suggestion to Roman Jakobson's brother Sergey Jakobson, on whose proposal the book was co-translated by himself and F. Schlömer and published in Berlin in 1922. See Trubetzkoy's letter to S. Jakobson of 24 August 1921 in Pomorska, "Trubetzkoy on the Translation of his Book," 235.

23. See Petr Savitsky, "Evropa i Evraziya. Po povodu broshyury kn. N. S. Trubetskogo *Evropa i chelovechestvo*" (Europe and Eurasia: On the occasion of Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy's pamphlet *Europe and Mankind*), *Russkaya Mysl'* (Russian thought) (Sofia) 1–2 (1921): 119–38.

24. See N. S. Trubetzkoy, *Evropa und die Menschheit*, trans. S. O. Jacobsohn and F. Schlömer, with an introduction by Otto Hoetzsch (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1922), 13–14.

25. The Russian text seems to be even more telling: "byt' osoboï ukrainskoi individuatsiei obshcherusskoi kul'tury." See N. S. Trubetzkoy, *Istoriya, Kul'tura, Yazyk* (History, culture, language), ed. V. M. Zhivov (Moscow: Progress, 1995), 379.

26. *Ibid.*, 400–401.

27. Cf. Leonid Luks, "Die Ideologie der Eurasier im zeitgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge 34 (1986), 379. Luks's article remains the best study of the similarities between the Eurasian movement and the Communist ideology in the USSR. The precarious and indeed strongly compromised multiculturalism of the Eurasians is partly due to the unsurmounted ideological legacy of the Slavophiles who were eager to see Russia both as a unique entity and at the center of Pan Slavism; the most sensitive and nuanced study of the controversial way in which the Eurasians viewed the ideology of the Slavophiles is the short lecture by the Russian émigré historian A. Kizewetter, "Slavyanofil'stvo i evraziistvo," in *Evraziya: Istoricheskie vzglyady russkikh emigrantov*, ed. L. Ponomareva and V. Khachatryan (Moscow, 1992), 19–25.

28. Trubetzkoy, *Istoriya*, 293, my translation.

29. For a not very convincing attempt to vindicate the Eurasians' assault on Catholicism by pointing to the scene of European diplomacy and the situation in Russia in the 1920s, see Yu. K. Gerasimov, "Religioznaya poziitsiya evraziistva" (The religious stance of Eurasianism),

*Russkaya Literatura* 1 (1995): 159–76, esp. 163–64. On Karsavin's controversial part in the movement, see S. Khoruzhy, "Karsavin, evraziistvo i VKP" (Karsavin, Eurasianism and the All-Union Communist Party), *Voprosy Filosofii* (Problems of philosophy) 2 (1992): 78–87; A. Sobolev, "Evraziistvo: L. P. Karsavin i drugie" (The Eurasian movement: Karsavin and the others), *Nachala* (Principles) 4 (1992): 49–58; I. Massaka, "Metafizyka 'do wynajecia.' Lew Karsavin i ruch eurazjanski," *Slavia Orientalis* 4 (1997): 597–608.

30. Nikolay Berdyayev, "Evrazlitsy" (The Eurasians), *Put'* (The path) (Paris) 1 (1925): 134–35.

31. There are attempts to declare Bakhtin the first great theoretician of the novel in Russia; see, e.g., M. Aucouturier, "The Theory of the Novel in Russia in the 1930s: Lukács and Bakhtin," in *The Russian Novel from Pushkin to Pasternak*, ed. J. Garrard (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 229–40. While stressing the power of his insights, such attempts seem to underestimate Bakhtin's embeddedness in a rich preceding (and coterminous) Russian tradition of theoretical discourse on literature and the novel. For a more balanced but slightly eclectic approach, see O. Osovsky, "Roman v kontekste istoricheskoi poetiki (Ot A. N. Veselovskogo k M. M. Bakhtinu)" (The novel in the context of historical poetics [from A. N. Veselovsky towards M. M. Bakhtin]), in *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, vol. 2, ed. V. Makhlin and D. Kuyundzhich (Moscow: Labirint, 1991), 312–43; see also Caryl Emerson, "Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 271–93 and G. Tihanov, "Bakhtin's Essays on the Novel (1935–1941): A Study of Their Intellectual Background and Innovativeness," *Dialogism* 1 (1998): 30–56.

32. Aleksandr Veselovsky, *Istoricheskaya poetika* (Historical poetics), ed. V. M. Zhirmunsky (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1940), 66. All references are to this edition.

33. *Ibid.*, 66. Cf. also the 1899 "Tri glavy iz Istoricheskoy poetiki" (Three chapters from the historical poetics) (*ibid.*, 380) and Veselovsky's later conspectus of the unfinished chapter 7 (Cosmopolitan trends) of his "Poetika syuzhetov" (Poetics of plots) (1897–1906): The cosmopolitanism of the Alexandrian epoch; instead of a *national hero*—a solitary person, scattered around the world. Secluded life of *feeling*; geographic expanse—and *utopia* (*ibid.*, 595).

34. Boris Engel'gardt, *Al. N. Veselovskiy* (Petrograd: Kolos, 1924), 101.

35. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Fransua Rable v istorii realizma*, Institut Mirovoi Literatury (Rossiiskaya Akademiya Nauk), fond 427, opis' 1, No. 19 a, 640. The Russian text reads: *A. N. Veselovskiy govoril, chto epos voznikaet 'na mezhe dvukh plemen'. Pro roman novogo vremeni mozhno skazat', chto on voznik na "mezhe dvukh yazykov."*

36. For more about Bakhtin's intellectual roots in German Romanticism see my article "Bakhtin, Lukács and German Romanticism: The Case of Epic and Irony," in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. C. Adlam, R. Falconer et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 273–98.

37. On Bakhtin's theory of chronotope see, above all, G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and, more recently, Eduard Vlasov, "The World according to Bakhtin: On the Description of Space and Spatial Forms in Mikhail Bakhtin's Works," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 1–2 (1995): 37–58.

38. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84. Hereafter "FTC," cited in the text.

39. Savitsky's texts have been repeatedly anthologized over the last few years. For a fuller selection see Petr Savitsky, *Kontinent-Evraziya* (Moscow: Agraf, 1997).

40. Savitsky was also indebted to Russian scholarship, especially to Lamansky's *Tri mira Aziiskogo-evropeiskogo materika* (The three worlds of the Asian-European continent) (St. Petersburg, 1892, reprinted Petrograd: Novoe Vremya, 1916), but also to contemporary German

and Scandinavian geographic theories; on this debt see the masterful study by Mark Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space," *Slavic Review* 1 (1991): 1–17, esp. 11–12 and 16 n. 73.

41. Petr Savitsky, *Rossiya—osobyi geograficheskii mir* (Prague: Eveaziiskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1927). Hereafter *R*, cited in the text. Anatoly Liberman goes so far as to suggest a clear connection between Savitsky's work and Bakhtin's and Trubetzkoy's interpretations of Dostoevsky: "Dostoevsky's novels must have struck him [Trubetzkoy] as a literary counterpart of the Eurasian universe: a complex whole with non-merging constituents. Autarky and polyphony became synonymous in his usage. In his lecture on *Crime and Punishment* he twice calls this novel a unique psychological world—a paraphrase of Savitsky's phrase." In Liberman's introduction to Trubetzkoy, *Writings on Literature*, xi.

42. See Petr Savitsky, *Mestodeistvie v russkoi literature (Geograficheskaya storona istorii literatury)* (The place of action in Russian literature: The geographic aspect of the history of literature), in *Sbornik prací I sjezdu slovanských filologů v Praze* (An anthology of papers from the first congress of Slavic philologists in Prague), vol. 2 (Prague, 1931), 346–48. This extremely interesting essay consisting of seventeen extended theses has never before attracted due scholarly attention. Savitsky adumbrates in it the history of both "great literature" and the "literary background" [*literaturnogo fona*] from the point of view of the "literary 'colonization' of the Russian territory" (347) and examines the generic allocation of this process (prose vs. poetry).

43. See Petr Savitsky, "Step' i osedlost'" (Steppe and settlement), *Na putyakh: Utverzhenie evraziitsev*, Kniga II (On the paths: The self-assertion of the Eurasians, book 2) (Moscow: Gellikon, 1922). Similar ideas were championed by the prolific Eurasian historian G. V. Vernadsky; on this see Charles J. Halperin, "Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 36 (1985): 55–194.

44. Among the few thinkers later to appreciate Savitsky's work was R. Jakobson who saw in him a "talented forebear of structural geography." In Roman Jakobson and Krystyna Pomorska, *Besedy* (Conversations) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 68.

45. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance," in *Art and Answerability*, trans. V. Liapunov, ed. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

46. The text on the *Bildungsroman* and "Discourse in the Novel" present Dostoevsky as a novelist whose production unambiguously falls within the genre of the novel of ordeal. Both the biographical novel and especially the *Bildungsroman*, together with their respective chronotopes (and the respective authors), are placed in these two texts above the novel of ordeal (and, by implication, above Dostoevsky) as superior forms allowing the depiction of man in the process of becoming.

47. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *Dialogic Imagination*, 16.

48. For an inspired analysis of the "unhappiness of consciousness" in Hegel's philosophy, see the founding text of Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929) and Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la "Phénoménologie de l'esprit" de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). All quotations from Hyppolite's book follow the English translation by S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

49. Hyppolite, *Genesis*, 191.

50. Wahl, *Le Malheur*, 29.

51. See, e.g., the interpretation of the image of children in the idyll as a "sublimation" of coitus, conception, growth and renewal of life (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 227) or the reading of characters such as Gargantua and Pantagruel as "sublimation" of folkloric kings and *bogatyri* (*ibid.*, 241).

# Heroic Poetry in a Novelized Age: Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain

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## I

ONE of the central oppositions in Bakhtin's thinking about the novel is of course his categorical juxtaposition of the novel to epic, most trenchantly expressed in the essay "Epic and Novel." In the essay, Bakhtin juxtaposes the epic to the novel across a number of different categories, notably epic's fixation on the past, compared with the novel's orientation to the present; epic's zone of epic distance which divides the events of epic from the everyday world of poet and reader, so unlike the familiar and everyday world of the novel; and epic's finishedness, its take-it-or-leave-it air of remote completion, contrasted with the unfinishedness or openness to the future which characterizes the novel. These oppositions are a restatement, in generic terms, of some of Bakhtin's most characteristic philosophical preferences. But Bakhtin also resumes, though with a negative valuation, the dominant nineteenth-century tradition of scholarship with respect to the epic, which is to associate it with a specific *national* heroic past. In this essay I wish to explore the consequences of this association of "epic" with "nation," and to ask how, in the novelized cultural spaces of nineteenth-century England, epic might survive. Any attentive reader of my title will anticipate that one general answer that I shall give is that epic survives by the association with empire.

First, the Bakhtin of "Epic and Novel": "The world of the epic is the national heroic past: it is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests.'" <sup>1</sup> This association of the epic

with the *national* past was by no means new. In fact, it represents one of the central emphases of nineteenth-century critical and philosophical reflection on the epic, especially in the tradition of German scholarship with which Bakhtin was familiar. Starting with Schlegel at the opening moment of German nationalism in 1812, a whole series of writers had sought to claim the *Nibelungen Lied*, for example, as a German national epic in order to raise contemporary national pride and consciousness—as Thomas Carlyle somewhat sardonically noted in an essay of 1831:

Learned professors lecture on the *Nibelungen* in public schools, with a praiseworthy view to initiate the German youth in love of their fatherland; from many zealous and nowise ignorant critics we hear talk of a “great Northern Epos,” of a “German Iliad”; . . . the *Nibelungen* is welcomed as a precious national possession, recovered after six centuries of neglect, and takes undisputed place among the sacred books of German literature.<sup>2</sup>

But this was no more than came to be claimed for a whole series of medieval and other poems discovered and rediscovered in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth centuries for which similar national claims were made: *Ossian* in Scotland, the *Cid* in Spain, the *Chanson de Roland* in France.<sup>3</sup> Hegel, indeed, though rejecting the specific claims made for the *Nibelungen Lied* made by Schlegel and others, nevertheless felt that the European epics enacted the conquest of a higher European moderation over Asiatic brilliance. For Hegel, too, the epic was the “objective manifestation of a national spirit,” and the epic “sings of an heroic past.”<sup>4</sup> But the mention of Hegel in the context of Bakhtin should make us suspicious, Hegel being profoundly antipathetic to him. For although Bakhtin is acceding to the characterization of epic provided by this whole nineteenth century tradition of thought, he is of course reversing the valuations which accompany it. It is precisely a way of *praising* the novel in the essay “Epic and Novel” to say that it repudiates and parodies the fixation on the heroic national past that characterizes the epic. In the secular struggle between the genres, the generic characteristics of the novel would seem to line it up against the nationalizing claims of epic.

We can get to a similar conclusion in Bakhtin’s thinking by drawing on another set of oppositions in his work, here mediated much more particularly through considerations on the national language. In some densely argued pages in “Discourse in the Novel,” he offers an account of language, and an implicit history of it, which sees the

historic European languages as pulled between unifying or centripetal forces, and decentralizing, heteroglossic, or centrifugal forces. This is at once a theoretical and a historical account—and this, perhaps, is its difficulty. It is a theoretical account because Bakhtin here partly restates Voloshinov's critique of the Saussurean *langue/parole* distinction: the "normative" pole of Bakhtin's opposition is that which permits continuity ("guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding," *DI*, 270), while the centrifugal pole is that which responds to the necessary contingency, the eventness of all occasions of actual utterance. But this is also an implicitly historical account of the actual evolution of language; or, where the history becomes explicit, it is condensed and undeveloped, as in the following paragraph:

The victory of one reigning language [dialect] over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems, philology with its methods of studying and teaching dead languages, languages that were by that very fact 'unities,' Indo-European linguistics with its focus of attention, directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language—all this determined the content and power of the category of "unitary language" in linguistic and stylistic thought.<sup>5</sup>

This is immediately persuasive in providing the social and historical ground, in actual linguistic practice, for what appears here as a *mis-take*—the misplaced prestige attributed to the notion of the unitary language. It is also suggestive, in its condensed way, of the actual historical processes which went to establish the national languages of Europe, of the part played by such linguistic imposition in the establishment of the unitary nation-state. But it is also difficult to reconcile with the continuing need, in Bakhtin's thinking, for a unifying pole to make language intelligible, even if that unifying pole is only conceived as the sum of previous occasions of linguistic usage, and the set of "norms" as only posited and not given. Be that as it may, the point of this excursus into Bakhtin's linguistics is that he associates the "poetic genres"—especially, in my view, epic, though he does not say this explicitly—with those unifying and centralizing tendencies within the national language.

Thus the generic contrast between poetry and the novel re-emerges in this specifically national-linguistic context:

At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal ideological world in the higher



official socio-ideological levels, on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all "languages" and dialects.<sup>6</sup>

The novel is naturally the form which both draws upon these parodic and carnivalizing forces, and indeed contributes to them. Poetry, by contrast (epic poetry especially, I wish to add), was instrumental in "accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal ideological world"; to generalize from this account, epic poetry becomes one of the crucial centralizing and unifying forces holding together the national language, and thus crucial in the ever-active constitution of the national center. Once again we recognize the judgment which associates the epic with the national past, and once again also we recognize how Bakhtin has reversed the valencies of the nineteenth-century thought on which he is drawing.

If I stress the *suggestiveness* of these lapidary and condensed assertions on Bakhtin's part, I do so because they certainly do not, as they stand, constitute a history of any of the European languages, and the scholarly work that would be required to substantiate them has not, to my knowledge, been done. In particular, the role of poetry in the formation of the national languages certainly seems to me to be overstated in that last quotation from "Discourse in the Novel," though I can of course immediately think of specific examples which seem indicative—perhaps Chaucer and Early Modern English, or Dante and Italian. Nevertheless, in what follows I take Bakhtin's broad categorizations in a certain sense for granted, to this effect: that the language of the novel in the nineteenth century is thoroughly heteroglossic, reflecting and drawing on a profoundly heteroglossic linguistic world; and that in addition to any of the other fundamentally historic reasons why the nineteenth century should be inimical to epic, this novelized heteroglossia makes the possibility of finding an appropriate heroic language or idiom intrinsically problematic. Furthermore, and especially in Britain, the association of epic with an heroic national past poses some acute ideological problems when the national past is itself an arena of contention.

## II

So in seeking to address the meaning of epic in nineteenth-century England, and especially its association with ideas of nationality,

there are two questions which this Bakhtinian account make emerge with particular clarity. First, how would it be possible to *write* an epic in the nineteenth century?—that is, how would a writer of epics forge a diction that negotiated the novelized and heteroglossic reality of nineteenth-century life. Second, what are the politics of epic in an already formed nation-state with a powerful and dominant national language? I discuss these questions in relation to the nineteenth-century debate over, and practice of, Homeric translation and in relation to William Morris's little-read epic poem, *Sigurd the Volsung*, which draws on the stories of the *Nibelungen Lied* as they were available through their Icelandic version in the *Volsunga Saga*. In doing so, I am choosing a very particular pathway through the nineteenth-century obsession with epic, and that a fuller account would need to pass through Wordsworth, who considered writing "some British theme, some old / Romantic tale by Milton left unsung";<sup>7</sup> or Byron and his interest in Italian comic epics; or Tennyson in "Ulysses" and the *Idylls of the King*. In choosing Morris and the Homeric translations, however, I am choosing material that seeks especially to insist on the heroic—which distances itself from the already novelized epic that Bakhtin detects above all in Byron. The poetry that I have chosen is in flight from the contamination of the novel.

So I take epic in a generically conservative sense. This is unlike one powerful recent account of the epic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Franco Moretti's *Modern Epic*.<sup>8</sup> Moretti explicitly challenges Bakhtin's opposition of epic and novel for the nineteenth century, seeing precisely the *novel* in this century as the form which homogenizes and centralizes, while it is the epic, as world-text, which must incorporate the polyphony of the world (*ME*, 56–57). This is salutary in opposing a too-easy celebration of the heteroglossic or the centrifugal in the nineteenth-century novel; but it relies on an eccentric emphasis from Hegel's account of the epic, stressing the inclusiveness of epic in Hegel's account, while almost ignoring his simultaneous insistence on the national heroic past—ignoring, above all, the way that epic is almost an impossibility for the nineteenth century in Hegel's view, since it springs so centrally from the particular conditions of a nationality at a certain (primitive) stage in its history. So it is not epic as world-text that I discuss, but more conservatively epic as national heroic poem, and its potential, indeed actual incompatibility with the modernity of the nineteenth century.

It is this modernity which forms the context for my first question—how to write an epic poem in the nineteenth century. This is

a question that forces itself as much upon translators of epic poetry as it does upon those who seek to write wholly new epic poems. Such translations, especially of Homer, were extraordinarily frequent in the nineteenth century: George Steiner gives examples from over twenty translations of Homer from the nineteenth century; two British prime ministers, Derby and Gladstone, translated him, the former producing a complete version; Tennyson and Arnold both attempted Homeric specimens.<sup>9</sup> Matthew Arnold, of course, devoted lectures to the topic of Homeric translation, lectures which became *On Translating Homer* in 1861.<sup>10</sup> The crucial questions for Arnold—as they must be, of course, for all translators as they actually engage with their material—are those of form and diction. Thinking about these matters in a Bakhtinian perspective, however, sheds a particular light upon these technical or aesthetic-seeming matters, suggesting some of the wider social forces that are imbricated in them.

Arnold's chief polemical target in *On Translating Homer* was F. W. Newman, who had produced a translation of *The Iliad* in 1856. Newman replied to Arnold's strictures with his own pamphlet on the topic of Homeric translation.<sup>11</sup> In dispute between them is the extent to which a translation can or ought to foreground the social and historic distance that divides the contemporary moment from the moment at which the poem was first produced. Arnold particularly objected to Newman's translation, because in using a kind of ballad meter, and a heavily archaic vocabulary, it had emphasized that distance; the objective for a modern translation, in Arnold's view, was to find a form and diction that would be suitably noble without suggesting the least trace of strangeness. Newman, by contrast, defended his translation by arguing that it was possible to get an equivalent sense of the strangeness that Homer must have had for Periclean Athens by drawing on the archaic forms of the ballad tradition; most strongly, since Homer was "the poet of a barbarian age" (*HT*, 48), his songs now would "move in us the same pleasing interest as an elegant and simple melody from an African of the Gold Coast" (*HT*, 13).

In practice this meant poetry like this:

The Queen of Morning from the bed of glorious Tithonus	
Uprose, to carry light to men	and eke to gods immortal.
But to the sharp Achaian ships	from Jove came Quarrel
	darting,
Noisome, who bare within her hands battle's portentous ensign:	
And on Ulysses' galley black	she stood; which midmost
	couched,

<p>Huge like to some leviathan,          Alike towards the tented camp          And to Achilles' bands, which haul'd their evenbalanced galleys          Last on the strand, on bravery</p>	<p>to shout both ways adapted,          of Telamonian Ajax          and stubborn strength          reliant.<sup>12</sup></p>
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I make no particular defense of this as poetry, but it does demonstrate strikingly the dilemma facing the translator of epic in the nineteenth century: that in seeking to find a poetic equivalent within English prosody of the effect Homer might have had for fifth-century Athenians, one is inevitably driven to a form and diction which risk mere antiquarianism. Nevertheless, Newman seems to me to have the better of Arnold in the matter of their dispute, if not in the manner. Only by invoking archaic forms, equivalent to those practiced by contemporary Africans, can the force of epic be made available in the modern world.

In this light, epic poetry in the modern world becomes an impossibility, a conclusion that manages to satisfy both Hegel and Bakhtin. It satisfies Hegel because for him epic is essentially an archaic form, bound to be at odds with the modern world. And it satisfies Bakhtin because, in the epochal contest of genres, the novel appears to have conclusively won. Newman's reference to "an African of the Gold Coast," however, suggests another aspect to the cultural politics of epic; that it needs to be mapped not only on the transition from barbarity to modernity, but also on the national axis between "barbarous" periphery to modern and metropolitan center. I return to this theme in the last section of this paper.

The difficulties posed to the nineteenth century by Homeric translation certainly underlines one general Bakhtinian point, which is that it would be very difficult to forge an heroic diction which drew upon the full heteroglossic range of the contemporary world, a usage which must remain the privilege of the novel. This applies still more to the attempt to write an original epic, an attempt made most ambitiously by William Morris in *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876). Morris's poetic diction, in its more extreme version, was notorious for its archaism and for its attempt to eschew all Latinisms in favor of a (sometimes new-minted) Germanic idiom. It represents, in other words, an extreme selection from, and forcing of, the linguistic diversity of nineteenth-century Britain, though it would be eccentric to claim that such a peculiar style served the purposes of linguistic normalization.

Morris's poem was based upon the same ultimate material as the *Nibelungen Lied*, but in its Icelandic version, the *Volsunga Saga*. Some

years before the publication of the poem, Morris, with the collaboration of Erikir Magnússon, had translated the saga; the translation is preceded by a mass of prefatory material which places the story in a very particular ideological field:

In conclusion, we must again say how strange it seems to us, that this Volsung Tale, which is in fact an unversified poem, should never before have been translated into English. For this is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks—to all our race first, and afterwards, when the change of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been—a story too—then should it be to those that come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us.<sup>13</sup>

Morris is here adopting, with some characteristic modifications, exactly the association of epic and nationality which proceeds from Schlegel and Carlyle. More specifically, this passage asserts a *racial* continuity between the epic past and the present. It is typical of Morris, however, to anticipate the passing away of “our race” in the same manner as the Homeric Greeks and Trojans—this is scarcely a triumphalist assertion of racial continuity. Nevertheless, this assertion of a heroic national past is one of the grounds upon which the epic material of the saga, and the poem that will spring from it, is brought forward.

In other respects, also, the poem itself exhibits some of the characteristics that Bakhtin ascribes to epic. Unlike the translation of the Saga, and unlike Morris’s own practice in his redaction entitled *The Earthly Paradise*, *Sigurd the Volsung* appears with no prefatory or framing material. In addition, the poem itself makes virtually no anachronistic allusion to the contemporary world, rigorously excluding any concessions to the moment of its composition. In short, the poem certainly seeks to maintain that “zone of epic distance” which Bakhtin saw as contrasting the epic from the novel.

J. W. Mackail, Morris’s biographer and later himself a translator of Homer, described *Sigurd* as “the most Homeric poem which has been written since Homer.”<sup>14</sup> Certainly, in considering the diction of the poem, we can see it as displaying some of the same difficulties that beset the nineteenth-century translators of Homer; the following passage gives an account of a sea voyage of the Niblung host:

Fair now through midmost ocean King Gunnar’s dragons run,  
And the green hills round about them gleam glorious with the sun;  
The keels roll down the sea-dale, and welter up the steep,  
And o’er the brow hang quivering ere again they take the leap;

For the west wind pipes behind them, and no land is on their lee,  
 As the mightiest of earth's peoples sail down the summer sea:  
 And as eager as the west-wind, no duller than the foam  
 They spread all sails to the breezes, and seek their glory home:  
 Six days they sail the sea-flood, and the seventh dawn of day  
 Up-heaveth a new country, a land far-off and grey;  
 Then Knefrod biddeth heed it, and he saith: "Lo, the Eastland shore,  
 And the land few ships have sailed to, by the mirk-wood covered o'er."<sup>15</sup>

This is a style which continually and provocatively announces its difference from the prosaic. This is much more than a matter of the use of archaisms; some of these, like the use of the archaic *eth* inflection, were usual in nineteenth-century poetry to indicate grandness or memorableness of utterance ("Say not the struggle nought availeth"). More striking in this passage is the use of kennings ("green hills"; "sea-dale"), alluding to the poetic practice of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, and Morris's use of polysyndeton, beginning so many of his clauses with the conjunction, to give an air of elevated importance to each of the actions in this grandly rendered narrative.

More important, however, are further "traditional" features of the style of the poem which Morris employs insistently. The heavily marked alliterations which distinguish each half of the hexameters recall some features of medieval English verse, though this is certainly not alliterative verse if by that is meant a verse where the fundamental prosodic feature is alliteration; rather Morris's poetry recalls such verse or alludes to it by its own alliterative practice. Also, the heavily stressed rhythm, predominantly anapestic before the caesura in each line, indicates a diction that seeks to mark its distance dramatically from the rhythm, not only of prose, but of the more "natural" English rhythms of the iambic line.

In addition to these permanent features of the poetry are the more obviously archaic vocabulary items, the Morrisian coinages, and the exaggerated preferences for Germanic rather than Latinate root-words. Even in this short passage there are midmost, sea-dale, sea-flood, up-heaveth and mirk-wood. The point is not the success or otherwise of these coinages and revivals; it is rather that they must inevitably *allude to* rather than unselfconsciously perform the epic distance and grandeur that they seek.

The style and diction of the poem, then, constantly dramatize the distance of the world of the poem from the prosaic world of the nineteenth century; this is a permanent feature of *Sigurd the Volsung* and more than compensates for that absence of framing devices which distinguishes the poem from the stories in *The Earthly Paradise*.

The diction is partly a question of simplification, in the sense that it must exclude not only all modern coinages, but also the Latinate resources of English, which, despite Milton, are here considered unsuitable for the force of epic. But mostly, the diction testifies to the forcing, the violence, that must be done to the everyday language of English in order to make it fit to be a vehicle for epic in the nineteenth century. This evocation of the national heroic past, while it offers itself as the great story of "our race," can nevertheless only ever undo its own project as it insists on its own difference from the contemporary. This will soon become part of Morris's revolutionary political project, which is to measure the inadequacies of the present by reference to the more authentic forms of the medieval past; but here we can note the paradox that Morris's project seems both to confirm Bakhtin's account of the national language and to disconfirm it. Certainly epic poetry in the nineteenth century cannot draw upon the full heteroglossic range of English—on the contrary, the language has to be forced, simplified, reinvented. But equally, given this historical moment, epic language no longer appears as a centralizing or homogenizing force in the national-linguistic situation, but now as a strange and even eccentric dialect within the wider heteroglossia.

Finally, however, this is by no means a disconfirmation of Bakhtin in his account of the place of epic poetry in the politics of national-language formation—or it is so only if we ignore Hegel's ascription of epic to an earlier stage of human history than the nineteenth century. Epic might well have been once an agent in national-language formation; but it can scarcely be so now, and the extraordinarily mixed achievements of Morris in *Sigurd the Volsung*, and the nineteenth-century translators of Homer, testify to this impossibility. But there is another sense in which the politics of epic impinge upon national politics in the nineteenth century, which involves a paradox that is more difficult to resolve: namely the association of epic with empire. The paradox is this, that Morris should have written an epic, understood in the terms that he did, and yet should have been one of the most consistent opponents of British imperialism in the late nineteenth century. It is with this redirected nationalism that I conclude—epic torn from its association with the national heroic past and redirected to the contemporary imperialist present.

### III

This is how Patrick Brantlinger, writing in 1988, makes the connection between epic and empire:

Heroes (and imperialist writing often translates experience into epic terms) are made "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" to the blandishments of home. . . . Against these complexities [of the domestic social and political world], which often call for submission to social norms treated as "laws" of evolution, imperialism offers a swashbuckling politics and a world in which neither epic heroism nor chivalry is dead. Both are to be rediscovered in crusading and conquering abroad.<sup>16</sup>

Brantlinger is not alone in making such a connection; Martin Green, writing at the beginning of the 1980s, had similarly argued not only that adventure stories were the "energising myth" of empire, but more particularly had associated the specifically epic and saga material with the British imperialist project: "The translations of Homer taught in the public schools, and even more the Norse and Germanic sagas that aroused so much interest in the nineteenth century, provided a literary model for which these African subjects were perfect."<sup>17</sup> This last remark occurs in a discussion of Rider Haggard's fiction. And the critic Joseph Bristow has similarly argued that a new conjunction of adventure-writing, masculinity, and imperialism characterizes the end of the nineteenth century.

There are some difficult questions to untangle here. The broad thrust of Brantlinger's argument is that epic is an essentially simplifying genre, which permits the imperialist imagination to rediscover abroad the grand moral and political simplicities which are denied it at home. In this account, the contemporary politics of imperialism can be lived and written in epic terms. But to complicate matters, another strand of late nineteenth-century argument associates epic not so much with the imperialists as with the conquered native subjects; in this account, as Green suggests, you can best understand your native foes by reading them through the work of Homer, the sagas, or William Morris. So on the one hand, epic invites to a swash-buckling imperialist politics; on the other, it serves as a guide to the martial mentality of some at least of the subject races of the empire. Consider, for example, this striking sequence: Alexander the Great, who took a copy of *The Iliad* with him on his campaigns, and modeled himself on Achilles; Napoleon, who took a copy of *Ossian*; and T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia), who took *Sigurd the Volsung* with him on his campaigns in the desert. Each of these imperialist adventurers took a copy of an epic with them on their campaigns; but the first two sought to model *themselves* on their epic heroes, while Lawrence sought to understand the Arab peoples who came into contact with him by means of his Morris. *Sigurd* became a guide to the barbarians.

This ambivalence about the imperialist politics of epic is related



to the notion of atavism; epic, that is, emerges from an earlier stage of human history than the present, and thus our enjoyment of it speaks to an earlier phase in our historic development—or even our evolution. A classic statement of such a doctrine is to be found in Andrew Lang's articles defending the new masculine romances of Stevenson and Haggard in the *Contemporary Review* in the late 1880s:

Are we to be told that we love the "Odyssey" because the barbaric element has not died out of our blood, and because we have a childish love of marvels, miracles, man-eating giants, women who never die, "murders grim and great," and Homer's other materials? Very well. "Public opinion," in Boston, may condemn us, but we will get all the fun we can out of the ancestral barbarism of our natures. I only wish we had more of it. The Coming Man may be bald, toothless, highly "cultured," and addicted to tales of introspective analysis. I don't envy him when he has got rid of that relic of the ape, his hair; those relics of the age of combat, his teeth and nails; that survival of barbarism, his delight in the last battles of Odysseus, Laertes' son . . . Not for nothing did Nature leave us all savages under our white skins; she has wrought thus that we might have many delights, among others "the joy of adventurous living," and of reading about adventurous living . . . The advantage of our mixed-condition, civilised at top with the old barbarian under our clothes, is just this, that we can enjoy all sorts of things.<sup>18</sup>

Lang's purpose in defending the fiction of Stevenson and Haggard is accomplished here by a notion of *atavism*, though of a rather different kind than that with which we have become familiar. A widespread late nineteenth-century notion of "degeneration" has become recognized as a distinctive post-Darwinian trope—and fear.<sup>19</sup> Here in Lang's prose, however, atavism appears in a benign light, as the explanation upon which the appeal of epic and kindred forms like romance can be accounted for. It is *because* we are still barbarians "under our white skins"—Lang shares the thought with his presumed racially homogenous readership—that we can still take pleasure in these otherwise archaic and childish forms. The ambivalence of that gesture of Newman's, when he had compared the poetry of Homer to that of an African of the Gold Coast, begins to become more apparent.

We can focus these ambivalences more exactly by considering the reception of Morris's *Sigurd* and of his earlier translation of the saga. The theme of the archaism of the epic material runs through the reviews of the translation of the *Volsunga* saga and *Sigurd the Volsung*; an anonymous reviewer in the *Spectator* refers to the saga's heroes and heroines as "the most ferocious set of savages that ever inspired

poetry of a really high order";<sup>20</sup> while the equally anonymous reviewer of the poem, in the *North American Review*, talks of the world of the Scandinavian tradition as "archaic": "Like the savagery of certain low races, it represents the survival of ruder stages in man's development than are to be found in the oldest records of the most favoured races" (*WM*, 246)—this same reviewer goes on to compare the deeds of the poem to the deeds of the "monstrous deities of Polynesian mythology, Pele and Lono."<sup>21</sup> (The reviewers also habitually remark on the greater *manliness* of this poem by comparison with *The Earthly Paradise*, but that is another story, though not a wholly unconnected one). There is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) contrast here between this specifically Scandinavian material and the Greek epic material with which these critics were more at home; but in general we can see epic as being associated with an earlier stage of human history and development, and the attempt to revive it being suspect for just that reason.

There are some complexities, then, in trying to unravel the cultural politics of epic in the context of late nineteenth-century imperialism. On the one hand epic seems to fit readily into the requirements of a simplifying imperialist politics. In this context it is relevant that, despite his explicit politics, Morris's verse appealed strongly to a generation of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century imperialist writers: to Kipling, and Henry Newbolt, and, as we have seen, to T. E. Lawrence.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, epic is also widely seen as an appropriate form for the barbaric *opponents* of empire; in an apparently generous move, the cultures of those opponents are dignified by an association with the prestigious form of the epic. But this generosity is at once compromised by the association of epic with a barbaric past, so that, as in the theory of atavism, both epic and barbarism belong to a now superseded phase of human development. Yet here too the politics of atavism are complex, for it was on a theory of atavism that the greatest of the anti-imperialist writers of this period, J. A. Hobson, based his assault on Jingoism: that it could only be understood as an atavistic revival of outmoded cultural and political forms.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV

A theory of atavism would certainly seem to accord better with a broadly Hegelian account of epic than a Bakhtinian one, though we have seen that both writers share the sense of epic directed to the heroic national past. I return to Bakhtin, however, for an under-

standing of one final, relevant aspect of late nineteenth-century imperialist writing, namely the demotic imperialist verse of writers such as Newbolt and Kipling. If we ask, after Bakhtin, what happens to epic in a novelized age, one answer is that it reemerges in the accents of the barrack-room: that is, the heroic and martial virtues can now be heard in popular and demotic speech, rather than from beyond that zone of epic distance of which Bakhtin speaks.

Kipling, for example, certainly alludes to epic in the dedication to “Barrack-Room Ballads”; the dead servants of the empire are imagined in the following way:

They are purged of pride because they died; they know the worth  
of their bays;  
They sit at wine with the Maidens Nine and the Gods of the  
Elder Days—  
It is their will to serve or be still as fitteth Our Father’s praise.<sup>24</sup>

And, of course, Kipling is anxious on many occasions to achieve a tone of high seriousness in writing about the empire. But he is also the author of those “Barrack-Room Ballads” in which the accents of the serving soldiers of the imperial army are reproduced, as in the following characteristic example, a poem called “Route Marchin”:

We’re marchin’ on relief over Injia’s sunny plains,  
A little front o’ Christmas-time an’ just be’ind the Rains;  
Ho! get away, you bullock-man, you’ve ’eard the bugle blowed,  
There’s a regiment a’comin’ down the Grand Trunk Road;  
    With its best foot first  
    And the road a-sliding past,  
    An’ every bloomin’ campin’-ground exactly like the last;  
    While the Big Drum says,  
    With ’is “rowdy-dowdy-dow!”—  
    “*Kiko kissywarsti* don’t you *hamsher argy jow*?”<sup>25</sup>

(Kipling helpfully explains that last line, in a footnote, as “Why don’t you get on?”) In an age of democratic imperialism such verse is perhaps to be expected. It takes a characteristic moment of epic poetry—the army on the march—and reworks it in demotic accents. The effect is not to debunk the claim to epic grandeur, but rather to reframe it in several ways. The speaker’s self-importance is undoubtedly in part comic: since it is the self-importance of a mere private soldier, Tommy Atkins—there is some condescension here in Kipling’s mimicking of his accents. But beyond that minor comedy some epic grandeur persists—or at least there remains a sense

of real endurance and courage on the part of these lowly servants of the empire. This is an epic idiom that has bathed itself in the heteroglossic variety of the marketplace and emerged transformed but not ultimately robbed of its political point.

A similar account can be given of the patriotic verse of Henry Newbolt, which is likewise divided between a language of anxiously sought high seriousness and the popular form of the ballad dressed in mimicked demotic accents:

Call him on the deep sea, call him up the Sound,  
 Call him when ye sail to meet the foe;  
 Where the old trade's plyin' an' the old flag flyin'  
 They shall find him ware an wakin', as they found him long ago!<sup>26</sup>

This is the conclusion to Newbolt's poem "Drake's Drum," which invokes the spirit of Drake to serve in any future national emergency, but invokes it in a mimicked popular tone. The heroic national past of epic has been recycled in an effort to include not only the leaders but the led. Not only the demotized diction, but the very ballad form itself—popular shadow of the high forms of English epic throughout the nineteenth century—here figure the inclusiveness of a national-democratic myth.

*Sigurd the Volsung* and these poems by Newbolt and Kipling represent opposite strategies for writing epic grandeur in a novelized age. Morris's poem precisely sought to provide the epic of an heroic national past, but in doing so had to invent a diction which forced and simplified that of his contemporary world—and thus in its eccentricity could not possibly provide that unifying linguistic pole which Bakhtin prescribes for poetry. Kipling and Newbolt, by contrast, in their would-be demotic poems, sought to provide heroic poetry for a democratic age, but in an age when national heroism meant imperialism. These opposite choices, though they are neither predicted in the broad sweep of Bakhtin's arguments about poetry and the unity of a national language, nevertheless testify to the force of that connection and the paradoxes of sustaining it in the full heteroglossic reality of late nineteenth-century Britain.

## Notes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 13. Hereafter *DI*, cited in the text.

2. Thomas Carlyle, "The Nibelungen Lied," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1888), 1:221.

3. This whole process is well but briefly described by David Quint in his chapter "Ossian, Medieval 'Epic,' and Eisentein's Alexander Nevsky," in *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 2:1062; 2:1046-47.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *Dialogic Imagination*, 271.

6. *Ibid.*, 273.

7. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), bk. 1, ll. 179-80.

8. Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (London: Verso Books, 1996). Hereafter *ME*, cited in the text.

9. *Homer in English*, ed. George Steiner (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

10. Matthew Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, in *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

11. Francis W. Newman, *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice: A Reply to Matthew Arnold, Esq.* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1861). Hereafter *HT*, cited in the text.

12. *Homer in English*, 152.

13. William Morris, *Collected Works of William Morris, vol. 7. Grettir the Strong. The Volsungs and the Niblungs* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992; reprinted from the 1910-1915 Longmans, Green edition), 286.

14. J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1901), 1:332.

15. Morris, *Collected Works of William Morris, vol. 12. The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, 272. All references are to this edition and hereafter appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

16. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 36.

17. Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 231.

18. Andrew Lang, "Realism and Romance," *Contemporary Review* 52 (1887): 689-90.

19. See, for example, William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Sally Ledger, "In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in *Fin de Siècle* Britain," in *Literature and History* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 71-86.

20. Anon., *Spectator* (13 August 1870), 983-84, in Peter Faulkner, ed., *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 157. Hereafter *WM*, cited in the text.

21. Anon., *North American Review* (March 1877), 323-25, in Faulkner, ed., *William Morris*, 246, 247.

22. Kipling had family connections with Burne-Jones and was an admirer of Morris (and a more general aestheticism) as a school boy—the contradictions of this can be seen in Kipling's stories of *Stalky & Co* in *The Complete Stalky & Co*, ed. Isabel Guigly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Newbolt was the editor of a selection of Morris's writing, mostly his poetry; see *William Morris*, ed. and comp. Henry Newbolt (London: Nelson & Sons, n.d.).

23. See both *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) and *The Psychology of Jingoism* (1901).

24. Dedication from "Barrack-Room Ballads," in Rudyard Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, ed. M. M. Kaye (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990), 68.

25. *Ibid.*, 343.

26. Henry Newbolt, "Drake's Drum," in *Collected Poems 1897-1907* (London: Nelson & Sons, n.d.), 17.

# Epic, Nation, and Empire: Notes toward a Bakhtinian Critique

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In recent years [. . . the Indian nationalist party, the BJP] has benefited immeasurably by the steady growth of Hindu consciousness, fuelled by sporadic communal disturbance, conflict in Punjab and Kashmir, and—unquantifiably but crucially—two years of frantically popular television serials based on the Mahabharata.

—Derek Brown, “The Terror”

WHY should it be the case that the screening of a dramatized version of an ancient epic poem should cause or add to violent cultural conflict? What “crucial” assumptions about the “communal” role of epic underlie the Western journalist’s observations about the Indian/Hindu populous?<sup>1</sup> In its reading of Bakhtin, this essay attempts to theorize the cultural politics of the epic poem, and in doing so to disentangle and engage with the assumptions about communality, sectarianism, nationalism, and primitivism which underpin the cultural semantics of epic and indeed the throwaway comments of a *Guardian* journalist in India. The epic is read in this article, through a theorization originating in the writings of Bakhtin, as a genre which comes to have a specific politicized relationship with the concept of the *nation*, sharing with it defining characteristics of cultural cohesion, and seeking to become defining of and defined by nationality. Bakhtin’s scant but intensely provocative writings on epic are developed in this study within his theories of monologism to suggest that the simultaneity of definition across epic/nation can be disrupted and diffused both notionally, through the inherent dialogism of socially situated textuality, and in practice through textual reading. Both the genre of epic and the concept of nation are viewed as desiring to be “centripetal,” turning in upon themselves, denying the existence of the Other; the essay suggests

that the context of empire may, in a Bakhtinian epic poetics, reveal the “failures” of epic poems in their desire to maintain their cohesive, internalizing ideology.

### Bakhtin, Monologism, and Epic

Bakhtin’s writings on epic are contained largely within two essays; “Epic and Novel” (written in 1941) and “Discourse in the Novel” (1934–35).<sup>2</sup> “Epic and Novel” is a substantiation of claims made about the differences between novel and epic (more broadly between dialogic and monologic forms) in “Discourse in the Novel,” and as such it contains, along with sections of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*,<sup>3</sup> the most explicit comments Bakhtin makes on his notion of the monologic. Bakhtin uses “monologism” (and thus a critique of epic) as a foil to his readings of his favored dialogism (much in the same way that Aristotle uses epic as the point out of which tragedy evolves),<sup>4</sup> and this leads him and critics who have followed his ideas, I will argue, to leave monologism as an underutilized theoretical tool.

In his important work on Bakhtin and ideology, Michael Gardiner acknowledges the monologic as crucially (and politically) underlying Bakhtin’s work. Gardiner’s discussion of Voloshinov implies that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* witnesses an initial politicized playing out of the theory of language restriction which is to become monologism. Gardiner argues that, according to Voloshinov: “The dominant class is motivated to ensure fixity of meaning and arrest the flux of the sign, insofar as the establishment of a monolithic or ‘official’ language facilitates the sociopolitical unification of society.”<sup>5</sup> And in a set of notes aimed “Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book,” written in 1961, Bakhtin summarizes the monologism which stretches throughout his theorizing:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of *my* consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other. . . . Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons.<sup>6</sup>

Bakhtin's ideas of the epic need to be understood in the context of this theoretical distaste for monologism, and with an acknowledgment that Bakhtin supports dialogism in a competitive linguistic, discursive, and social disruption. Thus Bakhtin's version of literary history repeats notions of epic apparent since the origins of literary criticism: there is a desire for epic to be evolved away from, narrated into nostalgia and out of significance. Yet Bakhtin does not put an historical limit on the existence of monologism (epic being, in his terms, the monologic genre *par excellence*); rather it is involved in a continual struggle to suppress, cut off and silence the dialogic.

Thus Bakhtin's construction of epic, as with all his literary criticism, is embedded in the concepts of language and discourse which lead to "dialogism." For Bakhtin language is always situational, contextual, socially stratified, and ultimately dialogic. No utterance is made without the expectation of an "answer"; no utterance is pristine, but comes instead from an intertextuality of discourses; every utterance is thus placed in a social context and is dependent on this context for its meaning.<sup>7</sup> This offers both a definition of and, in some instances, an ideal state *for* language. Bakhtin's literary writings, often in partial opposition to his more centrally linguistic theorizing, tend to imply that although language *is* dialogic (or sometimes heteroglossic—made up of colliding, competing, and complementary discourses), texts can exist which deny this natural status of language. This is a paradox of monologism, one which is addressed more fully below. For the moment it is important to know that Bakhtin's linguistic basis translates into textual reading through a prioritization of the novel as the truly dialogic genre: the only genre which is shaped by rather than seeking to shape language (which means to ideologically fix it, as Voloshinov implies). For Bakhtin, the novel has no ordering principle—he praises Dostoevsky for allowing the speech, discourses, and behavior of his characters to exist outside the remit of the sort of authorial control which he identifies, for example, in Tolstoy—the novel allows (more properly, has *the potential* to allow) discourses to interact *as* language. Thus "Epic and Novel" and "Discourse in the Novel" are remarkable for the way in which they reorientate generic understanding so that the boundaries and categorization of genres are changed from formalistic definitions to a principle of genre which prioritizes the nature of their inclusion/exclusion of discourse(s). While this often coincides with preexisting differentiations, Bakhtin can produce some readings which initially rub against orthodox generic placement. His discussion of Pushkin's long poem *Eugene Onegin*, for example, moves the text from consideration as "poetry" until Bakhtin openly refers



to it as a "novel" (contradicting, incidentally, the notion that Bakhtin thinks all poetry monologic).<sup>8</sup>

Discussing the differentiation of epic and novel, Bakhtin says: "Differences between the novel and the epic are usually perceived on the level of thematics alone."<sup>9</sup> In a Bakhtinian critique it will be the nature of the discourse(s) contained in, or erupting out of, epic which define it. Epic is then a single discourse, a way of speaking which (seeks to) restrict the number and types of utterance which can potentially be made within it. Epic denies and defies the true, dialogic, heteroglossic nature of language. David Lodge describes monologic "genres" as those which "seek to establish a single style, a single voice, with which to express a single world-view."<sup>10</sup> Lodge's pointer toward the fact that these "genres" are not only linguistically but ideologically restrictive (indeed overdetermined) rightly reminds us that Bakhtin's ideas are always grounded in a belief that the utterance exists only in a social sphere—this ideological aspect of monologism will become central to my reading of epic.

The "monologic"<sup>11</sup> then comes to obtain a crucial meaning, signifying restriction, singularity, antidiversity, and "the centripetal forces of language."<sup>12</sup> Michael Holquist characterizes Bakhtin's differentiation of monologic and novelistic genres by saying that for Bakhtin monologic genres "are constituted by a set of formal features for fixing language that pre-exists any specific utterance within the genre. Language, in other words, is assimilated to form. The novel by contrast seeks to shape form to language."<sup>13</sup> In consequence the epic, as monologic, will necessarily be a conserving, univocal, and "centripetal" discourse, excluding other discourses, limiting what can be said within it (again the words "seeking to" could be added; as will become clear, monologic discourses often fail to maintain their monologism in the face of the inevitable but unwanted answer-to-the-utterance). And by this direct intervention in holding in check its potential range of utterances, it becomes apparent that epic as monologic form will in a very significant way determine the semantic possibilities held within it. The genre will not only restrict meaning, it will come to "mean" itself. In the words of Krystyna Pomorska, for Bakhtin, "'form' is active in any structure as a specific aspect of a 'message.'"<sup>14</sup> It can then be expected that a Bakhtinian reading will suggest that "epic," as a self-defining field of utterance, will emit meaning *as a field and as a form*.

Bakhtin, writing on epic, makes substantial progress toward identifying the nature and meaning of epic discourse. In "Epic and Novel" he says:

The epic as a genre in its own right may, for our purposes, be characterised by three constitutive features; (1) a national past—in Goethe's and Schiller's terminology the "absolute past"—serves as the subject for the epic; (2) national tradition (not just personal experience and the free thought which grows out of it) serves as the source for the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives. (*DI*, 13)

Bakhtin then expands on each of these characteristics. The "national epic past," he says, is not simply the linear history of the nation projected from one point to another on a telos. It is rather "a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times,' " "a world of 'firsts' and 'bests,' " (*DI*, 13), a selective history which, because the epic poem is continually "about" the past, places a past world hierarchically above the present. The epic contorts national history to project that history in its "best" (most national) form. If the epic moved out of this relationship it would, according to Bakhtin, "step out of the world of epic into the world of novel" (*DI*, 14) (a movement out of strict monologism and into apparent novelization which will need to be examined later).

For present purposes it is important to bear two things in mind about this first Bakhtinian characteristic of epic. First, epic is linked to nationality (an ideological conjunction that Bakhtin does not here, or elsewhere, fully explore). Second, epic reads national history in a partisan, valorizing way, stressing origins and "successes," producing an "epic" version of history which promotes the nation/tradition. To employ Bakhtin's word, the past is "absolute"; "valorized to an extreme degree. . . . The epic absolute past is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well" (*DI*, 15).

Expanding on his second characteristic ("tradition"), Bakhtin says: "The epic past, walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary, is preserved and revealed only in the form of national tradition. Important here is not the fact that tradition is the factual source for the epic—what matters rather is that reliance on tradition is immanent in it. Epic discourse is a discourse handed down by tradition" (*DI*, 16). Tradition, for Bakhtin, both preserves the closed nature of epic and ensures that it remains unchanged in its movement through history. Not only is "tradition" a conserving force, fending off processes of change, it is also active in reinforcing the "valorization" of epic: "The epic world is given solely as tradition, sacred and sacrosanct, evaluated in the same way by all and

demanding a pious attitude towards itself" (*DI*, 16). The inviolability which epic draws around itself is thus doubled, through the version of the past it constructs and through the means by which it moves, as a genre, along a corridor of history. Bakhtin summarizes his thoughts on "tradition":

Let us repeat: the important thing is not the factual sources of the epic, not the content of its historical events, nor the declarations of its authors—the important thing is this formal constitutive characteristic of the epic as a genre . . . ; its reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view which excludes any other possible approach. (*DI*, 16)

Epic "means" through its form (how else could it "demand a pious attitude"?); and not only does it generate meaning but it additionally codifies itself to the point of the apparently unquestionable (the "sacrosanct"), beyond the individuality of its author(s), deeply reflecting the historically layered and transmitted beliefs of a culture. Monologism here functions as an obscuring of certain origins at the expense of elevating others.

Bakhtin then moves on to his third characterizing feature of epic, which he considers an outcome of the other two, and describes as "absolute epic distance." Epic history ensures that the epic is "walled off from all subsequent times," while tradition "isolates the world of the epic from personal experience, from any new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding and interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations" (*DI*, 17). Thus contemporaneity is excluded from contact with the epic past, while epic can achieve a "completedness not only in its content but in its meaning and values as well. The epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-evaluating present" (*DI*, 17). Bakhtin insists upon the utter separateness of past and present in epic, which valorizes its own version of the past over the "present." What epic serves, Bakhtin points out, is "the future memory of a past" (*DI*, 19). Epic both faces and embodies the past, while inherent in it is a knowledge that it constructs a past (one that is marmorealized) for the future.

Before moving on to examine how Bakhtinian notions of epic can be used to produce a politicized critique of the genre as a national form, it is worth reiterating some of the main aspects of epic discourse on which Bakhtin focuses. Most importantly, Bakhtin links epic to the concept of nation, and, although he is very suggestive

about the nature of the linkage, Bakhtin does not expand on a concern which is not central to his purpose. Second, epic is a preservative force, seeking to ensure the unspoilt nature of what it contains. It is a closed world, moving through history, hoping, with the aid of "tradition," to remain unviolated. Walter Benjamin commented that "memory is the epic faculty *par excellence*."<sup>15</sup> Epic has a grip upon the past which surfaces as a continual memory, arising without contextual interference. And third, epic's version of the past is not all-encompassing or amorphous; it is selective and ultimately ideological, highlighting and foregrounding history and myth as "peak times," "firsts" and "bests." It contains the grain of knowledge that all its addressivity is *toward the future*—a projected retelling of the same meaning "for" history. Last, we should retain the fact that epic's monologism restricts its field of utterance and possibility by enclosure and foreclosure. Bakhtin says that the "epic hero lacks any ideological initiative (heroes and author alike lack it)" (*DI*, 35). And by its intervention epic comes to mean as form; in the phrase Graham Pechey uses to describe monologic genres, it is a "motivated signification,"<sup>16</sup> denying engagement with other discourses or ideologies. As Holquist comments, "the epic . . . sets out to purge [diversity] from its world."<sup>17</sup>

### Nation, Monologism, and Epic

Initially my methodological movements toward a Bakhtinian critique of epic hinge on the underplayed and assumed relationship Bakhtin establishes between epic and "nation." My aim here is to examine more fully than Bakhtin does this crucial linkage between genre and political entity, drawing a closer, more complicit area of contact between epic and nation, and positioning epic within the conceptual formulations employed by "nation." Epic and nation need to be seen as (ideally—in epic's terms) compatible ideologically and functionally symbiotic.

Nationalism, as a political and cultural phenomenon, has been generously theorized in recent years.<sup>18</sup> Below I use two of the most persuasive, influential and partially conflicting accounts of nationalism available—Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983)—foregrounding characteristics of cohesion and self-preservation in nationalism delineated in these works and then setting these in parallel to a Bakhtinian reading of epic; the points of confluence between the two lead to a more de-

tailed and activated understanding of the "meaning" of epic as an ideological/ monologic form and as a genre with a singular relationship to "nation."

The "Imagined Communities" in the title of Benedict Anderson's book has become something of a catchphrase in cultural and literary criticisms of nationalism, with the requisite ambiguity to allow it to be reinterpreted and argued over almost as an indicative cipher for his text. Imagined communities can be false, because imagined; authentic, because communities; incoherent as a result of their "obviously" constructed nature; necessary for the cohesion they supply.<sup>19</sup> My own use of Anderson (which I am aware of as an appropriation rather than an exposition) stresses the "imagined" as a construct, hopefully without falling too often into judging the (in-)authenticity of that constructedness; thus the "communities" (whatever their nature) tend to have a lower priority than my major concern with uncovering the mechanics of cohesion set in motion by the "imagination." Nations as imagined communities can be simultaneously inclusive (deciding who/what belongs) and exclusive (deciding where and against what they finish). It is the need to be defined over-against what it is not, what is "other" to it, which has been vital in making the nation a central reoccurrence in critical theories, and which sets it into the context of monologism/dialogism more clearly.

The "nation" is obviously patterned in Anderson and Gellner as a self-preserving force, and, importantly, never as a static entity. Its concepts of history and time recognize fluidity and change while presenting themselves through ideologies of the unchanging. As Gellner says, the nation "preaches and defends continuity"<sup>20</sup> (against the implicit knowledge that it is historically "new" [and imagined?] according to Gellner). The nation insists upon its historical continuity. Just as epic sanctions itself off from the present in the "epic distance" it establishes between its world and contemporaneity while using "tradition" to transmit itself through history, the nation is seen to exist in a permanent conceptual stasis which is constant throughout (and constantly aware of) history. As Anderson famously says: The nation "is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history."<sup>21</sup> Anderson elsewhere refers to this as a "genealogical" reading of nation: "the expression of an historical tradition of serial continuity" (*IC*, 195). The fixity of conception jostling with historical mobility clearly overlap in the nation and in (Bakhtinian) epic; both seek to preserve themselves as integral, immutable, defined units both pliable in and yet unaffected by/through history.

Bakhtin draws attention to the fact that the epic past is not merely the past, or in history in toto, but is in fact a selective, ideologically charged narration of "peak times" and "beginnings." Ernest Renan, a theorizer of nation of a different type than Anderson or Gellner, sees the past as a vital part of the nation's "soul"; it is, he says, "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories." And it is upon that word "rich" that the nature of the national past hangs (just as epic past relies on valorized "peaks" and "firsts"). Renan goes on: "A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea."<sup>22</sup> Renan's writings are of course important as historical texts, reflective of a general notion of the nation in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (though not utterly encapsulative of thinking on "nation" during the period). As much as his valorizing words "heroic," "great" and "glory" are relevant for us, showing how the nation forms ideological preferences, Renan's remarks are revealing also for the processes they involve. The parenthetical "by which I understand genuine glory" twists in a paradox of mutual nondefinition with nation. What is "genuine" glory will and can only ever be "national" glory. What is "genuine" is "national," and the nation therefore is genuine (and thus certainly never "imagined"). Gellner on the same issue is, not surprisingly, more skeptical than Renan, arguing that nationalism uses "pre-existing, historically inherited . . . cultures . . . , though it uses them selectively" (*NN*, 55). Anderson is even more incisive, pointing to the fact that nations engender "the need for a narrative of identity"; he shows how such narratives are formed by noting what he refers to as "that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (*JC*, 205, 44).

Nations then filter the past ideologically, producing an "antiquity" which can be considered "glorious" by Renan, "selective" by Gellner, and an "image" by Anderson. And the crossover with Bakhtinian epic again becomes clearer; it similarly reads the past ideologically, stressing "peak times" of national (subsequently epic) history, becoming interwoven with (rather than merely parallel to) the ideological processes of nationalism.

A firm and increasingly dependent relationship can thus be established between epic as a cultural form and the nation as a political entity. And Bakhtin's designation of epic as monologic form can be moved across the definition of epic into "nation" to further our understanding of the nature of the linkage between the two. Gellner, in terms close to Bakhtin's on epic, notes that the nation "imposes homogeneity both inside and, to a lesser degree, between, political units" (*NN*, 125). Anderson makes an even more Bakhtinian state-

ment about the monologic nature of the nation when he discusses the singing of national anthems as a symbol of the nation, stressing the "community" and simultaneous anonymity *demand*ed by the nation during the event. "The image: unisonance" is his comment, and in a footnote he extends this potentially Bakhtinian reading by noting the contrast between the anthem's official voice of the nation and the "dialogue" of "the language of everyday life" (*IC*, 145).<sup>23</sup> The nation here, through a specific cultural form, is expressed in "unisonance," univocally, monologically. The nation is at its "best" when there is no disruption inside its own communal, unified voice, when difference is purged and "communality" stressed. Notably Anderson says of national anthems: "No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity" (*IC*, 145). It is form here, not its content, which contains/relays the meaning of the event, and which best expresses nationality. When Bakhtin writes on epic it becomes clear that the monologism of epic means that its content will be restricted, its meaning enabled, through its signifying, "motivated" form. In Anderson's discussion the national anthem contains national meaning through its formal, situational qualities; so epic, monologically constricting the nature of its content, is able to signify the "nation" through its formal constitution. Its monologic discourse derives from (conceivably helps "imagine") the nation; the monologic characteristics of epic which Bakhtin identifies continually point back to the persistent connection he makes between epic and nation, and in turn suggest a critique of the nation as itself a monologic, constricting discourse.

And perhaps at this point a reassessment of Bakhtin's apparently paradoxical notion of "monologism" can begin. Answering the basic question of how Bakhtin can posit monologism as even existent if dialogism is the "real" or "true" state of language may be attempted through various means. Lynne Pearce notes movements away from Bakhtin's monologism/dialogism poetry/novel split in the eighties, and describes the dichotomy as a "red-herring": "poetic discourse is no more than a hypothetical (and ultimately false) polarity against which to pit the dialogicality of the novel."<sup>24</sup> Michael Gardiner draws out monologism in the best available analysis of its affect in/on Bakhtin, saying that for Bakhtin "language is unitary only 'in the abstract'" and:

There is no "ideal text" for Bakhtin, no pristine or "virgin" meaning which is beyond dispute or further argumentation; to suppose so is for him one of the defining features of monologic thought. Moreover, Bakh-

tin strongly argues that all texts are constructed with a particular audience in mind (even if an "ideal" one), which he feels radically alters the nature of the communicative process itself.<sup>25</sup>

The addressivity of discourse as *dialogism* is where the focus for an understanding of monologism as a *reading strategy* should be turned. Monologism does not have to *exist*; it needs to be understood as an *attempt* to circumvent (the ineffable plurality of) the addressivity of language. When Anderson's national anthem singers sing, who are they singing to? If they are singing as a simultaneity, as a nation, are they addressing "other" nations? The addressivity of the event is in fact self-referential, the nation singing to the nation, constituting its own "future answer word," deproblematizing the dialogizing "social situation" of language; the nation is here, to paraphrase Bakhtin, trying to manage by itself, without the Other.

Monologism, the nation, and the epic can thus be understood as *attempts* to circumvent the "otherness" inherent in the dialogicality of discourse: to predict and dictate the future answer word—ensuring that it mirrors the utterance itself, admitting no other possibilities. Epic thus becomes an ideological force (with nation overarching it) seeking to pull inward all cohesive forces, to expunge difference, to foreclose the possibilities of the past and the future.

### Bakhtin, Epic, and Empire

On a conceptual level the co-existence of empire and nation simultaneously potentially defracts the exact coincidence of epic and nation established above, and enables a process which opens up areas of reading in "Bakhtinian epic." Benedict Anderson usefully points toward the problems of empire/nation simultaneity when he refers to "the inner incompatibility of empire and nation" (*IC*, 93), and in doing so highlights what is almost a paradox affecting political discourse in the nineteenth century. While, as I have asserted above, the nation is the predominant and basic unit of Western political philosophy, dictating the nature of constitutional and martial politics, imperialism and colonialism have a history which parallels and lives symbiotically with nationalism. And while the nation defines its borders (geographical, cultural, often racial) very clearly, and relies on a homogeneity which is partially reliant on the mutually exclusive homogeneity of other nations, empires expand borders, implying a vast heterogeneity of cultures, races, geographies within one conceptual boundary. Nations have a teleological stasis



("moving steadily down [or up] history"); empires narrate expansion, change, movement.

These opposing impulses can initially be understood, if not resolved, by focusing on the hegemonic strain inherent within nationalist thought. Jacques Derrida describes this thus: "each time a nation affirms itself . . . [the people] say, 'We are the best representatives of mankind.'" <sup>26</sup> Nationalism entails that nations are in constant (not always military) abrasion against each other. The contours of history through which the nation creates its self-image are indicative of how this hegemonic strain comes about; as Anderson says: "It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny" (*IC*, 12). Destiny confirms the "bests" and "firsts," melds them into a hegemony with a purpose, and produces the imperializing mission, which comes dressed in the unnervingly benign discourse noted by Derrida.

That nationalism might lead to imperialism does not lessen the potential conceptual difficulties of placing a national cultural (monologic) form in an imperial (heterogeneous) setting. There are, for instance, two main types of nationalism in the context of "empire." The first is that described above which leads to an imperializing impulse, the result of the nation's "aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance."<sup>27</sup> And within the context of empire there is the inversion of this imperial nationalism which constitutes a decolonizing impulse, and organizes resistance to imperial rule around the concept of nation (often as a concept "transported" to the imperial peripheries as an inherent part of the colonizer's self-justification). These decolonizing forces, while they are shrouded in the discourse of national "liberty" and work to overthrow the restraints and ethical procedures of empire, have themselves been subsequently critiqued in terms which echo the implicit ideological distaste for nationalism in Bakhtin's notion of monologism (and the expansion on it above).<sup>28</sup> While postcolonial criticism has founding texts which imply an utter distinction between colonizer and colonized, and a "natural" teleology of anticolonialism *through* nationalism, there has in recent years been a desire to move beyond "the reified polarities" this induces.<sup>29</sup> These revisionings, leading to a knowledge of imperialism as "culturally speaking, a two-way flow,"<sup>30</sup> have taken various forms: in Subaltern Studies, in the writings of Homi K. Bhabha, in the notion of "transculturation" used by Mary Louise Pratt (to give few examples from many).<sup>31</sup> While the notions contained within this diverse canon of criticism differ, even disagree, they collectively emphasize that the underlying movement in recent postcolonialism has been into the complexities of cultural ex-

changes and interfaces in the context of empire—toward a topography of the “hybridity” (to use a term from Bhabha) of the colonial situation and away from the essences of absolute oppositions.

Given this critical context, the crucial question is whether and how Bakhtinian/national epic will be “deformed” or hybridized in the culturally heterogeneous (although hegemonously layered) context of empire and its aftermath; will the epic remain culturally monologic given a necessarily culturally dialogic context? Bakhtin himself makes some interesting, but typically elliptic, comments which could affect our thinking on this position. He remarks that in “poetic” genres “the word is sufficient unto itself and does not presume alien utterances beyond its boundaries” (*DI*, 285). He goes on: “Even when speaking of alien things, the poet speaks in his own language. To shed light on an alien world, he never resorts to an alien language, even though it might in fact be more adequate to that world” (*DI*, 287). This is essentially a restatement of the monologic position discussed earlier, in which monologic epic is an “utterly finished” and impenetrable object—but, as noted above, the security of monologism needs to be treated skeptically both in Bakhtin’s writing and as a useful reading strategy. Bakhtin’s notion may seem unchanging, fixed, and absolute, but it should be remembered that his version of generic evolution is not a straight narrative from the primitive to the civilized—it is a contest between monologic and dialogic genres, in which there is always a capacity for “drift” from monologism into dialogism. As Robert Stam notes: “Bakhtin pits decentralizing energies (speech, carnival) against a hegemonic project of centralization (officialdom, the language system). In both cases what was thought to be marginal . . . is brought to the center of discussion.”<sup>32</sup> Michael Gardiner notes that Bakhtin’s writing traces a framework for the examination of how ideological systems “leak”;<sup>33</sup> how, in other words, the monologic is “infected” and infiltrated by the dialogic. In terms of a cultural critique, hints abound as to how this “leakage” might become affective in reading cultural texts—usually involving the “deconstruction” of established texts by previously marginalized discourses.<sup>34</sup> Such a linkage between the “othered” and the marginal, and the disruption of monologism, does exist in Bakhtin’s own writings. In “Epic and Novel” Bakhtin cites the example of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* as a “borderline” genre, on the edge of “epic” (with a hero and a valorized history), but which disintegrates out of monologism for two reasons: Xenophon allows his “own contemporary reality” into the text; but also, and obviously more importantly for Bakhtin:

It is characteristic [of the dialogization of genre] that the heroic past chosen here is not the national past but a foreign and barbaric past. The world has already opened up; one's own monolithic and closed world (the world of the epic) has been replaced by the great world of one's own plus "the others." (*DI*, 29)

The model that this provides for reading epic in the imperial context is obvious—when the Other is introduced into epic discourse monologism begins to stutter, open up, lose its centripetal grip. While this might be a basic "reading strategy" for Bakhtinian epic poetics, we should be wary of the complacency brought on by the temptation to watch the disintegration of restrictive monologism and see replacing it a bright new liberalizing dawn of dialogism/decoupling. As Bakhtin shows, epics remain, despite the points at which their monologism is undermined, texts which *desire* the security of being culturally monologic. For this reason it needs to be recognized that monological notions of the epic and a knowledge of its links with "nation" should be retained as the conceptual framework for reading epic texts. Into these will intrude the forces which shake monologism (many of them through self-induced apoplexy in the ideologies inherent in the texts); thus the "conceptual space staked for [the subaltern]"<sup>35</sup> in Bakhtin's work is filled *within monologism*.

### Reading Bakhtinian Epic

These conceptual notes on Bakhtinian epic map out how we can use Bakhtin's writings on epic, and the politicized generic notion of monologism which he employs, to read what are often thought of as "closed," conservative texts against themselves. Bakhtin's nation-centred version of epic is capable at the very least of uncovering the textual/ideological mechanics of epic texts and the use of the epic genre. This might apply as usefully to Pope's *Iliad* (1715–1720) as it would to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). The notes above, however, suggest that Bakhtin's theory of epic, because of its prioritization of dialogism, may be most fruitfully applied to epic when the ideological cohesion apparently offered to epic by the "nation" is itself indeterminate or strained. As theorists of nation show, imperialism has entailed such a context, with "nation" as a political entity stretched beyond its own logical boundaries in the way that monologism is strained by the dialogic. Thus epics of empire/postempire show themselves to be stressed by their imperial context—Tennyson's

*Idylls of the King* (finished 1885) provides a primary example of an epic which attempts to meld nation and empire and as a result traces only the disintegration of nation *because of empire*. In the aftermath of empire one might look to “postcolonial” epics for signs of writing back to the monologism of the colonist (as is partially the case in Mazisi Kunene’s Zulu epic *Emperor Shaka the Great* [1979]) or of the contemplation of the ironies inherent in, and the disintegration of, colonial ideology in, for example, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990).

Bakhtin’s writings on epic should not however be used solely to investigate what is, after all, a rarely used and often esoteric literary genre. More importantly Bakhtin signals and particularizes through his writing on epic the monologism of nationality and the way in which nation in tandem with monologism can invest in cultural forms in order to acquire status and authority, and can in doing so relatively effectively exclude recognition of the dialogic. At its best, Bakhtin’s version of epic can become a reading strategy employed against the cultural restrictions of nationalism and against the impossible desires of monologism itself. Bakhtin, so often a contradictory, often apparently careless critic, is always sure to employ particular and relatively constant characteristics for the monologic—it is a “tendency,” a possibility, and a force. Its impossibility of fruition is never a marker of its feebleness. Rather its pressure in *seeking* monologism is never underestimated. And yet despite the power with which the monologic attempts to bring itself about, the dialogic context always remains, sometimes on the horizon, but always implicated in textuality. To make use of Bakhtin’s notion of the monologic as an effective reading strategy we need perhaps to treat monologism as Derrida treats the sign and its “trace.” In seeking closure, the urgency of monologism reveals its knowledge of dialogism. Identifying the textual points at which dialogism causes the text to leak, or the points at which the text attempts to shore itself against the dialogic, will allow us to examine the structural mechanisms through which a text makes itself singularly ideological. If this can lead to a political critique in which the monologic (be it nationalism or whatever) is always necessarily allowed to self-disintegrate, so much the better. But at the moment the untapped resources of Bakhtin’s analysis of monologism and his uncovering of its internal workings, are, appropriately, open to many possibilities.

### Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the cultural implications of the screening of the Mahabharata in India see Arvind Rajagopal, “The Televisual Broadcast of an Ancient Indian Epic and Its Reception in Indian Society” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992).

2. For the dating of Bakhtin's works see the "Select Bibliography" in Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1984), 353–58.
3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
4. See Aristotle, "Poetics," in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965).
5. Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.
6. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 292–93. Quoted in Gardiner, *Dialogics*, 26.
7. Bakhtin's theories of language and those of his "Circle" have been excellently discussed elsewhere, especially in Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics* (London: Arnold, 1994). Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990) is also very useful as an introduction. The Circle's writings are most importantly P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1928), trans. A. G. Wehrle (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973). For Bakhtin's writings on language see especially Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980) and *Speech Genres and Other Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).
8. For Bakhtin's discussion see "Discourse in the Novel" in *Dialogic Imagination*, 259–422. Lynne Pearce dismisses this debate as a "red-herring" saying that it is questionable as to whether "any literary text can be fully (or even predominantly) monologic" (*Reading Dialogics*, 64). Pearce's reading of John Clare's "Child Harold" demonstrates a dialogic reading of poetry. Also useful in this context is George Myerson, *The Argumentative Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).
9. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 265.
10. David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 57–58.
11. Ken Hirschkop, "Bakhtin, Discourse and Democracy," *New Left Review* 160 (1989): 3–95, notes how Bakhtin's uses of the term and concept of *monologism* changes over the course of his various critical writings.
12. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 220. Hereafter *DI*, cited in the text.
13. Michael Holquist, "Introduction" to Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, xxix.
14. Krystyna Pomorska, "Foreword" to Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), viii.
15. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 96.
16. Graham Pechey, "On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogization, Decolonization," *Oxford Literary Review* 9, nos. 1–2 (1987): 74.
17. Holquist, in Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, xxxii.
18. Apart from the two works cited below in the text, other important contributions are Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966); Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). All of these could be used in a way similar to that which I use below in reading Anderson and Gellner. I have chosen these texts for their prominence and restricted the extent of my analysis for the sake of brevity. The crossover into literary and cultural studies has been extensive. Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) and John Lucas, *England and Englishness: Ideas of Nationhood in English Poetry, 1688–1900* (London: Hogarth, 1990) are typical, if very different, examples.

19. As an example, Edward W. Said interestingly negotiates with Anderson (in relation to Yeats) in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 280.

20. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 125. Hereafter *NN*, cited in the text.

21. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso Books, 1992), 26. Hereafter *IC*, cited in the text.

22. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, 19.

23. The vocabulary used here by Anderson, and indeed the idea of "the language of the marketplace" as dialogue opposed to the monologue of "official" discourse, is most reminiscent of Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*.

24. Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, 64; see also n.22.

25. Gardiner, *Dialogics of Critique*, 36, 135.

26. Jacques Derrida in conversation with Alan Montefiore in *Talking Liberties*, ed. Derek Jones and Rod Stoneman (London: Channel Four/BSS, 1992), 8.

27. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 15.

28. See particularly the work of the Subaltern Studies Group in India: Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 7 vols. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982—). The interpretation of their work as a critique of postcolonial nationalism is contentious and involves a division between the theory and praxis of nationalism in post-Independence India—but in theoretical terms their interest in subaltern groups which have suffered under the hegemony of Indian nationalist politics since decolonization constitutes a serious challenge to the notion of anticolonial nationalism as a liberative force.

29. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 48. I have (along with many others) questioned Said's own ability to move beyond the reifications he identifies. See Colin Graham, "Anomalous Theory," *The Irish Review* 15 (Spring 1994): 117–23. It should be noted that even an essential text such as Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* expresses doubts about the nature of future postcolonial nationalisms, seeing them as at best a necessary evil.

30. Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, 47.

31. For Subaltern Studies see n. 29. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) collects his major and influential essays. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of transculturation is discussed in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

32. Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore, Md.: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 85.

33. Gardiner, *Dialogics of Critique*, 164.

34. Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*, does this through analysis of third world films and carnivals. Pechey, "On the Borders of Bakhtin," makes the most incisive, though unspecific, gestures in this direction; he also uses the term "dialogical leakage."

35. Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*, 21.

# “In the Mouths of the Tribe”: *Omeros* and the Heteroglossic Nation

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THE morning after the 1996 Academy Award Presentation show, Claudia Cohen, entertainment reporter for *Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee*, was asked to explain why *Braveheart* had won the Oscar for Best Picture. She concluded that Mel Gibson's film, which exceeded three hours and chronicled the battles waged by Scottish commoner William Wallace against the imperial powers of England, had taken the prize because it was an epic, and the academy loves the grandeur, glory and prestige of epic films. Never fear: the point of this anecdote is not to introduce an extended study of *Regis and Kathie Lee*, or even of Gibson's powerful and self-indulgent film. Instead, I offer it as an example of the ways in which “epic” is a term used prevalently and even popularly to delineate cultural productions which are long heroic narratives of a nation—in Ezra Pound's words, a “tale of the tribe.”<sup>1</sup>

Numerous authors and critics more established than Cohen have noted that the epic is a celebrated and authoritative genre, one which centers on brave men's deeds and concerns the “formation of a race or nation.”<sup>2</sup> For example, Pound, whose *Cantos* are perhaps the most (in)famous twentieth-century epic endeavor, characterized epic as “the speech of a nation through the mouth of one man.”<sup>3</sup> Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose genre criticism is the focus of my work, also says clearly that “national tradition . . . serves as the source for the epic.”<sup>4</sup> The epic is thus defined as a genre with a public role, a literary work which simultaneously reflects and instructs its national or cultural audience.

Along with Bakhtin, theorist Georg Lukács<sup>5</sup> and critic Peter Baker<sup>6</sup> note that the epic depends upon cultural consensus and uniformity since its role, as Pound says, is to “voice the general heart,”<sup>7</sup> or, as Jeffrey Walker says of Walt Whitman as epic poet, to be “the authoritative voice of the one true . . . ethos.”<sup>8</sup> Such unity is gener-

ally felt to be anathema to our contemporary world. Faced in this century with the nationally diversifying forces of multiculturalism, the global economy, mass immigration, and so on, certain critics have shied away from or qualified the label "epic," preferring instead the more fluid "long poem," or terms like "neo-epic," "personal epic," "public poem," "bardic poem." The various terms indicate a discomfort with the genre that is seen as too antiquated, unviable in a society whose values may not be taken for granted. In the twentieth century, then, there is a certain defensiveness to claims for the epic, which can still be usefully, if loosely, defined as a public work that is written for a nation or group and embraces collective themes, often with the intention of illuminating models of virtue, strength, integrity, or justice. I feel there is still a place for the genre in a more diversified world precisely because of its cultural weight. I look here, then, at the 1990 epic poem *Omeros* by Caribbean writer and Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott.

Though it is necessarily reductive, a brief overview of *Omeros* may be helpful. Walcott's poem is 325 pages long, divided into seven books and sixty-four chapters of three subchapters each. The poem sustains a strict form, hexameter triplets with a terza rima rhyme scheme. Set largely in St. Lucia, it contains three major narrative threads. The first, rich in references to Homer and the Trojan War, is a feud over the stunningly beautiful Afro-Caribbean woman Helen, who is pregnant by one of two men. Her suitors are Achille and Hector. Achille is particularly important, since as a fisherman he, like his friend Philoctete, values the island's traditions. He is led, in the course of the poem, on a mystical trip to Africa, a modified voyage to the underworld, where he meets his father and tribe and watches the Africans and Europeans collaborate in slaving. The second major narrative involves the Plunketts, a British couple who live on the island; Major Plunkett, inspired by lust for Helen, tries to write a history of the island and ends up focusing on his desire for a son when he finds proof of another young Plunkett who died in battle there. The last narrative strand belongs to the poem's partly autobiographical narrator. Having suffered a divorce, he travels the world in search of healing and returns to his birthplace in St. Lucia where he is commissioned by his father and by the character Omeros (a rendering of the modern Greek word for Homer) to write about the island, presumably the text we have at hand.

Walcott's epic, with its themes of colonialism, economic struggle, race relations, and artistic emigration, is one pertinent for its national subject. St. Lucia, a small island of the Lesser Antilles, has a history marked by conflict and diversity. Claimed by both the British



and the French during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the island changed hands thirteen times between the imperial powers, with the British gaining control in 1814. In the process, the indigenous peoples were destroyed. In addition to white settlers, there are many inhabitants of African descent, whose ancestors came to the Caribbean as slaves. Asians also came to the islands as indentured workers. Though the official language is English, many St. Lucians speak a French patois. St. Lucia became an independent state within the British Commonwealth in 1979 and it continues both to struggle with and thrive from the racial, ethnic, and economic difference of its population.

Within the rich diversity of the West Indies, Walcott envisions an epic story that opens the genre in revolutionary ways to the experiences of the St. Lucian nation. This epic revises and challenges its generic tradition: Walcott replaces traditional heroism in battle with the quiet heroism of day-to-day existence in conditions of poverty and loss. Rather than championing conquest like the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, he portrays its oppressive aftermath for a postcolonial region. Perhaps because of its departure from traditional heroic figures and themes, *Omeros's* status as epic has been contested. Some critics wish to keep the tradition "free" from lowly characters and postcolonial themes; others wish to divide *Omeros* from the tradition in order to highlight its work as a radical postcolonial text.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Walcott himself has fluctuated in calling his poem an "epic," often preferring to foreground the originality of *Omeros* even as he uses the epic tradition to sanction his text, having figures no less than Homer, Joyce, and the poet's father (himself an artist and writer) give his narrator the onus and authority to write St. Lucia's narrative.<sup>10</sup> But to read Walcott's poem outside of the epic tradition obscures the very power of the poem as a postcolonial project that challenges the bases of a tradition that may be oppressive to the postcolonial poet. I think that it is likely that critics who do not read *Omeros* as an epic (perhaps including Walcott himself) are caught in the notion of epic as necessarily the voice of an authoritative, unified, white imperialist culture. It is my project (and despite his overt statements, of Walcott's in practice) to show that this need not be so. I take Derek Walcott's rich and haunting poem *Omeros* to be an epic because of its explicit engagement, on levels ranging from reverential to ironic, with epic characters, themes, forms, and authors and because of its enunciated stance as a bardic national poem, a "tale of the tribe."

Genre theorist E. M. W. Tillyard has argued that to manage this public role, the voice of the epic bard must be communal, or "choric," to adequately express the feelings of "a big multitude of men

of whose most serious convictions and dear habits he is the mouth-piece."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, says Tillyard, that bard "must be centred in the normal, he must measure the crooked by the straight. . . . No pronounced homosexual, for instance, could succeed in the epic."<sup>12</sup> It is in this troubling insistence on a "normal" or, perhaps more accurately, a *normalizing* voice that Tillyard and other theorists of the epic intersect most powerfully with Bakhtin, though Bakhtin disparages the bardic stance that Tillyard, Pound, and others celebrate. Translated into Bakhtin's terms, what the epic bard's voice must be is authoritative and monologic; it must consume (or ignore or drown out) all other voices in order to speak authoritatively to and for a nation. Though Tillyard, Lukács, and others stress the "communal" nature of the voice, this serves only to highlight its monologism, for the epic voice speaks *as* a unified individual but actually *for* a group whose diversities are muted. Twentieth-century criticism's attempts to move away from a communal focus to highlight the personal bardic voice, the poet as hero, also reduces some epics' multiplicity; important critics of the long poem like Thomas Gardner<sup>13</sup> and James E. Miller Jr.<sup>14</sup> privilege the personal voice as *the* epic voice, creating in effect a monologic utterance even when the textual voices proliferate. Like most other poetic language, then, the epic for Bakhtin (and seemingly other theorists of the genre) is a centripetal force that counters the multivocal, conflictual state of language he calls heteroglossia. Epitomizing the limited and limiting theorizations of the genre, Bakhtin writes, "The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance."<sup>15</sup>

Although even Bakhtin admits to employing the most extreme description of the epic ("DN," 287), most critics have taken his important essays "Epic and Novel" and "Discourse in the Novel" largely at face value.<sup>16</sup> Those essays deny the possibility for heteroglossia in the epic form. Bakhtin contends that poetic discourse, particularly in the epic, is necessarily one of the falsely unifying forces of language and that heteroglossia, the superior mode because of the linguistic freedom and possibilities for dialogue it allows, is only representable in the novel ("EN," 11-12). Therefore, encountering long poems or epics that incorporate multiple voices, Bakhtin calls them "novels in verse" rather than heteroglossic poetry ("EN," 9), a move which voids the texts' often complex relationship to literary precursors. Whether they greet the death of the epic with despair (Lukács) or joy (Bakhtin), many theorists suggest that the novel is the living, powerful genre of our time, seeing the epic as, in Bakhtin's words, a "congealed and half-moribund" genre ("EN," 14).

Bakhtin's strict genre divisions are blurred, however, by his simultaneous theory of "novelization," the belief that genres may exert influence on one another and that the novel in particular has created the necessary conditions for the emergence of heteroglossia in other genres ("EN," 7).<sup>17</sup> My quibble with Bakhtin is first, then, one of terminology. Although I consider here how Walcott's heteroglossic epic fulfills Bakhtin's generic expectations for the novel, I avoid the term "novelized epic" which still privileges the novel as the primary and preferred genre. Bakhtin's occasional small disclaimers that by "novelized" he does not necessarily refer to the genre of the novel contradict his belief that words are saturated with previous meanings that cannot be drained from them: of course the word "novelized" creates a focus on the genre of the novel. Indeed, following Bakhtin's own practice, critics have certainly applied his theories almost exclusively to the novel. Thus, while it seems insightful to trace a move to multiplicity, diversity, and multivoicedness in literature, Bakhtin's heroization of the novel as the primary catalyst for that change limits his understanding of other genres and leads him to contradictory claims about their characteristics. I am concerned on a broader level, then, with the tautology inherent in Bakhtin's definitions of the epic. Though "the novel can include, ingest, devour other genres and still retain its status as novel,"<sup>18</sup> the Bakhtinian epic cannot, for its very definition precludes the admission of other discourses. Though the epic is inferior precisely for being finalized and monologic, if it breaks those boundaries it is no longer an epic, is robbed of its genre. Caught in the tense dichotomy "novel vs. epic," Bakhtin neglects the power of "novelization" on the genre of the national poem. In effect denying the possibility for the epic to be "novelized," Bakhtin goes so far as to suggest that the novel is the only genre that continues to develop, saying, "We encounter epic as a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated" ("EN," 3).

My aim is to interrogate Bakhtin's claim and argue that only inflexible and limiting definitions of epic are outdated; the epic is a genre that continues to undergo radical revision and to mold itself to the tasks of the day. As the world's nations change, so too does the genre which carries the burden of guiding and representing the nation. Specifically, like much twentieth-century literature that assumes an aesthetic that has been called fragmented or shattered, the epic breaks confining models of genre and language in an effort to represent wider sections of the global community. The result may be something like *Omeros*, Walcott's heteroglossic and polyglossic<sup>19</sup> epic. *Omeros*, like a heteroglossic novel, represents language not as a

finalized, monologic, singular phenomenon, but rather as an animate exchange or struggle between varied, oppositional languages. The result, however, is not a "novel in verse" (Bakhtinian terminology which privileges the novel as the basic genre) but a heteroglossic epic, a poem within the epic tradition that opens itself to the intense clash of languages which distinguishes the condition of heteroglossia. The relationship between Bakhtin and Walcott is truly dialogic: the notion of heteroglossia provides a valuable framework for theorizing Walcott's multivocal narrative tactics, and *Omeros's* status as heteroglossic epic poses a stiff challenge to Bakhtin's limited genre theory.

*Omeros* shatters the monologic authoritative voice of the traditional epic bard and replaces it with multiple discourses, including those which swirl around and constitute the characters of its tale. A partial cataloguing of the languages and discourses in *Omeros* records French Creole, English Creole, Standard English, nonstandard British English, Aruac,<sup>20</sup> myth, Christianity, political rhetoric, allusion to other literature, autobiography, history and historical document, letters, the blazon of courtly poetry, nautical lingo, music such as the Beatles and Bob Marley, obeah,<sup>21</sup> phonetical black "slave" English (like that of *Huck Finn*, for instance), film direction, military jargon, and prayer. The poem is heteroglossic, a work that will not permit monologue and that renews itself by incorporating dialogized multiple voices.<sup>22</sup> As discourses proliferate, the form of the epic opens to a nonlinear, subversive, fragmented mosaic that contains multiple voices and stories. *Omeros* continues the ongoing revision of the developing epic genre to accommodate the polyvocality of its national subject. Reading the multivoicedness of the epic *Omeros* through the lens of heteroglossia suggests two things: one, it attempts to give voice to the diverse linguistic composition of St. Lucia, speaking for a nation as an epic traditionally does; two, it is a powerful authorizing strategy for a disenfranchised epic poet, challenging monologic constructions of the genre by insisting on the polyvocality of all language.

The history of the West Indies has left the region with a wide variety of languages, and it is thus a site particularly ripe for the polyvocal epic to thrive. Because of its history of colonization, the Caribbean has imperial languages: English, French, Dutch, and Spanish. There are also remnants of ancestral languages such as Amerindian, a language from which pieces have survived despite the genocide carried out on its original speakers. There is Hindi and Chinese, and even traces of some African languages, all brought to the islands with imported workers and slaves.<sup>23</sup> And, of course, there are the

Creoles, patois, and dialects which combine, alter, and inflect all of these languages in the everyday speech of the islanders.<sup>24</sup> As living and changing hybrids, these dialects and Creoles foreground the interplay of discourses which Bakhtin locates in all language. As I have argued, the multilingual epic is a cultural production that acts as a national poem for the diverse culture of St. Lucia. As Walcott says, "That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary . . . A downtown Babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelized, polyglot."<sup>25</sup>

Writing a national poem poses particular difficulty for the postcolonial poet in English, whose liminal political and literary position troubles the central status necessary for an epic bard. As I have shown above, the epic is a genre which many critics want to reserve for the "normal," authoritative voice. A Caribbean poet like Derek Walcott, then, may face a certain level of internal and external resistance when entering the epic tradition. He penetrates a genre that commonly celebrates imperialism and conquest, an ideology which historically has led to colonization and its attendant oppressions and which has marginalized the artistic works of colonized peoples. Walcott's task is further complicated by the relationship of the postcolonial subject to an imperial language. For Walcott, as a poet who writes primarily in English, the epic tradition is wrought in Standard English—the King's English, so to speak, an expression which highlights the potential colonizing force of language itself. Since French Creole is the common language of St. Lucia, English there is a product of schooling, a powerful legacy of the British school system under colonial occupation. As a mulatto, postcolonial subject, Walcott's relationship to English is likely to be at best ambivalent. The postcolonial poet is left in the impossible position of being taught that the King's English is superior and that s/he nevertheless may not righteously use it. This lesson is one that perpetuates social hierarchy and brands postcolonial language and literature as always filial, secondary. As Walcott explained it, "I would learn that every tribe hoards its culture as fiercely as its prejudices, that English literature . . . was hallowed ground . . . , that colonial literatures could grow to resemble it closely, but never be considered its legitimate heir."<sup>26</sup> And yet as a writer Walcott also wants to lay claim to his right to English; as he told Edward Hirsch in a 1986 interview, "English is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination."<sup>27</sup>

Of the myriad discourses included in *Omeros*, then, the ones most frequently noted are the French and English Creoles which challenge Standard English as the only authoritative mode for the English epic.<sup>28</sup> Creole in *Omeros* is most often used in the everyday

speech acts of the Afro-Caribbean characters, but there is great diversity and fluidity in the individual utterances. Since St. Lucia is dominated by a French-based lexicon, Achille, Hector, Philoctete, and company sometimes speak first in French Creole when talking to one another, after which a rough rendition into English Creole, Creole-inflected English, or occasionally Standard English is provided for the reader within the character's speech act itself. Sometimes the Creoles are also reversed or interwoven. The effect is that the speaker is using both languages simultaneously, rather than that the narrator is breaking in to translate to a reader. For example, Philoctete and Ma Kilman, an obeah woman, discuss his festering wound which stands in *Omeros* for the wounding of the Afro-Caribbean people:

*"Mais qui ça qui rivait'ous, Philoctete?"*

*"Moin blessé."*

"But what is wrong wif you, Philoctete?"

"I am blest

wif this wound, Ma Kilman, *qui pas ka guérir pièce.*

Which will never heal."<sup>29</sup>

Ma Kilman's question is translated within separate quotation marks into nonstandard or Creole-inflected English, a form she uses also in other places in the poem; the voice seems to be hers in both primary and secondary speech acts. Philoctete's utterance melds the languages even further. Within one set of quotation marks, he speaks in French Creole, translates it into demotic English, switches back to French Creole and translates again, this time into Standard English. The two seem to have some command over several forms of English and French and switch discourses smoothly.

The choice of dialect and language is always politically weighted, for, as Bakhtin and other linguistic theorists have argued, each word and utterance is ideologically saturated from its previous uses and users. In the Caribbean, this choice may include a shift in linguistic register more dramatic than that for other speakers; sociolinguists use the term "code-switching" to denote this process of choosing from a continuum of dialects that range from most to least formal depending upon audience and situation. Within Walcott's society, rapid linguistic choice may mark race, native island, education, social status, hierarchy between speakers, and even political allegiance.

As a nation in which Creoles, dialects, code-switching, and authoritative imperial tongues all play a role, St. Lucia supports Bakhtin's linguistic theories. Bakhtin sees all speech acts (even those without such explicit ranges of lexicon and inflection as the Caribbean discourses) as ideologically saturated utterances which position themselves in dialogue with other discourses and with past uses of the same words and discourse ("DN," 271, 294). As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson explain, "Each language of heteroglossia has arisen from a vast array of social and psychological experience . . . and so the language carries with it the wisdom of its speakers' experience."<sup>80</sup> A speaker in the Caribbean, then, chooses a basic discourse (e.g., French Creole) and may then still choose a level of dialect (e.g., basilect) within that discourse which signifies social status and the dynamics of the particular situation. Furthermore, an imperial language like Standard English, which is marked as "correct" and used in education, business, and government, exemplifies Bakhtin's authoritative discourse. It works against the variegated strata of the islands' linguistic heritage to promote one language as superior, binding, monologic.

What *Omeros* enacts is this cultural linguistic struggle, the choices made by Walcott in his writing, which at times reflect the choices made by characters and speakers from various social situations. Though Walcott has downplayed or denied the place of the epic battle in his poem, I suggest that the conflict of *languages* is in fact one of the most remarkable aspects of *Omeros*, a conflict that carries within it histories of violence and oppression. To represent this linguistic battle is also to participate in it, for the utterance of a polyglossic and heteroglossic epic that forcefully includes nonstandard discourses is a subversive choice that counters the oppression of an epic tradition constructed as monologic and of the empires it championed.

Therefore, within *Omeros* the fluidity between Creoles and Standard English serves to balance the potency of the languages within the context of the poem. Speakers can gain authority in each form. A few examples will serve to illustrate this. In the opening chapter of the poem, Philoctete faces tourists, intrusive figures who "try taking / his soul with their cameras," and relates to them a myth of nature that leads to the ritual making of canoes for the island's fishermen, an act which he parallels to murder and war since it takes the life of the tree. He spins this myth in an English Creole with some French lexicon:

"This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes . . .  
 . . . Once wind bring the news

to the *laurier-cannelles*, their leaves start shaking . . .

Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us  
 fishermen all our life, and the ferns nodded 'Yes,  
 the trees have to die.' "

(O, 3)

The role of mythmaker and storyteller is one Philoctete, the "Philosophe," fills at times for his community, and it is a powerful role. The forger of myths may set tradition, justify communal actions, or determine what is to be preserved as history and how it is to be remembered. Therefore, to create or relate myths in nonstandard English is to value that language as appropriate for myth and history, discourses that can carry much authority. Furthermore, this authority is endowed not only by the islanders themselves, but also by tourists (probably American, based on the tourists in the rest of *Omeros*), who want to listen to and in some way record the myth Philoctete tells. In fact, there is some suggestion that Philoctete is actually exploiting the tourists (he is willing, for instance, to show them his wound for "some extra silver") (O, 4). If the myth he relates in this opening passage is primarily or even in part to exploit their desire to record island culture, its language is even more powerful. It becomes manipulative, potent in its ability to control the desires of others.

Philoctete is not the only or even the most powerful figure in *Omeros* to speak nonstandard and creolized English. Walcott goes for what is very probably the ultimate authority to legitimate these dialects: God. God speaks explicitly only once in *Omeros*, to Achille on his voyage to Africa. It is, as I have noted, a voyage of son to father, precipitated by sun-stroke or *son-stroke*,<sup>31</sup> and a Judeo-Christian God the Father makes an inexplicable brief appearance in Africa. When he does so, he speaks an English Creole: "'Look, I giving you permission / to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot . . . / And thou shalt have no God should in case you forgot / my commandments' " (O, 134). In Bakhtin's figuration and many religious ones, God's word is perhaps the most authoritative text, one with whom no dialogue is really possible. (Indeed, even the brave Achille does not address God in return.) Walcott authorizes Creole by placing it within the mouth of this most authoritative figure, a move



heightened by the fact that he chooses a Judeo-Christian God rather than an African manifestation and thus challenges the monologic Western representations of God as well.

If God is not speaking Standard English, who is? Standard English is the form which I have suggested is already graced with authority from the larger Western world, a language used for official matters and for writing "high" literature. True to Walcott's desire to lay claim to each of the languages, Standard English is not debased here in order to promote Creole.<sup>32</sup> It is also used frequently and powerfully. The narrative voice of the poem, for instance, often uses Standard English in beautiful, eloquent phrases, though it also includes Creole and dialect. Achille and his father Afolabe have a long section in Standard English as well when they meet in Africa. Interestingly, Walcott presents this section of chapter 25 as a sort of dramatic dialogue that is unlike any other writing in the text. Before each speech, the characters get a dialogue tag in centered capital letters, and the exchange includes a parenthetical description of the surrounding tribe's actions which is not unlike a stage direction or setting description in a play. Though the speech of Achille and Afolabe roughly maintains the hexameter lines, broken on the page at times by speech, their utterances are closer to written English prose than anything else in the poem. For example, the text reads:

#### ACHILLE

I do not know what the name means. It means something,  
maybe. What's the difference? In the world I come from  
we accept the sounds we were given. Men, trees, water.

(O, 138)

The theme of the passage that contains this quotation sheds some light on the use of Standard English. Afolabe presses his son to explain his name and other words, and Achille insists that he does not know the meanings because of the amnesia of the Middle Passage ("The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave / us; trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing") (O, 137). Standard English is one of the imperial languages that silenced the African tongues, of course, and as such it is appropriate that Achille and his father use it when discussing linguistic loss. Walcott's use of the dramatic dialogue form underscores this, since Achille and Afolabe are presented like characters in a play who speak words scripted for them by someone else. However, Standard English is also redeemed by being the language through which they finally connect after

Achille has been alienated by the incomprehensible “chattering” of the tribe; as it erased Achille’s roots, so now it returns him to them.

The fact that characters and the narrator himself slip between dialects foregrounds the linguistic diversity and complexity of the Caribbean. Moreover, Walcott seems to have mobilized these languages with specific intent to show their equality as viable forms within a literary text. The fact that Achille, an uneducated Afro-St. Lucian fisherman, and his father, an African, speak modern Standard English in an ancient African context, for instance, illustrates the arbitrariness of language and denaturalizes Standard English as an authoritative and exclusive form. Just as Walcott wants to lay claim to English as an available language for the postcolonial writer, his characters assume the language with ease when it fits the purposes of the story. Because various forms of English (and French, of course) are shown to be equally legitimate, Walcott’s work insists on the polyvocality of even authoritative forms.<sup>33</sup>

The ongoing and vital process of creolization is even exaggerated by Walcott in an attempt to parody authoritative language. This project is an interesting manifestation of the parody that Bakhtin champions in heteroglossic novels,<sup>34</sup> and may be one feature of the heteroglossic epic made possible by the “novelization” of literature. As other critics have noted, the phonetic naming of the minor character Statics, who is running for local office, represents the incomprehensibility of his utterances as he tries to mingle American political rhetoric, or “Yankee” (*O*, 105), and French patois. This combination leads him to make such humorous vows as “*Moi* shall return” (*O*, 106) and “Bananas shall raise their hands at the oppressor” (*O*, 105). Unlike other places in the poem, the French Creole in Statics’s speeches is not always translated, and, when it is, may be translated loosely or imperfectly. Imperfect or incomplete glossing foregrounds the gap between discourses and the necessity of each one; since they can’t be perfectly translated or equated, each must represent its worldview. Statics cries, for example:

*“This island of St. Lucia, quittez moin dire z’autres!  
let me tell you is heading for unqualified  
disaster, ces mamailles-là, pas blague, I am not*

*joking. Every vote is your ticket, your free ride  
on the Titanic . . .*

*. . . This chicanery!  
This fried chicanery!”*

(*O*, 107)

Statics's speech acts are a parody of amalgamated discourses, an ironic rendering that pokes fun at once at the island's parochialism, the empty rhetoric of American politics, and the attempt of any language to be wholly impervious to outside influence or to be monologic. Beneath the parody, the dialogized discourses of his speech enact the rupture of a cross-cultural text, in which several languages may be necessary to represent cultural complexity. As much as critics, educators, poets, elected officials or anyone else may wish to establish authoritative discourses as monologic, they cannot do so, for the authoritative forms are choices and are shaped in dialogue with the other voices of heteroglossia.

Bakhtin has characterized these individual choices and speech acts as a struggle, the result of language's dynamic competition and its condition of being always already determined by previous utterances. Perhaps because of his personal history negotiating the polyvocality of the Caribbean, Walcott's discussion of language is strikingly similar:

Obviously, when you enter language, you enter a kind of choice which contains in it the political history of the language, the imperial width of the language, the fact that you're either subjugated by the language or you have had to dominate it. So language is not a place of retreat, it's not a place of escape, it's not even a place of resolution. It's a place of struggle.<sup>35</sup>

The struggle of languages, discourses, and their attendant world-views is thrown into relief in postcolonial St. Lucia. This cacophony is the national voice(s) that speak in and through the (heteroglossic) epic form.

Because it draws into question the authority of any monologic voice by its insistence on multiplicity and dialogic struggle, heteroglossia is an emancipating formal strategy. As I have shown, some critics and bards of the epic have wanted to reserve that genre for an authoritative voice, one which often speaks for a great nation or empire. As a postcolonial poet from a tiny island nation, Walcott mobilizes the many discourses of his nation into a heteroglossic utterance that challenges previous notions of the Western epic and its authoritative speaker. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia as a freer, more positive model for speech acts works well to illustrate the shattering of monologism that Walcott enacts in his multivoiced poem as he jostles for space in the epic tradition. Musing on his national subject and inspiration, Walcott states eloquently the need for the Antillean artist to represent the fragments of culture which exist in his native islands:

This gathering of pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture. . . . Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its making but its remaking.<sup>36</sup>

Powerfully gathering the "shards of vocabulary" together into a heteroglossic national utterance, Walcott positions himself in the tradition of the mighty epic.

Moreover, as I have argued, heteroglossia is an apt way to capture the diversity and multiplicity of the West Indies that Walcott seeks to represent. A look at Creoles and English in the poem only begins to illuminate multivocality and its task. By including several Creole varieties in *Omeros*, Walcott captures the oral richness of the Antilles and remains loyal to his chosen subject matter: the people and nation of his birthplace, St. Lucia. By including Standard English, he stakes a claim for his island to the literary language of the empire and thus aligns *Omeros* with epics written by noncolonial poets whose authority in the tradition may be less troubled.

Like remnants of cultures in the West Indies, the discourses of heteroglossia do not fit evenly together to create a monologic whole. Instead, their importance lies in their disparity and noncoincidence. Bakhtin has shown the importance of the novel in representing or enacting the ongoing heteroglossic dialogue in literature, but other genres may also do so. The task is particularly important for the epic because of its heritage as a shaper of culture and nation. Realizing its importance, Walcott even figures the epic as an organic national form: "The epic poem is not a literary project. It is already written; it was written in the mouths of the tribe, a tribe which had courageously yielded its history."<sup>37</sup> "Remaking" poetry and the epic from linguistic and literary fragments, with all of their inherent pain, is the task Walcott assumes in *Omeros*.

Thus, while Bakhtin's linguistic theories of heteroglossia aptly illuminate Walcott's postcolonial, contemporary epic, they also reveal the limitations of his own genre definitions. By insisting on the monologic oppression of the epic as a genre, on its unfeasibility as a "novelized" genre, and on its unviability for our times, Bakhtin short-sightedly aborts the challenge posed to the modern and contemporary epic bard: to stay in dialogue with traditional epic themes, forms, or narratives (a dialogue which is too much compromised by refusing to classify poems like Walcott's as an "epic") and

still to find within the genre a means of representing socially diverse nations and their histories.

Recent national crises or tensions, such as those in Bosnia-Herzegovina or among the races and tribal groups of South Africa, indicate clearly and sometimes tragically the dangers and necessities of asserting a constructed unity over diverse peoples by positing a "nation" where no obvious alliance exists. With our growing social awareness of diversity, a genre like the epic, which focuses on events and people vital to the formation of nation and may therefore silence less prestigious or mainstream groups and individuals, is risky. However, denying the viability of the multivocal verse epic altogether, as Bakhtin does, is equally risky, for it undermines the possibilities of the epic form as a cultural production that seeks not to limit but to include. As a nation like St. Lucia struggles politically, socially, and artistically to define itself, the heteroglossic epic presents an ethical model for articulating the tales of the tribes.

### Notes

1. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions Press, 1970), 194. Actually, Pound says to "give Rudyard [Kipling] credit for his use of the phrase," referring to a speech of Kipling's in 1906. For further explanation, see Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 8.
2. William Rose Benet, *The Reader's Encyclopedia* (New York: Crowell, 1965), 317.
3. Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions Press, 1975), 19.
4. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 13. Hereafter "EN," cited in the text.
5. See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).
6. See Peter Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance: Exteriority and the Modern Long Poem* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991).
7. Bernstein, *Tale of the Tribe*, 19.
8. Jeffrey Walker, *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 25.
9. Other critics who do classify *Omeros* as an epic include long-time Walcott scholar Robert Hamner, Joseph Farrell, classicists Mary Lefkowitz and Oliver Taplin, and Rei Terada. On the other hand, John Figueroa, a West Indian writer, does not want to use the term "epic" for the poem, and neither do poetry critics Sidney Burris or Sven Birkerts.
10. Though he more often has denied *Omeros's* place in the epic tradition, Walcott's comments have at times directly contradicted each other. For instance, in a 1990 interview prior to the poem's publication, J. P. White asked whether or not the new poem was an epic. Walcott answered, "Yes. I would think that the design of it, yes . . . In the epic terms of it, there is also a battle. The Battle of the Saints, which is a naval battle, fought between the French and the English—a crucial battle in history." See interview with Derek Walcott, *Green Mountain Review* 4, no. 1 (1990): 35. A few months later, however, he is quoted as saying, "I do not think

of it as an epic . . . Certainly not in the sense of epic design. Where are the battles? There are a few, I suppose. But 'epic' makes people think of great wars and great warriors." See D. J. R. Bruckner, "A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man," *The New York Times*, 9 October 1990, C13.

11. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and Its Background* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), 12.

12. *Ibid.*, 8.

13. See Thomas Gardner, *Discovering Ourselves in Whitman: The Contemporary American Long Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

14. See James E. Miller Jr., *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction: Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

15. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *Dialogic Imagination*, 296. Hereafter "DN," cited in the text.

16. Occasionally a brief acknowledgment is made of Bakhtin's admitted injustice to less extreme poetics. Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson write, for instance, "One might object that Bakhtin's suggestions could lead . . . to a sort of novelistic imperialism, rather than a comprehensive literary theory privileging neither prose nor poetry. . . . Bakhtin was not immune to this imperializing move on behalf of the novel." In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 20. However, even critics who recognize the shortcomings of the genre theory rarely interrogate it with any depth.

17. See also Michael Holquist, introduction to Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, xxxi.

18. *Ibid.*, xxxii.

19. Polyglossia refers to the difference between established languages (e.g., Spanish and Japanese), while heteroglossia is more technically the difference within a language.

20. Aruac or Arawak is a language of the region's ancient Arawak Indians, who preceded the Carib Indians as inhabitants of the islands before white settlers.

21. Obeah is a practice and belief system found chiefly among Afro-Caribbeans which includes healing rituals, spells and divinations, and extra-sensory knowledge of, or possession by, spirits.

22. Other critics also have noted *Omeros's* multiple voices. See Joseph Farrell, "Walcott's *Omeros*: The Classical Epic in a Postmodern World," *Epics and the Contemporary World Conference*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 22 April 1994; Sidney Burris, "An Empire of Poetry," *Southern Review* 27, no. 3 (1991); Susan M. Schultz, "Defiance and Translation in Walcott," *Verses* 11, no. 2 (1994); and Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

23. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), 5-6.

24. Fittingly, perhaps, for its use in the bardic epic, in his piece *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite calls the amalgamated discourse of the Afro-Caribbeans "nation language," and he contests that it is characterized by rhythm and sound as much as word choice.

25. Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory. The Nobel Lecture," *The New Republic*, 28 December 1992, 27.

26. Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Noonday Press, 1970), 31.

27. Edward Hirsch, "Interview with Derek Walcott," *Paris Review* 101 (1986): 211.

28. This strategy is aligned with the thinking of much postcolonial theory. In their popular work on postcolonial theory, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin cite what they call "the Creole continuum" as a way of overcoming the hierarchy of language which values only Standard English.

29. Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), 18-19. Hereafter *O*, cited in the text.

30. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 309.

31. I am indebted to Lyn Isaacson for drawing my attention to this pun.

32. Postcolonial theorists, particularly in Africa, debate the ethics of using Standard English in literature. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, most notably, urges postcolonial writers to use only their mother tongues; see *Decolonizing the Mind: Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Currey, 1981). However, other theorists agree with Walcott that Standard English need not be inherently oppressive and can be adapted to the needs of postcolonial users; see, for example, W. H. New, "New Language, New World," *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. C. D. Narasimhaiah (London: Heinemann, 1978).

33. Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, has made a similar point in examining Walcott's mimetic aesthetic. She writes, "Walcott shows that languages do not possess strict borders and that every language owes something to others. As each author's poetry must be mimicry, each language, too, must finally be viewed as a creole" (5).

34. See, for instance, his essay "Epic and Novel."

35. David Montenegro, "Interview with Derek Walcott," *Points of Departure: International Writers in Writing and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 86.

36. Walcott, "Antilles," 27.

37. Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History: An Essay," *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. Orde Coombes (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 9.

# Bakhtin: Uttering the “(Into)nation” of the Nation/People

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OF the most dangerously utilized words in contemporary discourse on culture and politics, “nation” and “nationalism” are outstanding in the light of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Chechnya, and the plight of the Kurds. While some predict the demise of the “nation” (more precisely, the bourgeois nation-state), others want “nationalism” arrested, convicted, and buried; both terms, however, are not only alive and well but have acquired powerful multiaccentuated resonance. Their diasporic presence fortuitously illustrates Bakhtin’s concept of words (verbal discourse) as social events, not abstract linguistic phenomena or subjective reflexes.<sup>1</sup> Condensing the complex social situations that generate their use and constitute their meanings, “nation” and “nationalism” perform in various sites of exchange, what Bakhtin would call “double-voiced” functions: they summon forth the partisanship of antagonistic addressees, releasing conflicting intentions in carnivalesque play and also circumscribing them in speech genres and chronotopes that somehow map the unfinalizable circuit of communication. I want to explore here how Bakhtin’s approach to discourse can illuminate the roles/usages that “nation” and “nationalism” assume when they participate in the making of “third world” utterances of liberation.

Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism, carnivalesque deconstruction, and heteroglossia have so far dominated his academic reputation to the extent of converting the corpus of his achievement into its ironic opposite: a monologue on unfinalizability and the infinitude of possible meanings in a text. Recently, with the publication of *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin’s “other”—the limit of endless semiosis—has been reaffirmed.<sup>2</sup> Aside from valorizing the chronotope of literary forms like the *Bildungsroman*, the emphasis on speech genres or conventions is salutary. In his introduction to



*Speech Genres*, Michael Holquist points to the dialectic between the necessity of conventions or patterns and the relative degree of interpretive freedom: "the better we know possible variants of the genres that are appropriate to a given situation, the more choice we have among them" (SG, xix). Without ground, there is no figure; transgressing frames depends on positing them first.

One generic frame or model that underlies Bakhtin's translinguistics is his concept of utterance (not to be confused with "sentence") as a unit of actual speech practice or communication. Unlike Saussure's parole, utterance refers to the "forms of combinations" of linguistic elements which are as varied as living speech. Enabled by the general system of langue, these individual speech performances can be studied since, according to Bakhtin, "each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. . . . Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes" (SG, 87) that foreground the performative function of language, its pragmatic and even prophetic mode of apostrophizing.

For Bakhtin, the contexts and conditions of verbal exchange are the determining parameters of meanings, what makes communication possible. The real unit of speech communication is the utterance demarcated by individual speaking subjects; the boundaries of each utterance is in turn determined by "a change of speaking subjects" or change of speakers (SG, 71). Utterance cannot be conceived apart from the total act of communication comprised of three aspects: 1) "the active position of the speaker in one referentially semantic sphere" or theme (SG, 84) which determines its compositional and stylistic features; 2) the expressive aspect as a constitutive feature of utterance, "the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the semantic content" evinced through intonation and other stylistic qualities; and, most important, 3) the "mutual reflection" of utterances, that is, "each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account" (SG, 91). Each utterance is saturated with echoes and reverberations of other utterances, a "link in the chain of speech communication" (SG, 94), given the fact that thought itself "is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought" (SG, 92).

What is then primarily constitutive of utterance is neither thematic content nor expressive style but the dialogic overtones and unmediated responses folded in syntax and intonation. The topic and theme—the concrete historical situation surrounding the speech performance—"has already been articulated and evaluated" in vari-

ous ways; the utterance addresses not only its own object but also others' speech about it. Bakhtin insists that "an essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity" (SG, 95). The others (the person addressed, as well as the "hero" or third participant) are not passive listeners but active players in speech communication. They make one's thoughts actual inasmuch as the speaker constructs her utterance "in anticipation of encountering" their responses. The addressee can be an immediate interlocutor in everyday dialogue, a differentiated collective, an ethnic group, and so on. Or even "an indefinite, unconcretized other (with various kinds of monological utterance of an emotional type)" (SG, 95). How the speaker senses or imagines the apperceptive background of the addressees' perception of her speech, the force of their effect on the utterance, and how she tries to determine their response, defines the speech genre. For example, the addressee's social position, rank, and importance are reflected in rhetorical genres, while the familiar and intimate genres indicate addressees outside the framework of the social hierarchy and social conventions (SG, 97). The speaker's attitude toward "the other and his utterances (existing or anticipated)" is therefore the key to addressivity as the constitutive feature of the whole of a concrete utterance (SG, 99).

In the 1929 work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin/Voloshinov already argued the proposition that social intercourse establishes the possibility of verbal communication/interaction and therefore speech performances.<sup>3</sup> Utterances exist between speakers, its structure is thoroughly sociological (MPL, 96, 98). Not only is the word a two-sided act, "the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee" (MPL, 86). It is also the "arena of the class struggle" because conflicting social interests converge/diverge within the sign community, generating the "social multiaccentuality of the ideological sign" (MPL, 23). In the 1952–53 essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin shifts his attention to the explanation of developments in language and literature as revealed by the history of speech genres as they reflect the changes in social life (SG, 65). Of all speech genres, the dialogue is viewed as "a classic form of speech communication" which entails rejoinders of all kinds and presupposes other (relative to the speaker) participants in the speech communication (SG, 72). In this context, Bakhtin observes that "the very problem of the national and the individual in language is basically a problem of the utterance (after all, only here, in the utterance, is the national language embodied in individual form)" (SG, 63).

So far, Bakhtin's theory of the utterance posits intersubjectivity, more precisely a community of ideological norms, judgments, and evaluations. This signifies not a plurality of speakers but a chain or complex of speaking subjects involved in "actively responsive understanding" (SG, 68). Intersubjectivity is founded on the principle of alterity and exotopy. "In life . . . we appraise ourselves from the point of view of others," Bakhtin writes. We can never grasp ourselves as a whole; the other is needed to give us a perception of our self as a totality, as a personality "consubstantial with the external world":

The very being of man (both internal and external) is a profound communication. To be means to communicate. . . . To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other. . . . I cannot do without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (mutual reflection and perception). . . . I receive my name from the other, and this name exists for the other (to name oneself is to engage in usurpation). Self-love is equally impossible.<sup>4</sup>

Life is essentially dialogical—we are always engaged in questioning, listening, answering, agreeing, disagreeing—and requires the protagonists in this dialogue, the "I" and "you" not to be equal but asymmetrical and radically distinct, so as to facilitate what Todorov calls "the objectivation of the I, the erasure of its pseudosingularity":<sup>5</sup> "I hides in the other and in others; it wants to be but another for others, to fully penetrate the world of others as another, and heave aside the weight of an I unique in the word (the I-for-myself)."<sup>6</sup>

Others are thus needed to constitute the dialogic play of utterance, functioning as the transgredient element needed to realize the moment of socially responsive understanding that validates communication. These others who are addressed can range from the immediate participants to what can be designated as a "third party":

in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee). In various ages and with various understandings of the word, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute

truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, and so forth). . . .

The aforementioned third party is not any mystical or metaphysical being . . . he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deeper analysis, can be revealed in it. . . . Karl Marx said that only thought uttered in the word becomes a real thought for another person and only in the same way is it a thought for myself. But this other is not only the immediate other (second addressee); the word moves ever forward in search of responsive understanding.<sup>7</sup>

Could this “third party” or intermediary participant be the key category that can shed light on how the idea of the nation and its corollary, nationalism, continue to survive despite the forces of universalizing modernity and the standardizing drive of global/transnational capitalism today?

When Marx and Engels proclaimed in the *Communist Manifesto* that the working class has no country, they probably expressed more their condition of exile and rationalistic aspiration for cosmopolitan solidarity than the lived experience of the proletariat’s rootedness in place.<sup>8</sup> Proletarian consciousness had not yet reached the point of transcending national boundaries. Consequently the Second International broke up when the proletarian leaders then opted to support their national bourgeoisie in World War I. While the bourgeoisie cannot be accused of inventing nationalism to delude the workers, the ideology of nationalism arose with mercantilism in eighteenth-century Europe and the formation of nation-states. Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau and Kant envisioned international solidarity and cooperation among the bourgeois states, while philosophers like Herder and Fichte, followed by Hegel, Mazzini, Mill, Acton, and Weber, among others, espoused in various ways the rights of culturally defined collectivities called “nations” against imperial hegemony and its civilizing agents. When inflected with liberalism or conservatism, nationalism acquires either a benign or malignant temper. In “What Is a Nation?” (1882), Ernest Renan rejected Edmund Burke’s idea of the nation as founded on religion and tradition. Renan believed that the nation “is a soul, a spiritual principle” that derives from “a common heroic past, great leaders and true glory” that is confirmed in daily plebiscites.<sup>9</sup> When this notion of nation built on sacrifice is inflected with the racial superiority of its constituents, modern fascism is born.

“Nation” as a term in utterance focuses on the theme of community or common bonds based on inter alia language, kinship, religion, territory, customs, etc. Such affective ties can also gravitate

around the hypothesis of a common origin or common destiny. It is addressed to those who ascribe to themselves belongingness to those domains that entitle one to membership in the nation. While this impulse toward solidarity may lead to an authoritative closure of utterance, to monologic discourse, it can also direct us toward a permanent open interrogation that solicits a critical responsiveness. It can pose a challenge, a call for answers. How is this possible when nation/nationalism implies exclusion and identity premised on affinities? Can "nation" be a multiaccentual sign, a double-voiced signifier that can be enunciated in heterogeneous fashion? Can the utterance of "my nation" or "your nation" solicit a free play of into/nation, so to speak?

In the context of the history of "nationalisms" in Europe, the ex-colonized countries of the South (versus the North), and the United States, such questions cannot be answered in the abstract without delimiting the area of reference. Here I propose a specific topic of inquiry. I would like to explore the resonance of Bakhtin's addressivity of utterance vis-à-vis a Marxist reading of nationalism<sup>10</sup> and then apply the notion of "third party" and alterity to certain "third world" articulations of the principle of decolonizing subaltern subjects. The intertextual semantics of "nation" may provide a heuristic guideline to examining the articulation of revolutionary nationalist movements in the "third world" with the politics of feminism and antiracism in a postmodern milieu.

The Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer defined the nation "as a community of character arising out of a community of fate" ("NC," 267). By character he means "national peculiarities" in modes of thought, behavior, temperament, etc. These are differences "in the basic structure of the national mind, intellectual and esthetic taste, and reactions to the same stimuli; differences of which we become aware when we compare the cultural life of the nations, their science and philosophy, their poetry, music, and arts, their political and social life, their customs and way of life" ("NC," 270). In effect, this character is a "precipitation of past historical processes," not a given biological or genetic inheritance. National history and the cultural practices of the social classes locked in conflict afford evidence for describing the habits of thinking and acting of the dominant social bloc; hence the community of character arises from the common fate of the ruling classes. In this way, Bauer argues that the national phenomenon cannot be divorced from "its characteristic history" and the process of integration of the social classes. The "historical nation" arose in capitalism when the cultural community of the governing classes included the masses; while in "unhistorical nations"

dominated by alien ruling classes, "it was the very beginning of a national cultural community, a true 'awakening'" ("NC," 274). In other words, the utterance of the nation is an expansive process that begins with the bourgeoisie and proceeds to envelop the other classes so that a socialist project needs to take into account the cultural character of each nation.

Actually, according to Bauer, international socialist ideology and tactics cannot help but acquire a national form in its development and concrete application. The various national cultural heritages are not incompatible with socialist movements with specific histories since the various socialisms are "historical product(s)" of diverse national characteristics. "The nearer the working class of a country comes to taking power, the more must it adapt its practices and methods of struggle to the national peculiarities of its battlefield. . . . Our task must not be to stamp out national peculiarities but to bring about international unity in national diversity" ("NC," 275). Bauer has in effect dialogized the unitary and homogeneous doctrine of "socialism in one country," a move whose resonance can be discerned in the pronouncements of militant revolutionaries and anti-colonialists like Leopold Senghor, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sun Yat-Sen with their varying orientations.

The articulation of "nation" as an anticolonial force against Western imperialism by subaltern peoples necessarily includes the Other (the colonizing master) as the addressee. It is the first stage in overcoming tutelage and gaining autonomy. But this internalization varies according to time and place, syncopated with the complex genealogy of resistance. In Sun Yat-Sen, not only Woodrow Wilson's proposal of "self-determination of peoples" but more cogently the example of Lenin's Bolshevik revolution established the stage for repudiating the false cosmopolitanism then deluding China's youth, a cosmopolitanism that is for him only "imperialism and aggression in another guise." In "Three Principles of the People," Sun writes: "We, the wronged races, must first recover our position of national freedom and equality before we are fit to discuss cosmopolitanism."<sup>11</sup> Without the national voice, the horizon of addressivity, there cannot be any cosmopolitan utterance since the addressee is no longer conceived as the racial Other but the past civilization of China that has antedated everything in Europe, including communism, except for science. Dialogic understanding, authentic communication, presupposes a recovery of what has been silenced or erased: "Europeans cannot yet discern our ancient civilization, yet many of our race have thought of a political world civilization. . . . Because of the loss of our nationalism, our ancient morality and civi-

lization have not been able to manifest themselves and are now even declining" ("TPP," 246-47). Sun believes that the true spirit of cosmopolitanism, genuine internationalism, can only be built on the foundation of nationalism: "Russia's one hundred fifty million are the foundation of Europe's cosmopolitanism and China's four hundred million are the foundation of Asia's cosmopolitanism" ("TPP," 247).

In contrast, Nehru seeks to remedy the monologic tradition of India rooted in part in religion, in the authority of the exclusivist caste system. He calls for a critical rejection of the past and an emulation of the dynamic and scientific outlook of the West. While recognizing the problems of self-destructive change in Europe, Nehru incorporates an addressee attuned to "the spirit of the age." Nationalism, from this secularizing perspective, "is essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions, and experiences"<sup>12</sup> which intensifies during crisis. This crisis can be resolved by adhering to universal ideals: "a faith in humanity and a belief that there is no race or group that cannot advance and make good in its own way, given the chance to do so," given equal opportunities and freedom ("DI," 251).

What renders precarious and ironic Nehru's striving for a unified agenda of progress for India is the brute reality of diversity, the centrifugal polyphony of voices and secessionist impulses that British imperialism could barely synchronize. Heteroglossia marks the circumstantial matrix of Indian nationalism which could find temporary focus in resistance against British rule; after independence, the voices of class and ethnic identities shatter the iterable and homophonic closure of nationalism as a political program.

We can observe the intensity of the disintegrative or heteroglotic potential of this genre of discourse by juxtaposing the antithetical views of Leopold Senghor and Frantz Fanon. If what unites the material word with meaning is "social evaluation,"<sup>13</sup> then we need to compare the repertoire of evaluations embodied in their antithetical pronouncements.

Senghor's intonation of African nationalism is initially premised on what he conceives as the distinctive character of the African subject as synthesis of ego and alter: "Thus the Negro African sympathizes, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. . . . He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis. . . . Subject and object are dialectically face to face in the very act of knowledge."<sup>14</sup> This binary mode of categorization cannot but lead to a synthesis. If the Other (Europe) is already assimilated, or conversely the African is already

dissolved in the Other, then what is the function and import of the version of nationalism Senghor espouses? Deploying a series of polarized terms—intuitive versus analytical, etc.—to distinguish the African and the European, Senghor envisages a mediating zone distilled in a utopian project: “Let us hold firmly to the concrete, and we shall find, underlying the concrete, beyond the discontinuous and the undetermined, the liberty that legitimates not only our faith but the African road to socialism” (“AS,” 269). This socialism combines Malian nationalism with Pan-Negroism or Pan-Africanism.

Senghor’s tone is more unilaterally didactic than Sun Yat-Sen’s. While mindful of the “colonial fact,” Senghor however arrives quickly at a compromise and urges that his compatriots stop denouncing colonialism; instead Africans should acknowledge Africa’s indebtedness to European civilization seen from the viewpoint of “universal history.” By enlarging the evaluative context of nationalist utterance, Senghor apologizes for colonialism as “a necessary evil” explainable by “historical necessity.”<sup>15</sup> This Hegelian ruse, also cognized as part of the painful “parturitions of history” (note the organic/biological metaphor here), becomes a pretext for what nationalists should do with the colonial legacies of Islam and Christianity: “Negrofy them” (“AS,” 272). In the task of building a particular nation-state (eventually denominated as Senegal), Senghor inflects and thereby cancels the particularist intonation of nationalism in an expansive, majoritarian discourse when he places “our nation not only in the Africa of today, but also in the civilization of the universal yet to be built” (“AS,” 273). In sum, the road of African socialism—for Senghor, socialism is only a method—goes through a nationalist phase, the utilization of West African sources (Negro African and Berber), moves to a “multinational confederation with France,” and then to a conception of a society where matter is prior but spirit is primary, a “Negro-Berber humanism.” From the organic trope of parturition, Senghor’s discourse shifts to a sacramental or liturgical tone, seemingly apostrophizing an ethnic or Afrocentric audience/listener: “To assimilate is to transform foods that are foreign to us, to make of them our flesh and blood—in a word, to Negrofy and Berberize them” (“AS,” 273). Bakhtin’s carnivalesque impulse appears here only to be sublimated and neutralized into the supreme spiritual value of “Negro-Berber” humanism—an ambivalent, even compromised intonation.

The dialogic strategy of revolutionary nationalism finds its culminating expression in Fanon’s Manichean vision of the war between natives and settlers in Algeria. Fanon repudiates Senghor’s easy mix of heterogeneous and even contradictory elements. In his eloquent



essay "Concerning Violence," Fanon locates the moment of historical recovery of what is indigenous to a second stage of decolonization after a period of self-hatred and self-denigration.<sup>16</sup> From being immobilized by colonial subjugation, the native enters the world of dances, orgies of possession, rituals of magic—the occult sphere of the community and the unconscious. The nation is born from this mediation: "The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom" (*WE*, 58). Utterance of national liberation and self-determination occurs in the context of violent combat between intransigent forces: the settler and the exploited peasants, workers, and intelligentsia.

Why is Fanon so enamored by violence, one may ask. Is it a means or an end in itself? Given the Manichean geopolitical arena where colonialism has paralyzed the natives and fragmented them, it is only collective violent action that can awaken and unify them. The polyphony of war destroys the monologic power of the colonial state by releasing the petrified others: "The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history" (*WE*, 93). But violence is not just a cathartic or cleansing force, restoring self-respect to the subaltern. Fanon anticipates that the process of armed struggle will have a more enduring result in the demystification of all state authority, including that of the nationalist bourgeoisie that is bound to supplant the foreign occupier, so that democratic participation of the masses will be insured. The sense of responsibility and the importance of accountability, Fanon hopes, will be lasting pedagogical effects of the mass mobilization that marks the genesis of the nation at the border between fetishism and demystification:

Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic and the nation is demobilized through a rapid movement of decolonization, the people have the time to see that the liberation has been the business of each and all and that the leader has no special merit. . . . When the people have taken violent part in the national liberation they will allow no one to set themselves up as "liberators." They show themselves to be jealous of the results of their action and take good care not to place their future, their destiny, or the fate of their country in the hands of a living god. Yesterday they were completely irresponsible; today they mean to understand everything and make all decisions. Illuminated by violence, the consciousness of the people rebels against any pacification. (*WE*, 94)

Pacification by their native masters, the magicians who will be engaged in imposing a new mystification: the neocolonial state.

Is Fanon's populist utterance here inventing his addressee, a fictional protagonist endowed with an instinct for participatory democracy who will no longer be vulnerable to ideological manipulation? Violence is the carnival of the oppressed in the war of national liberation, a process of destruction and renewal, the material body of the people undergoing metamorphosis and radical transformation. Such a revolution embodying the carnival spirit "frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities."<sup>17</sup> But is the nation born from this carnival excess fit for the novelistic genre of creative and communal exchange? Is Fanon's populist nationalism a means of defusing class struggle by blurring the antagonism between proletariat and petite bourgeoisie, a rhetorical ploy used by the radicalized middle stratum to establish hegemonic management of internal differences within the emerging nation-state? Is the nation articulated by Fanon's discourse an utterance with sufficient decentering subliminality to resist bureaucratic degeneration and systemic incorporation into the seductive Babel/babble of the global marketplace?

In "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," Bakhtin emphasized the inscription of context or lived situation in the structure and import of the utterance. In life, utterance becomes "an objective social enthymeme," a milieu of social/pragmatic evaluations shared by the community—also called "choral support"—that enables the "I" to "realize itself verbally only on the basis of 'we.'"<sup>18</sup> Exotopy or outsideness is the condition of possibility of inner speech, the vehicle of another's utterance. What links the verbal discourse and the extraverbal purview in utterance is intonation, the border between the said and unsaid. What is useful for our inquiry here is Bakhtin's concept of "third participant," the hero of the verbal production, that hovers between speaker and listener.

In Fanon's discourse on nationalism, we discover this "third participant" as the gap that opens up in the spontaneous explosion of Manichean violence, when the vanguard leadership of the anticolonial struggle displaces the masters (settlers), and closes the argument or debate between the native intellectual and the metropolitan addressee. In fact, this erasure of the emergent nation/people seems enacted in the closure of Fanon's text "Concerning Violence" when the task of "introducing mankind" into the world becomes a joint collective project of Europeans and "third world" subalterns. The nation/people agency of decolonization becomes the assumed, omitted premise in a global social revolution that elides the moment of national self-determination. In another essay entitled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," Fanon realizes the in-

adequacy of the nationalist soliloquy performed by the underdeveloped native "middle class," essentially a comprador dependent stratum tied ideologically and economically to the former colonizer. He stresses political education and participation of every citizen in order to prevent the cult of the leader, elitist vanguardism, Bonapartism and military caciquism: "Nationalism is not a political doctrine, nor a program" (*WE*, 203). What is it then? Fanon calls for the elevation of the masses "from national consciousness to political and social consciousness" (*WE*, 203); however, unless social consciousness proceeds through the moment of nationalism, it will degenerate into "primitive tribalism" (*WE*, 204).

As though anticipating objections, Fanon asserts this fundamental insight: "But if nationalism is not made explicit, if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into humanism, it leads up a blind alley. . . . The national government, if it wants to be national, ought to govern by the people and for the people" (*WE*, 204-5). It is clear now that this "third participant," the emergent community of the nation/people, to borrow Bakhtin's phrasing, "has not yet assumed full and definitive shape; the intonation has demarcated a definite place for the hero but his semantic equivalent has not been supplied and he remains nameless" (*SG*, 602).

The sheer "otherness" of its goal informs the dynamism of the revolutionary nationalist project. Because of this, semantic referentiality gives way to rhetorical and pragmatic tendencies in thought and social practice. The performative dimension in utterance preponderates over the constative in Fanon's discourse in "On National Culture." The resonance of Fanon's intonation verges toward apostrophe, with the second participant (the addressee) as witness and ally, as if magically invoking/evoking the missing, prefigured locutionary "hero." But this hero is not an abstraction. Fanon constantly reiterates the constitution of "nation" by popular action: "The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people," the "coherent, enlightened action of men and women," which implies "the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale" (*WE*, 204). Fanon dissociates himself from populism when he elucidates the link between culture and nation:

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought

to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on. (*WE*, 233)

The struggle for sovereignty and independence proceeds through the struggle of the masses for building the institutions of participatory democracy. Born in the "concerted process" of struggling for liberation and equality, the nation thus serves as the framework in which the renaissance of culture and the democratic state can occur. It is also "national liberation" which enables the culturally defined people to play its role in global/international affairs.

So in Fanon's utterance, it is ultimately the "third participant"—the nation-people—that enables dialogue to escape the mimetic circuit of speaker-listener, becoming the synecdoche for the circumstantial grounding of the idea of "nation" in historical specificity. This avoids essentialism and the perils of identity-politics by preventing the fetish of textuality, even intertextuality, from foreclosing the conversation on the uses of the nation-form. Here the nationalist discourse becomes novelized, as it were, politicizing culture and interpellating the complicities of power and discursive-institutional forms.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, I want to cite here an example of how Bakhtin's idea of "reported speech," what I would call a specimen of intercontextual performance, can also shed light on the theme of "third world" nationalism as an utterance-becoming-apostrophe. This is a species of creative production, the alterization of the bourgeois cogito, the imperial Self. I have in mind the context of the Filipino-American War (1898–1902) in which the United States military forces, after claiming friendship with General Emilio Aguinaldo, President of the first Philippine Republic, waged a brutal and savage war against the Filipino insurgents. This "insurrection," as the U.S. colonial authorities designated it, met a fierce campaign of suppression which ultimately led to the death of at least a million natives and over eight thousand American soldiers—historians call it America's "First Vietnam."

During the early phase of the war, the leading Filipino intellectual and adviser to General Aguinaldo, Apolinario Mabini, responded to a manifesto signed by American Commissioners Jacob Gould Schurman, George Dewey, Elwell S. Otis, Charles Denby, Dean C. Worcester, and John R. MacArthur. Mabini described this Commission as one named by President McKinley "in order that the United States might fulfill her obligations under the Treaty of Paris, which trans-

ferred sovereignty over the Philippines from Spain to the United States.” After quoting the stated intention of the Commission to introduce political, judicial, and economic reforms with the threat that those who refuse to submit will encounter the “ravages” of its armed forces, Mabini responds:

In order to be believed in it did not hesitate to employ lies and shameless enough to say that my Government was the one which issued a challenge [to the Americans], this action being the result of the Filipino’s ignorance of the goodwill and fraternal feelings of the Commission’s greedy President, although in reality the whole world knows that it is President McKinley who actually gives the order to compel the American opposition senators to ratify the Treaty of Paris which transferred the Philippines to the United States. . . . What a spectacle it is to see that at the end of the century called enlightened and civilized, a people who know how to love their sovereignty and proud of their sense of justice now would use their accumulated force to wrest from a weak people the very rights which in their case they believe to be inherent in natural law!<sup>20</sup>

From the linear style of speech reporting, Mabini shifts to what Bakhtin calls “pictorial.”<sup>21</sup> The reporter infiltrates the reported statement with authorial retort and commentary, obliterating the boundaries between the reporting context and the reported speech. The author’s positional staging of anger, sarcasm, disbelief, resignation configures the intonation of the quoted passage. Mabini quotes the American Manifesto’s claim of U.S. sovereignty as “compatible with reason and with our [Filipino] freedom” only to mock it by introducing McKinley’s greed and in particular the refusal of the signatories to the Treaty of Paris to hear the representatives of the Filipinos “in accordance with reason and with international law.” This critique of U.S. hypocrisy alludes to a “third participant” that Mabini summons, U.S. citizens and lawmakers who are sympathetic to the Filipino aspiration for independence and who opposed ratification of the Treaty of Paris and U.S. annexation of the Philippine Islands. In any case, the marks of pictorial reporting in most cases, for Bakhtin, indicates “a severe debilitation of both the authoritarian and the rationalistic dogmatism of utterance.”<sup>22</sup>

At the end, however, Mabini invokes the addressee of this national utterance—the insurgent nation/people—now no longer tyrannized by Spanish arrogance but by “race prejudice, which is deep, cruel, and implacable in the North American Anglo-Saxon.”<sup>23</sup> Like Senghor and Sun Yat-Sen, Mabini counterpoints racism with rational humanism; but quickly he moves to a Fanonian moment of allusion. Mabini’s text begins with the protocol of reporting informa-

tion and the other's claim to truth, moves to an agonistic critique and interrogation of what is reported, and ends with a performative gesture: an apostrophe to the listener/audience, a call to arms and to sacrifice. If utterance is language infused with life via "addressivity,"<sup>24</sup> the discourse of revolutionary nationalism inflected through various populist and revolutionary accents exemplifies a genre that bridges the distance between the carnivalesque heteroglossia of Rabelais, its utopian futurism,<sup>25</sup> and the polyphonic vertigo of Dostoevsky. What in practice nationalism in language and cultural production means in the postmodern world requires concrete conjunctural analysis.<sup>26</sup> But the intonation of the nation/people utterance by Fanon, Mabini, and other anti-imperialist militants aware of Bauer's idea of "community of fate" promises to be a rich field in which to explore further Bakhtin's seminal proposition of the sign as the battlefield of multiple social forces, sensibilities, and ideologies.

### Notes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 96–100.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). Hereafter *SG*, cited in the text.

3. V. N. Voloshinov/Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). Hereafter *MPL*, cited in the text.

4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxx.

5. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 97.

6. Bakhtin, quoted by Todorov in *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 97.

7. In notes written in 1970–71, Bakhtin noted that "in life as the object of thought (abstract thought), man in general exists and a third party exists, but in the most vital experience, life, only I, thou, and he exists" (*Speech Genres*, 44).

8. On the dialectics of space and place in a historical materialist context, see David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996).

9. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in *The Nationalism Reader* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995), 154.

10. Otto Bauer, "National Character and the Idea of the Nation," in *Essential Works of Socialism*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Bantam Books, 1971). Hereafter "NC," cited in the text.

11. Sun Yat-Sen, "Three Principles of the People," in *The Nationalism Reader*, 245. Hereafter "TPP," cited in the text.

12. Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Discovery of India," in *The Nationalism Reader*, 250. Hereafter "DI," cited in the text.

13. P. N. Medvedev/M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert Wehrle (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 119.

14. Leopold Sedar Senghor, "On African Socialism," in *The Nationalism Reader*, 268. Hereafter "AS," cited in the text.

15. Senghor was one of the initiators of the artistic movement called "Negritude" which tried to blend "Africanity" and "Westernization" as part of a modernizing trend; see Basil Davidson, *Let Freedom Come* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 178. On Senghor as a specimen of African Bonapartism, D. Fogel writes: "The national bourgeoisie, of virtually all political stripes, is deathly afraid of the development of 'disunifying' social class differentiation and the irreconcilable class struggle which it generates. Senegal's longtime president Leopold Senghor, Africa's foremost neocolonial puppet of France, urged his fellow African heads of state at a 1979 UN food conference to 'reread Marx and Engels' and adapt it to the realities of the black [sic] continent." In *Africa in Struggle* (Seattle, Wash.: ISM Press, 1982), 165.

16. In Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963). Hereafter *WE*, cited in the text.

17. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 49.

18. Mikhail Bakhtin/V. N. Voloshinov, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," in *Literary Criticism and Theory*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke (New York: Longman, 1989), 600.

19. See Ken Hirschkop, "Bakhtin, Discourse and Democracy," in *New Left Review* 160 (Nov.-Dec. 1986): 92-111.

20. Apolinario Mabini, "The Struggle for Freedom," in *Filipino Nationalism 1872-1970*, ed. and trans. Teodoro Agoncillo (Quezon City: Garcia, 1974), 230-31.

21. Voloshinov/Bakhtin, *Marxism*, 120.

22. *Ibid.*, 121.

23. Mabini, "Struggle for Freedom," 233.

24. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 217.

25. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 33.

26. For the case of Irish nationalism, see Tony Crowley, "Bakhtin and the History of the Language," in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 68-90, and Seamus Deane, "Imperialism/Nationalism," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 354-68.

# The Scriptible Voice and the Space of Silence: Assia Djebar's Algeria

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Today, at the end of a year of somber death,  
dirty death, in the darkness of a fratricidal struggle . . .  
What do you want to be called, Algeria!

—Assia Djebar

THE inscription of the voice remains a vexing problem for politics and philosophy, indeed a politics of philosophy, since it offers a conundrum about subjectivity, presence, and ontology. Derridean critique has attempted to undo the privileging of the spoken through the *différance* of writing but this too comes with a significant pause, for the interpretive mode applied to the sentence (death sentence or *l'arrêt de mort* in Derrida's approach—which, for interpretation, is both an order for death and a stay of execution) might also seem to elide the violence within speech, the power relations that trace the curve between the word and silence. It is ironic that so much postwar French philosophy has been concerned to untie the Gordian knot of speech in Western discourse when many of the philosophers concerned emerged in the shadow of North African decolonization, a postcolonial critical consciousness based, in part, on the insurgent voice.<sup>1</sup> The topic is a complicated one, but for the sake of this Bakhtinian approach the disabling of the Master's Voice should not imply the displacement of voice *tout court*, for this would seem to conspire with an ideology that insistently confers a panoply of silence on those whose voices would otherwise transform the conditions for dialogism. And what of silence, does it not speak back to a force of silence that would render it merely soundlessness? The rhetorical ploy that might accompany the question, *Who speaks for Algeria?* is an empty gesture if a consideration of silence is not written into the response, for this too interrogates the boundaries of the



utterance in Algeria as nation. Bakhtin understands profoundly the logic of such boundaries as context-specific and as historically informed. What he calls the "distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subjects and dialogic overtones"<sup>2</sup> determine and texture the very possibility of Algeria *as* nation in the present. Even amid the murderous shouts in Algeria's ongoing civil war, the silence of words on the page can become a scriptible intervention against a mode of production that would render silence only an empty voice.

How vast is the space of silence? Greater than most attempts to speak or write it. Theory continues to struggle with this space as much as it does with the inscription of the voice: to acknowledge it, to think it, to trace its logic of affective answerability (its inward state of being) without merely speaking, writing, thinking in its place. There is no single strategy for positioning oneself with respect to silence (as Bakhtin well knew), partly because that place is beyond voluntarism and volition (formed therefore by more than this or that individual consciousness or praxis) and partly because even in the moment of apprehension, the apprehension of silence, the eventness of the event is possible only in the field of the Other—the complex processes of identification that do not resolve themselves in the steady self-incriminating voice of the "I" (to say, "I hear silence," is to erase the Other). Like intersubjective relations themselves, the space of silence is a plethora of positions in the realm of the "possible answer," or what we can interpret from Bakhtin as the dialogic. This very multiplicity is not necessarily its virtue, for the ability to take up various positions may confirm a certain tenacity in the production of silence. Ideologies, for instance, can achieve longevity through such flexibility.

Clearly, historically specific matrices of power *produce* silence, enact its aura of absent subjectivity. The hegemonic mode of production of silence is extremely underestimated, but in various forms it has come to betray the logic of oppression in colonialism, racism, nationalism, patriarchy, and capitalism—to name but five of its most egregious manifestations. The difficulty remains whether the critic can speak to this position, the Other under the subjection of silence, without merely reproducing the insidious desire of modes of domination themselves. This is what must be risked, however, for to absolve oneself from this scene of silence, from the space of its production, is to oil its mode of *écrasement*. To understand the mode of production of silence is not to describe its vastness, but is to answer it, to come to terms with the way it might be made answerable in the field of the Other's silence.

Now there are some who would say that this is an entirely academic exercise (which means, in at least one of its connotations, that it conspires with the logic of exclusion, of separating off the subject as object). But that is too easy: it is not just anti-intellectual but idealist—it assumes that anything short of a populist intervention is elitist, conspiratorial, hegemonic. With these assumptions what would the Algerian feminist writer Assia Djébar be, but “well-to-do,” “anti-native,” or “nostalgic for colonialism”? These are just some of the accusations that Marnia Lazreg has leveled at Djébar in her book, *The Eloquence of Silence*, whose title, in this respect at least, can only be read as ironic.<sup>3</sup> I would, however, like to take the serious implication of Lazreg’s argument, its feminist polemic—which is itself based on a sustained and subtle negotiation of agency among Algerian women in history—and read it into a specific “problematic” of silence, one that is to some extent enjoined by Djébar’s writing, and particularly her recent novel *Vaste est la prison*, but is overdetermined by the crisis of Algeria. Algeria’s civil war, while certainly not eloquent, is a far-reaching silent space, a space whose vastness perhaps articulates the predicament of the postcolonial, but whose intricate logic of effacement, or what Djébar describes as its ability to crush, represents the challenge and the charge of Algerian women’s praxis in this extreme situation.

How can one provide detail of the crisis of Algeria, a “beyond” the mediatization of civil war as event? The problem of media “eventness” is a vexing one—as Djébar explains in “The White of Algeria”: during the war of national liberation, the French government and the media referred to the struggle as “events.”<sup>4</sup> Of course, the war that is closer to the black heart of the Age of Europe, the nationalist delirium recently played out in that presumptive phrase “the former Yugoslavia” is the one that is dear to the transnational media machine which still depends on an ideology of Eurocentrism (in this case, Europe literally at the center of the world). I would, however, like to indicate at least some of the components of the Algerian crisis (the “not event” rather than non-event) before providing a brief Bakhtinian reading of Djébar’s disarticulation, an interruptive and interrogative gasp, “Je ne crie pas, je suis le cri” [I don’t cry, I am the cry].<sup>5</sup> I do not believe that Djébar’s description of masculinist hegemony through the scriptible voice is the only or the best way to oppose the bloody frenzy unleashed in contemporary Algeria, but neither do I think that Djébar’s eloquence, academic or otherwise, is “another way of silencing women, this time by a woman.”<sup>6</sup>

First, the hegemonic mode of production of silence in postcolonial Algeria is primarily economic. The austerity program intro-

duced in 1994, for instance, was clearly an attempt to appease the IMF, with whom the government was seeking to reschedule Algeria's over 26 billion dollars in foreign debt. The interest on this debt alone was the equivalent of Algeria's entire export earnings that year. Inflation remains high, and unemployment hovers around thirty per cent. In the late twentieth century these "facts" appear to define the postcolony as nation, as further examples like Nigeria and Liberia would demonstrate. Second, the mode of production of silence seeks a guarantee in and through violence. A violent pathology is not postcolonial (if anyone, the colonizer in history has exercised that compulsion), but it is produced in postcolonies where global economic forces ignore the value that independence confers. The violent will to silence monologism is not innate: it is the product of a state's desire to harbor power in the face of an economic duress that cannot but fail to provide it with a mandate. In this respect, we can say that monologism is a mark of absent authorization—the authorization for power—if not authority. The "Security Council" or "High Council" in Algeria provides neither security, counsel, nor height, and now accepts military hardware from the French, against whom its generals had once waged war. The influx of weaponry only exacerbates the thrall of violence that has already killed some 60,000 Algerians (the official government figure is about a quarter of that) since the annulment of the election that took place in December 1991. Third, the mode of production of silence is gendered. This is highly controversial so let me be precise: it matters little to a masculinist hegemony whether a critic or a writer uses Algerian women as a metaphor for an abstract feminine condition. The gendering of silence depends upon a brute concretization of oppression in the form and structure of power relations. To be sure, the discourse of man is still in the metaphor of woman (as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says of the use of "woman" within a patriarchal symbolic order), but this should not obscure the fact that women in Algeria are primarily objectified within a discourse of oppression because they are women, not because they might stand for something else. Here the question of silence becomes tangible, not abstract. The Algerian women who were stabbed to death or had their throats cut in 1994 both for not wearing the veil and then for wearing the veil, are not metaphors for masculinism: they are its very instantiation.

There is no single strategy for an understanding of silence across the space of Algeria, as even a cursory look at Djebbar's long engagement with this process would indicate. Nevertheless, just as the Algerian civil war has intensified the mode of production of silence, so Djebbar's work now overflows in a multiplicity of oppositional writ-

ing—a kind of *l'écriture desaccordée* that writes out silence just as it inscribes the voice. Certainly, this has been a constitutive feature of Djébar's writing, which artfully *de*-scribes or deconstructs French colonial discourse while not sacrificing the scriptible voice of Algerian women that informs such delinking. The complex range of resistance that her works enunciate cannot be sufficiently engaged here, but let us suggest why, in Bakhtinian fashion, writing the voice out of silence informs Djébar's North African philosophy of language. I would argue that gender is the central fact of the oppositional critique in the latter because: 1) gender differentiation drives the colonial episteme, the desire for the Other constructs the Other as woman, that which must be possessed and assimilated to the Self of masculine certitude; 2) the Law of the Father preexists the colonial adventure—it is inscribed in the social discourses of the Maghreb, sometimes reduced to patriarchal interpretations of Islam, but also functioning within a more general code assumed to sanction gender hierarchy (this includes interpretations of tribal and class-inflected economies of difference); and 3) gender riddles the language of difference, not just between the alternative and alternating registers of colonizer and colonized discourses, but also within the languages of state which have often produced a celebratory masculinism in articulating the “imagined community” of nation, however important the concept of nation has been in delegitimizing colonial subjugation. In this light, Djébar addresses a central problem in the languages of liberation: how can one enunciate a new sense of being (the postcolonial subject, for instance) when the very process of delinking is grounded in ontologies of the male whose power seems to give to that process its logical integrity?

Several cultural strategies recommend themselves, including *écriture féminine* [women writing] and *parler-femme* [speaking (as) woman] which both suggest a deterritorialization of masculine space in language. Again, Djébar is aware of such theoretical approaches—her cosmopolitanism, for instance, includes debates with and within Paris. Yet the point is that her writing the voice of Algerian women is a politics in situ, a discursive scheme that differs not only from the perquisites of the Parisian scene, but also within itself, for the Maghreb is plural and contradictory. What I am suggesting is that Bakhtin's insistence on the space of enunciation locates the addressor in a specific way. In the case of Algeria, the polyphony of the Maghreb continually contradicts Algeria's ideology of nation and nationhood. This, against a backdrop of an increasingly conservative vision of Islam, intensifies a crisis of identity (for this vision itself questions what form an Islamic republic might take). Djébar

reads this agonistic function in postcolonial subjectivity as irrevocably engendered (that is, before women can be more than women they must be themselves) and therefore she articulates a “scriptive discontinuity”<sup>7</sup>—a break from a certain history of identity as a prelude for what might become. In the interanimation of these diverse counterhegemonic voices a heteroglossary begins to emerge, one whose philosophy of language is always already a politics of language in contemporary Maghrebi aesthetics.

Djebbar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (*Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*) begins with a scene of torture, a woman is being electrocuted by minions of the French regime, scarred for her work in the Algerian war of independence. Both Sarah and Leila carry these scars because they carried fire (in the war there were women who attacked the occupying army with grenades—Djebbar calls them the “fire carriers”—*porteuses de feu*): their scars are born of insurrection. For Djebbar, scars and scarring are a touchstone of memory, something that must be voiced. But this is not just a question of artistic creativity but one of access to language, to the arena of the *Le Verbe*, an arena of class struggle as Bakhtin puts it, and more besides (that is why in Djebbar's quartet, as Mildred Mortimer has pointed out, French *écriture* is opposed by Arabic *kalaam*, and thus the colonizing male is disarticulated by the indigenous peasant woman, *l'écrit* by *les cris*).<sup>8</sup> In the torture scene male violence is written onto the body of the woman: for Djebbar, that inscription cannot or should not be silenced, secluded, or veiled. This is one cadence of the discourse of postcoloniality.

The colonizer has memories too, as Djebbar evokes in her extraordinary “Postface” to *Women of Algiers* by reference to the “intoxicated gaze” of Delacroix, whose brief encounter with a harem in Algiers in 1832 produces the famous painting (indeed, Djebbar borrows the title for her collection of stories). The final essay, “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound,” dramatizes why a philosophy of language must also write out the cognitive and corporeal space of sight and sound specific to women's being. This bears comparison to the way that Bakhtin begins to sketch the complex coordinates of I/Other through the body and affect in *Art and Answerability*; in this case, however, Djebbar writes the body through the scriptibility of an unraveling discourse of domination. Djebbar argues that within Delacroix's “stolen glance” (which is also the viewer's who sees this painting) “Elles demeurent absentes à elles-même, à leur corps, à leur sensualité, à leur bonheur” (*Femmes*, 173) [They—the women—remain absent to themselves, to their body, to their sensuality, to their happiness] (*Women*, 137). In a sense, they are looking nowhere

because, in a cunning reversal and unlike the spectator who mischievously pores over this phantasm, they do not have the right to look. Yet it is not just the voyeurism of the colonial gaze that marshals this figurative absence: it is also the surveillance by the women's own culture that, a century and a half later, and despite a "progressive" relaxation of social codes in between, continues to situate or condition an affective absence (a felt and persistent marginalization—which is Djébar's way of accentuating that postcoloniality does not imply postpatriarchy).

Djébar knows that in highlighting the woman question, merely by having women speak (that is, in recording their oral expressions), she runs a gamut of oppositional critique. First, to oppose the marginalization of women in the new society is seen to detract from the integrity of Algerian nationhood (feminism itself can be attacked as colonial baggage). Second, feminism, while certainly not anathema to Islam is regarded as an affront to conservative interpretations of the Koran and *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) and as a profane symptom of non-Arab modernization (given the violence of 1988 and the continued instability of Algerian politics since December 1991 this makes Djébar's interventions all the more remarkable). Third, the use of French, even when it attempts to tongue-tie His Master's Voice, can be read as complicitous, a cosmopolitanism that again allows the woman question to be read as an antinationalist agenda (of course, that Djébar has attacked the policy of "Arabization" because "Official Arabic is an authoritarian language that is simultaneously a language of men" [*Women*, 176] has only fanned those particular flames).<sup>9</sup> Fourth, and most crucial given my own position vis-à-vis Maghrebi writers, there is a strong tradition of criticism in Maghrebi postcoloniality (the *Souffles* group for instance) that is highly suspicious of works that (intentionally or not) feed the ethnographic desire of the West. As M'hamed Alaoui Abdalaoui has commented on the situation of Moroccan novels in French, "in France (and elsewhere in the West), [such] novels are still universally read as sociological documents (the most highly prized being those that deal with the condition of Muslim women)."<sup>10</sup> This is not just a knee-jerk masculinism but is a position shared among some Maghrebi feminists (Marnia Lazreg for one has pointed out that narratives focusing on the veil, seclusion, or clitoridectomy play into the obsessive interests of the Western colonial unconscious—a fetishism inexorably inclined to ingest images of the oppressed woman *elsewhere*).<sup>11</sup> Here I will say only that the position of adjudication (or what Foucault describes as the place and subjectivity taken up by a subject in order to make a statement) cannot be produced

by simply displacing the woman question into categories of ethnography, sociology, or indeed neocolonialism (which seems to unite the other two). If Djebbar's fiction has a material correspondence with specific inequalities within Algerian society, it is not out of a desire for Western readers (*Women of Algiers*, for instance, was first published in Algeria), and even if it is, would this constitute adequate grounds for dismissal from *within* the very texture of that lived inequality? There is too much at stake for Djebbar to allow the decentering of Euramerican colonial desire to detour or defer women's enunciation—a condition that requires even more than a war of independence, but social transformation more broadly construed.

In the first two novels of her quartet (*L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Ombre Sultane*, translated as *Fantasia* and *A Sister to Scheherazade*, respectively) Djebbar suggests that the first priority must be the woman's story [*l'histoire femme*], which artfully links the scriptible voice to memory and so to history.<sup>12</sup> Both books depend upon a canny oscillation not just in the space between languages, but in that which marks the field of intersubjective exchange and diachronic "eventness" as Bakhtin puts it. These are indeed the weave of a dialogic, itself a significant mark of Djebbar's novelistic discourse, but here the point is that Djebbar's biculturalism is specifically dialogized by the woman's voice. This utterance is the product of an arduous collocation of historical research and a painstaking attention to oral traditions that denature the "established" borders of Algeria (those established by colonial fiat). Thus, even as *Fantasia* proceeds by a clever juxtaposition of the French invasion of 1830 with the events leading to the liberation of 1962, the central *histoire* is writing the voice, a question of women's performativity directly linked to aspects of Djebbar's upbringing, her acculturation. At one point the narrator comments on the differences among the veiled women of her community, especially that which refuses the realm of silence: for instance, women shouting between their patios:

To refuse to veil one's voice and to start "shouting," that was really indecent, real dissidence. For the silence of all the others suddenly lost its charm and revealed itself for what it was: a prison without reprieve.

Writing in a foreign language, not in either of the tongues of my native country—the Berber of the Dahra mountains or the Arabic of the town where I was born—writing has brought me to the cries of the women silently rebelling in my youth, to my own true origins.

Writing does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters. (*Fantasia*, 204)

Voice does not confirm presence, at least not in the philosophical sense of ontology, but it does imply a relation, one which links, sometimes imperceptibly, a historical chain of dissidence in dissonance. The voice is interventionist not just because it textualizes the testimonials of those who have often been confined to the realm of silence or the unheard (and therefore the *inconnue*) but also because it is an agonistic archive, a restless register of what *can* be said, and differently. Thus, even when the "chronicles of defeat," the defeat of 1830, are the reminiscences of men in the narrative, the presence of women begins to seep through: "Ces lettres parlent, dans le fond, d'une Algérie femme impossible à apprivoiser" [between the lines these letters speak of Algeria as a woman impossible to tame] (*Fantasia*, 69). H. Adlai Murdoch has suggested that Djebbar feminizes the figure of invaded Algeria but in a sense this has always been there in what Jenny Sharpe calls "an allegory of empire."<sup>13</sup> The greater strategy is that, while she does not falsify the records, Djebbar scrupulously marks the gender trouble that conditions their very possibility, so that the invasion "reverberates with the sound of an obscene copulation" (*Fantasia*, 19), one which attempts to objectify and possess in the same instant.

Djebbar recognizes that the colonial episteme requires a fantastic overinvestment in the colonized as Other. For her part, she presents this delirium fantastically, specifically, in *la fantasia*, in which we see something of the contradictory logic of the grotesque. *Fantasia* refers to both the warlike display of Arab horseriding skills in which the riders charge the audience only to stop just before they overrun it, and also the musical style (common in Europe from the sixteenth century) in which the form of composition is made subservient to "fancy." Surveying Algiers in 1818 Blaquierie described the fantasia as a "paroxysm of passion," which for me connects the violence of one interpretation to the creative reverie of the other. (During a fantasia in Djebbar's novel, Haoua, a young Algerian woman is [accidentally!] kicked to death by a horse ridden by a lover she had rejected. The historical incident that Djebbar reimagines is recorded by Eugene Fromentin in 1852 during the French occupation.) Today, the Maghrebi fantasia is not just a measure of tribal masculinism but also a bizarre, carnivalized mirror of orientalist desire (and can include "flying carpets," belly dancers, snake charmers, and any number of generalizations worthy of the tourists' gaze). The fact remains that Djebbar tracks fantastic projections of desire through every level of culture she articulates (one could also connect this theme to the letter-writing campaign of the adolescent girls in the first part of this novel). But she also focuses on the oppression of women as women



rather than simply revel in the description of such fantasy, which by itself would only replicate the desire she wants to challenge.

Like *Fantasia*, *Loin de Médine*<sup>14</sup> uses a close reading of history to speak to Algeria's present, in this case to offer a narrative of Islam's comparative flexibility in the final days of the Prophet's life and the immediate aftermath of his death. Djebbar supports her tactical contextualization of this moment through respected sources like Ibn Sa'd and al-Tabari, an essential although still a dangerous move in the current political climate (although Djebbar was trained as a classical historian so she knows her sources). Djebbar attempts to round the characters and their everyday interactions by accentuating what is latent in the classical histories; that is, that the wives of the Prophet and other women in their environs were "women of the Verb" and women of action, and were respected as such even if part of their power derived from patriarchal genealogies (for a nonfictional account of this period the work of Leila Ahmed is highly recommended).<sup>15</sup> The lesson is consistent with Djebbar's other works, her double words or dual words are an exhortation to remember, and in that memory to conjure a subjectivity deferred or confined: "Ah, far from Medina, to rediscover the wind, the exhilaration, the incorruptible youth of rebellion" (*Far*, 275). This is not idealism, but an utterance contracted to the specificity of a historical context. In October of 1988 in Algiers Djebbar saw "blood flowing in the streets." *Far from Medina* becomes her book of blood—not a call to bloody uprising but a meticulous reconstruction of the spaces through which the voice is engaged in an otherwise bloody and violent situation. As the singer of satires, the poetess says to Muhajir before he has her teeth pulled out and her hands severed, "My eloquence, my voice will remain when you are dust" (*Far*, 106). While hardly a philosophy of language in the accepted sense, it inspires a dissonant sense of writing that now claims greater urgency.

The third novel in Assia Djebbar's projected "Algerian quartet" (see note 12) is further evidence of her complex sense of Maghrebi women's "rise to the word." *Vaste est la prison* (Vast is the prison)—a work not yet available in translation—develops many of the critical tools of enunciation that Djebbar has deployed in her other works, including a nuanced approach to the problem of the scriptible voice (here most critics favor the term "polyphony"—although the consciousness that these voices connote is not always "independent" according to the terms of Bakhtin's model: the independence of consciousness is here circumscribed, for specific historical reasons); blood as a cultural sign (of violence, violation, initiation, and resistance); and memory as palimpsest and imbrication (a process of

conflicting historemes through which an ancestral woman is collocated—*Far from Medina* is probably the most salient example here). Let us focus, however, on the construction of narrative space, a narrative from silence that I invoked earlier. While critics have remarked in the past on Djébar's articulation of women's space in Algerian culture (that which resists the confinement of women, or their separation from the public sphere, except as veiled), there is less understanding of what grounds the abstract space of resistance that informs Djébar's construction of a counterpublic *enoncé*. Part, at least, of the "vastness" of Algeria's contemporary hegemony over women is answered and indeed confounded in Djébar's prose by a perspicuous privacy that throws into relief the privations of a masculinist Algerian public sphere that leaves out or denies an actual public presence for women. What Djébar terms the "silence of writing" is an implosion of this inhibiting interpretation of public space.

This is relatively easy to gainsay in Djébar's otherwise highly stylized and patiently but insistently formal quartet so far (the critical and metaphorical space of Algeria as woman in the language of the colonizer artfully deconstructed in *L'Amour, la fantasia*; or, "the world outdoors" without the *haïk* [veil] and the open secrets of the *hammam* [public baths] as a nonmale refuge in *Ombre Sultane* (*A Sister to Scheherazade*)). But the recoding of space in *Vaste est la prison* is itself repositioned by the Algerian implosion since December 1991, just as the October riots of 1988 structure (or texture) the very language of *Loin de Médine* (*Far from Medina*), the *langue vive* of a distant past in the service of an alternative rebellion or *Itjihad*. The third novel of the quartet, then, responds to an utterance context, as Bakhtin would have it, that forces Djébar to rethink the logic of history's power and, of course, history's erasure. For critics, all that narrative on blood, silence, writing, and voice in Djébar's previous books may have been the stuff of abstract play, but now it assumes the condition of real slit throats, real charred bodies, real butchered vessels of the word. This is the prison that history makes.

Let me indicate three strategies that I believe Djébar attempts to weave between the bars that words alone cannot break. To begin with, *Vaste est la prison*, like much of her other fiction, refuses the subject statement of a unitary self. But this stock-in-trade of post-modern "schizophrenia" (in Deleuze and Guattari's sense) is given a further interpretation in the recent novel by the silence of writing itself. What noise can invade this silence, which is not a last resort but words that live unvoiced? In "L'Aimé en silence," the first part of the book, this silence is a scene of battle in the heart and mind of the narrator as she remembers a love affair with L'Aimé, a younger

man with whom she experiences the passion of youth she had never had (*Vaste*, 105). The intense privacy of this affair is not just a traditional refuge but an opening out into questions of inscription—how can this love affair get told, and in what language, the medium of narration. And this is a feminization of space, a reclaiming (and sometimes an invention or a dream) of a language of desire, but one that is answered in a familiar way: the narrator is beaten up by her husband and admonished that she deserves to be stoned. Whatever the moral judgment of the affair and its consequences, Djebbar links the narrator's experience to the status of man in the unconscious of the Algerian woman. Beyond "la brutalité et le désordre conjugal" Djebbar seeks a reason for the imposition of silence in an economy of death, one that is marked as masculine in the organization of space in Islamic Algeria (the Islam particular to Algeria). This is a mask, both as a disguise and as a death mask, worn by the husband as a right, as a tradition, as a law of history. The mask of authority is what allows the patriarch to beat, and to speak.

What, then, can be read as melodrama (and the narrator says as much) is also "une translation de la vision de l'autre" [a translation (and an anglicism of "traduction" that underlines it) of the vision of the other]: a critique of the logic that interpellates the narrator in silence. Such a logic is worse than death (here silence does not equal death), for it takes a woman's heart in her mode of expressivity and effaces it: it erases not just its emotional content but also the language it creates. The vastness of this silence might seem to be the lot of an individual woman, the narrator, but the second part of the novel suggests that this narrative of erasure is precipitate in Algerian culture and history, in the narrative of nation itself. Thus, Djebbar will develop a counterstrategy of identification through a double-voiced discourse of history.

"L'effacement sur la pierre" [erasure on the stone] refers to a complicated story of imperial and colonial erasure in the face of "native" inscrutability. Briefly, this section relates the discovery and effacement of a key "texte bilingue" of North African history—the stele of Dougga Jugurtha, the King of Numidia who fought long and hard against Roman expansionism (and subsequently would be an inspiration to the FLN in their war with France). The stele makes a declaration of defiance in two languages—the first, a punic or Phoenecian script, and the second a sign of hybridity and alternative identification. This language is at the heart of Djebbar's polemic about the silence of writing (writing's silence and the imposition of silence on writing). The secret language on the stele is related to *Tamahaq*, and the alphabet is *Tifnagh* (a language preserved in Ber-

ber, a language of the Hoggar Mountains, the language of the Touareg, the nomad). We are jumping across this fascinating and detailed history, but Djébar's point is vital to our understanding of the novel. The Touaregs themselves have practiced a specific mode of cultural assimilation and autonomy that has not been averse to rejecting those aspects of a patriarchal interpretation of Islam that threaten the active roles that women occupy in their cultural practices. When wave after wave of foreign invaders supplanted the indigenous languages of the region (for instance, with Arabic, Turkish, and French) it was the women who preserved the ancestral writing: they were the scribes who gave the language its historical integrity when every other mode of archeology (which, in this history at least, means colonialism) tried to burn it, steal it, or scratch it out. Djébar is forcing the issue as a scribe herself, and one who is bound by the living contradiction of French, the mark, if not the guarantee, of "les piéds-noirs" (the popular term for the French colonizers). The narrator identifies with the ancestral lineage even as she knows she cannot be synonymous with it. Instead, "C'est dans la langue dite 'étrangère' que je deviens de plus en plus transfuge" [It's in the language called "foreign" that I become more and more a renegade]—a defector to the other side. Obviously this could be read as compensation, but this is not the point. The spirit of Jugurtha's resistance, an answerability to the land and not just a shadow of male warriorhood, lives on in every mode of writing that refuses erasure by the dominant, and in particular resists the prescriptions that deny the history of women that writes Algeria. This, then, is the second strategy.

In the third section, "A silent desire," Djébar works out this renegade spirit in the form of a polyphony, a disjunctive series of women of the land (Lila, Isma, Lila Fatima, Bahia, etc.) whose narratives, "fleeting" but forthright, do not so much recover the *écriture illisible* of Jugurtha but put it to work in a matrilineal memory that is the other side of history (the other side of that which erases, crushes, or silences). It is a generational memory to be sure, and one that measures a potential that has not been completely obliterated by the course of history before and after the war of independence. Just as the narrator recalls the valuable knowledge that her mother learned not from books but from the liberation struggle itself, so she attempts to teach her daughter the submerged "tenor" of silent desire. But her daughter learns, too, in the moment of history (she is, for instance, in Algiers when the October 1988 riots occur) when it is enough to want a breath of free air in the stifling vastness of state repression. Within this polyphony the narrators do not ask for abso-

lute separation from men; indeed, the "shadow of that separation" itself is seen as traumatic (as in the death of Uncle Sidi). But separation among the women is certainly more deeply felt, and it is the death of one of them, young Cherifa, from typhoid that forms a fulcrum within the text. As the women lament the loss of Cherifa they reflect too on a history of misfortunes all the way back to the inscription on the stele. Cousin Bahia sings in Berber, the language of the mountains: "From the first day of the year, we have not had a day of rest / vast is the prison that crushes me, where will you come from, deliverance?" (*Vaste*, 237). Vast is the prison (*Meqqwer Lhebs* in the Berber), but this is no ordinary lament: it is a voice of defiance. For Jugurtha, the prison would be *his* trap, so that, even when captured and taken to Rome, there would be a part of him that could not be inscribed or taken up within the narrative of Roman domination. This existence, as a hole, as a void of the unassimilable, would be, according to the narrator, literally a hole in the heart of Rome. And it is this spirit of the nonrecuperable, the unassimilable that is a catalyzing strategy for the women's community against the myriad hardships they may face.

There is much more to Djebbar's novel than this, but let me conclude by pressing the point on its relevance to Algeria's war within a narrative of nation. The spirit of Jugurtha remains not in the form of an idealistic national purity, but as the sign (like language) of a discordant but vibrant multiplicity, a *bilangue* of historical integrity, that which must return (as Bakhtin notes, "Every meaning will have its homecoming festival").<sup>16</sup> The dead Cherifa herself comes back. As the narrator comments: "On the earth of Algeria, so much later, the dead return. The women, the forgotten, because they are without writing, form a funeral procession, the new Bacchantes" (*Vaste*, 338). On the one hand, there is a masculine death, one that is explicitly linked to a specific interpretation of Islam in the present, a promise of monologism. On the other hand, Djebbar offers another version of this narrative: one that recognizes a Muslim reality but in a discrepant double language of history—one made possible by, for instance, the Touareg women's other language. It is this cry that infiltrates the mode of production of silence. Fleetinglly [*fugitivement*], perhaps, it collapses the embrace of that silence. It writes it out.

There are many lessons to be learned from Djebbar's approach to the scriptible voice, but here let me note one in particular. For some years now Bakhtinians have been aware of conflict in Bakhtin's concept of dialogism; it is a notion torn between, on the one hand, the unrepeatability of a specific utterance that mediates more than one intention and, on the other, an emphasis on the social implications

of the utterance determined and overdetermined by broader manifestations of heteroglotic materiality. Rather than adjudicate this difference as the familiar opposition of the properly aesthetic and the sociologically materialist, I believe Djebbar calls for a more nuanced interpretation. Her dialogism offers not only a cogent sense of the criss-crossed intentions of authorial desire in her identification with a complex sisterhood of history, but also a notion that the sociopolitical dimensions of women's community in Algeria are not simply voiced in the dialogic vistas of national identity. Indeed, to study Djebbar's writing in light of Algeria's contemporary crisis provides a chilling challenge to both the doyens of dialogism *and* nation. What if traditional configurations of the nation-state and normative notions of dialogue in the dialogic conspired to confine the excluded and the "unwritten" to a silent space? Would jettisoning one necessarily transform the other? Perhaps the problem of nation thus construed would then fold back into a consideration of the silent spaces, or the "barely audible," in Bakhtin's thought itself.

### Notes

1. This topic is a huge one, but it would be interesting to track how thinkers like Derrida, Cixous, and Lyotard steer the Scylla and Charybdis of writing and voice as a postcolonial *description*. While the privileging of voice within Western metaphysics has been rightfully critiqued, the question of voice in, say, Algerian culture offers a different order of "being," one with which such philosophers must surely be familiar.

2. Bakhtin's prescient discussion of "utterance boundaries" can be found in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 93. Here I use it to interrogate the problematic borders of the nation-state.

3. See Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Lazreg's critique of women in Algerian cultural and political life is salutary and necessary. All I disagree with here is her characterization of Djebbar's work. The following is testimony that Djebbar too has contributed to "women's rise to the word" as Lazreg investigates it.

4. Assia Djebbar, "The White of Algeria," trans. Andrew Benson, *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 138–48. This argument appears in expanded form in Assia Djebbar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995). A complex book, the latter takes the concept of an extended "in memoriam" that links her recently murdered fellow writers to other celebrated members of Algeria's literary history. The effect is of a deeply committed song of protest.

5. Assia Djebbar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Hereafter *Vaste*, cited in the text.

6. Lazreg, *Eloquence of Silence*, 201.

7. This operates at several levels, not just in the way Djebbar's writing breaks from Algerian forms of masculinism, but also in the disjunction she figures in the relationship of Western and Algerian women (seen, for instance, in her short story "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment"). For more on Djebbar's sense of this disjunction see the "Afterword" by Clarisse Zimra (which includes an interview not available in the French edition) in Assia Djebbar, *Women of*

*Algiers in Their Apartment*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992). Hereafter *Femmes* or *Women*, cited in the text.

8. See Mildred Mortimer, *Journeys through the French African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 147–64. Mortimer argues that Djebbar explores the space between two languages by writing the Arabic voice into French. This, of course, could be read into much Maghrebi Francophonous writing, but the key here is in the transposition of women's voices in the decolonization of French and, by implication, the Maghreb. Significantly, Mortimer also analyzes how this reinscription is simultaneously a struggle over women's space. See, in particular, Mildred Mortimer, *Assia Djebbar* (Philadelphia, Penna.: GELFAN Monographs, 1988).

9. For more on the contradictions of Arabization see John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)—esp. chap. 7. What Djebbar “loathes” is not only the patriarchal norms that gird aspects of the Arabic language but also the fact that the privileging of Arabic is made at great cost to Kabyle and other Berber languages. The situation is complicated, however, since historically the Kabyles themselves were the most inclined to Francophonie under colonialism and in general held higher social ranks than their indigenous counterparts. Clearly, Arabization was in part aimed at the privilege that had accompanied the use of French.

10. M'hamed Alaoui Abdalaoui, “The Moroccan Novel in French,” trans. Jeffrey S. Ankrum, *Research in African Literatures* 23, no. 4 (1992): 31.

11. This is a controversial topic that cannot be settled here, but it remains difficult for Maghrebi women themselves to articulate an oppositional politics without reference to the forms of oppression that structure their lived realities. Lazreg's main target is, of course, Western feminism and its religion/tradition paradigm where Arab women are concerned. The argument is a forceful one and is unresolved (if not unresolvable) within the scholarship on this issue. See Marnia Lazreg, “Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 81–107. See also Peter Hitchcock, *Dialogics of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)—esp. chap. 2.

12. Assia Djebbar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Lattès, 1985). Translated as *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* by Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1989). Hereafter *Fantasia*, cited in the text. Assia Djebbar, *Ombre Sultane* (Paris: Lattès, 1987). Translated as *A Sister to Scheherazade* by Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1987).

13. See H. Adlai Murdoch, “Rewriting Writing: Identity, Exile and Renewal in Assia Djebbar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*,” *Yale French Studies* 83 (1993): 71–92. I would read Djebbar's textual practice as outlined by Murdoch as a *de*-scription rather than a rewriting, although the general strategies of displacement pinpointed are surely the sine qua non of postcolonial subjecthood. See also Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

14. See Assia Djebbar, *Loim de Médine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991). Translated as *Far from Medina* by Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1993). Hereafter *Far*, cited in the text. For an informative discussion of this book and an interview with Assia Djebbar see Clarisse Zimra, “When the Past Answers the Present,” *Callaloo* 16, no. 1 (1993): 116–31.

15. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

16. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 170.

# Silence, Censorship, and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman

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**I**N his Booker Award acceptance speech of 11 October 1994, which was cut short due to time constraints, the Scottish writer James Kelman spoke of the rights to existence and to silence:

As I see it, it's an argument based solely on behalf of validity, that my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right. They may have the power to dismiss that right, but the authority lies in the power and I demand the right to resist it. . . . One of the remaining freedoms we have as writers is the blank page. Let no one prescribe how we should fill it whether by good or bad intention, not the media, not the publisher, not the book trade; not anyone. And if we want the blank page to stay blank then let it stay blank. We have the same right to silence as the rest of society.<sup>1</sup>

It is appropriate that Kelman speaks of silence in a speech in which he is accepting an award for *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994), a work in which silence dominates, as can be seen through an analysis of the blind protagonist Sammy and his verbal interactions with others.

Sammy, like Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* (1984) by Alasdair Gray and the speaker in Hugh MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) relies on silence, paradoxically, in order to be heard. Silence for these writers ensures what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the "loophole" necessary for a culture (like that spoken of in Kelman's speech) or a character to be released from the strictures of an identity which is not self-determined. Jock's "Don't name it. Let it grow"<sup>2</sup> is akin to Sammy's silence, although Sammy finds silence to be the only option available to him. Blinded after his beating by the police, Sammy, perhaps more than any other Kelman character, resides in an isolated world.

Kelman, like MacDiarmid's *Drunk Man*, recommends silence as



an appropriate response that will ensure that one always has control over one's final word. The danger here, however, is that the forces of self-censorship may rob silence of the voice it may potentially lend to a greater communal and cultural dialogism. We can come to a greater understanding of how this self-censorship works if we consider Bakhtin's ideas of censorship and alibi.

In his works, Bakhtin associates censorship with fear. He is most concerned with tracing the history of society's response to this fear and the artistic ways of combating it. In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin outlines ways in which laughter serves as an appropriate response to fear:

Laughter is essentially not an external but an interior form of truth; it cannot be transformed into seriousness without destroying and distorting the very contents of the truth which it unveils. Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. . . . Its external privileges are intimately linked with interior forces; they are a recognition of the rights of those forces.<sup>3</sup>

On the surface, it may appear that Kelman's fictions are rather devoid of laughter. However, we must remember that for Bakhtin laughter was not simply a humorous response but one which challenged authority and all forms of seriousness that limited and confined society. "Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength. It was linked with the procreating act, with birth, renewal, fertility, abundance."<sup>4</sup> In this way, Kelman's characters create a linguistic laughter through their use of profanity and Glaswegian dialect that challenges notions of "proper" English.

The Glaswegian spoken by Kelman's characters, much like the poetic voices of Tom Leonard, provides a carnivalization of standard English that is akin to Robert Burns's parodies of High Kirk English. What makes it doubly carnivalesque is the fact that it represents not broad and "accepted" Scotticisms, but phonetic and regionally charged dialect. Kelman's drifters, gamblers, bus conductors, and nightboilermen come from the lower strata of society and each has his own language. They speak not only Scots but also Glaswegian Scots as well as languages that pertain to their own sphere of friends, family, and colleagues. The voices of Kelman's characters are the perfect twentieth-century Scottish literary examples of what Bakhtin finds in the dialogic composition of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically or-

ganized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, or various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.<sup>5</sup>

Kelman's writing highlights this quality of speech diversity.<sup>6</sup> If we take Kelman's language and look at it alongside the city in which it thrives, we see a similarity with James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Joyce captures the theme of exile beautifully in his stories of native Dubliners returning to the city, or down-and-out citizens contemplating journeys abroad. You find this in Kelman too, but what strikes the reader is not simply the thematic exile that is desired by characters such as Sammy in *How Late It Was*, or Tammas in *A Chancer* (1985), who both leave Glasgow at the end of the novels, but rather, the linguistic exile represented by speech patterns and what they stand for. Bakhtin, in his later essays, many of which are contained in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986) deals with the utterance and its dependence on an infinite number of social, linguistic, and psychological factors. Regional language variation is one of these factors as well:

Any expansion of the literary language that results from drawing on various extraliterary strata of the national language inevitably entails some degree of penetration into all genres of written language (literary, scientific, commentarial, conversational, and so forth) to a greater or lesser degree, and entails new generic devices for the construction of the speech whole, its finalization, the accommodation of the listener or partner, and so forth. This leads to a more or less fundamental restructuring and renewal of speech genres.<sup>7</sup>

Dialect is one way this becomes noticeable in Kelman, but this is more likely to occur in stories that are set in and around Glasgow. For the most part, Kelman uses a mixture of dialect and English. When Glasgow natives make contact with those from other countries or regions, especially in collections in which stories about Glasgow are juxtaposed with those about experiences in London or the Channel Islands, the language used is English. Here, though, words themselves, rather than specific dialects, become important in identifying where someone is from. Thus, for example, in the story "An Old Pub Near the Angel" (1973), the Scottish character identifies

an Irishman and calls him "Mick," and is content to receive the reciprocal "Jock." Two speakers who share a position of exile and who both receive financial assistance achieve communication here. However, once "Jock" leaves the Labour Exchange and goes to the pub, his attempts at communication are thwarted. The bartender seems to be slightly deaf, and the old woman who enters toward the end of the story speaks gobbledygook that seems to be understood only by the bartender:

"Goshtorafokelch," she said.

The bartender looked from her to Charles and back again before replying, "Yeh, I'll say eh?"<sup>8</sup>

This accentuates the fact that Jock is speaking perfectly good English and yet seems to be failing to make a connection. This is not an isolated instance in Kelman's work of Scots outside of their native habitat failing to communicate. As Derek puts it, talking about living in England in "Events in Yer Life": "it's all one-way traffic, naybody to fucking communicate with, no properly, no unless ye bump into a black guy or something, maybe an Irishman. Apart from that . . . It's hard to open yer mouth."<sup>9</sup>

In "Keep Moving and No Questions" the speaker manages to initiate nonverbal communication with a young woman he meets in a nightclub, but words never seem to be effective and a conversation is never realized. In "Zuzzed," the Scotsman speaker fails to communicate with an English farmer who has hired him to help harvest potatoes in a predominantly French-speaking area (a Channel Island?). This is likewise the case in stories where "foreigners" visit Scotland. In "The Hitchhiker," the non-English-speaking woman who searches for shelter is scared of the male Scottish worker who attempts to help her and only barely manages to communicate by signs and brief expressions.<sup>10</sup>

In this way Scots, and Glaswegians in particular, only seem to achieve spoken communication with each other or with those who speak a dialect of English. What this failed contact with "others" masks, however, is a failure for communication to exist within native communities as well. Where stories such as those contained in *Not Not While the Giro*, as outlined above, show obstructed interaction between communities, a story such as "Events in Yer Life," from *The Burn*, and novels such as *A Disaffection* (1989) and *How Late It Was*, emphasize the inadequacy of language within a community.

In "Events in Yer Life," the protagonist, Derek, has returned to Glasgow from England for his mother's funeral. He meets up with

an old art school friend, Fin, and the two of them find much to disagree about when it comes to language. Derek has been away for so long that he has become susceptible to making linguistic errors (in terms of current Glasgow vocabulary), and he becomes frustrated with the realization that he is now somewhat of an outsider, an exile from the language community. At first the changes are innocently accepted as Fin explains to Derek what he does in his spare time:

. . . I'm just a Monroe freak. Ye know what a 'Monroe' is?  
What?

A 'Monroe,' it's a hill over three thousand feet; any hill over three thousand feet; that's what they call it, a 'Monroe.'

Where?

Where? Scotland, where d'ye think? ("EYL," 210)

Already, in Derek's time away, a different language has been established in his native city. The differences become more obvious when it comes to terms of national identity:

Fin shrugged. One thing that does occur to me. I was thinking at the bar . . . And don't take it the wrong way. Just yer politics Derek, ye know, they're bound to be different to what they'd be if ye'd stayed.

Ye think so?

Definitely.

Derek nodded.

The way ye mention Britain for instance.

What about it?

Just that there's nay separation up here. It's always Scotland.

What did I say?

Aw nothing really, it's only the way ye say Britain all the time.

I didn't know I was saying Britain all the time.

Aye, I mean like it was one country. See naybody does that here.

Naybody. No unless there's some sort of qualification involved. ("EYL," 221)

These kinds of language differences are understandable, albeit frustrating for the exile who returns home to a different linguistic environment. Communication is not easy, but there are considerations of time and space that can go some way toward explaining the differences between Derek and Fin. What is more worrying, frustrating and inexplicable is the ineffective dialogue that takes place *within* communities such as those Kelman explores in the novels *The Bus-conductor Hines* (1984), *A Chancer*, *A Disaffection*, and *How Late It Was*.

In each of these works the principal characters seek an escape from Glasgow and the lives they lead there. Hines wants to go to Australia, Tammas to Peterhead, Patrick to the "east neuk of Anglia," and Sammy to England. For those who do manage to get out (Tammas and Sammy), the reader is left wondering if they will succeed in their quest. However, as we've seen in Kelman's short stories, the promise of discursive consummation carries other frustrations outside of Glasgow. The prognosis is not good for Kelman's novelistic heroes either.

The protagonists of Kelman's longer fictions have more room in which to develop a dialogic profile than the characters who inhabit his shorter works. Where the speakers of the short stories suggest a number of problems with identity formation and successful communication, the novels provide a larger framework within which language can be analyzed. Characters can be examined first through their techniques of monologue and second in terms of how they relate to the world that surrounds them in a dialogic fashion. Finally, it will be seen that no matter how isolated these figures are, they seem to speak to each other in a way that refers back to the language they use. Kelman shows how dependent the self is on that language for the creation of a sustainable and healthy identity.

Kelman's characters are slaves to their "inner censors" if only because their inner censors refuse to allow them out into a greater vocal community. The inner censors of Kelman's characters are the powers that demand that discourse remain within the consciousness. The "I-for-other" of Bakhtin is constrained and made to conform to notions of "I-for-self" in Kelman's fiction.

While Kelman's characters exhibit a concern with the manipulation of knowledge, power, and politics, they are fundamentally preoccupied with questions concerning truth. In *How Late It Was*, Kelman uses the brutal treatment of Sammy by the police and the medical authorities to highlight a deeper concern with power that has to do with flexibility and subjectivity. Sammy's blindness is a metaphor for what we all endure, and, more importantly for Kelman, what working-class Glasgow endures every day. Censorship and authority here becomes very much a problem of issues, much the way it does in Kelman's polemical collection of essays *Some Recent Attacks* (1992) and in his play *Hardie and Baird* (1991). People are blinded and imprisoned every day and have been throughout history and in this condition communication, social interaction, and health are at risk. These are some of the psychological implications of Kelman's political task in presenting hardships and inequalities at a surface level. It is helpful to consider Kelman's work by looking at the na-

ture of truth and responsibility as formulated by Bakhtin in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993).

*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* represents some of Bakhtin's first and most seminal ideas concerning the act of authoring, the nature of Being, and self/other relationships. Although it is the most recent of Bakhtin's works to be translated, it was most probably the first to be written, sometime between 1919 and 1921. The fact that this work, and others by Bakhtin, were suppressed and censored themselves indicates that Bakhtin was very much aware of the nature of censorship and had opportunities to theorize on the subject throughout his life. However, it is not censorship that figures highly in *Toward A Philosophy of the Act* but rather truth.

Bakhtin does not approach truth directly, but rather by way of other ideas that will aid him in his exposition of truth as being open-ended. Two of Bakhtin's ideas presented in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* are "participatory thinking" and "non-alibi." Participatory thinking involves an interaction between the world and the individual consciousness: "I cannot include my actual self and my life (*qua* moment) in the world constituted by the constructions of theoretical consciousness in abstraction from the answerable and individual historical act."<sup>11</sup> This notion includes the idea of "non-alibi in Being," which allocates to each consciousness a measure of responsibility in a world of other consciousnesses from which there is no "alibi" for being elsewhere. In other words, as Vadim Liapunov reads Bakhtin: "I cannot be relieved of answerability for the commission of an act by an *alibi*, that is, by claiming to have been elsewhere than at the place of commission" (*TPA*, 95 n. 111). Responsibility, according to Bakhtin, does not lie in the creation of definite truths, but rather in the creation of "unique truths" or *pravda* (*TPA*, 28). This is very much in keeping with Bakhtin's philosophy of *heteroglossia* where any number of factors occurring at a certain time produce a different meaning than they will at any other time under different conditions.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Busconductor Hines*, Robert Hines finds that questions of truth are much more closely aligned with language itself and he probes language in a very deconstructive manner when attempting to find some way of identifying a self:

Here you have a Busconductor Hines. How he must have been walking about in a trance and that. What he used to do was. He really didnt do. He had an idea. He conducted himself in a manner such that, his method of being, it accorded to certain factors. Certain factors appear to have governed his movements. What we know is mainly average. His

goal was twofold: to obtain a PSV licence, to acquire a sum of money—a sum of money which while of unknown extension was nevertheless taken for granted as settled in some unshadowy region as for example consider the striving to a goal where the goal lies in between the lines while the lines themselves are the striving and can produce the goal seemingly in themselves but not really in themselves for the goal lies in between and though some daft cunts have no knowledge of this they assume its existence in accordance with the existence of the lines. Now this is fucking nonsense of course because there doesn't have to be any in between at all, there can be nothing whatsoever. This is what has happened to Hines. A classic case, striving for the fucking nonexistent goal.<sup>13</sup>

Hines is constantly defining and redefining the language he uses and that uses and shapes him. Hines's take on truth and the way an individual perceives the world that surrounds him can be boiled down to "a strange kettle of cabbage":

It is a fucking strange carry on altogether. Here you have a house—a flat—cum house—up a close in a tenement building. Now: there is a—many in fact—singular bits involved in this problem about the house. Not least is an item of apparently insurmountable nature. It calls for wide heads. The past and the present have got to be considered. When the immediate past is not only today but also tomorrow. What the fuck. The time things they set you up. 5 years is never to be described as 10 minutes. That would be fucking ridiculous. 5 years is a host of days; then for each 1 you get 3. Even if you only want the 1 you've got another 2 stuck on. You're best paying no attention. You just go along. You can just go along okay. You can be getting along fine, just going along, you can eh—then the house coming on top of the job or maybe beforehand, the flat, it is to be being demolished so the flit from out from here to the next place and getting the space, clearing for the space, getting shot of the auld brickwork and concrete, the debris, you get it stacked then wheel it away in your wheelbarrow, right up the ramp and into the skip, the debris. Your head gets thick. You can be watching and waiting. It is a fucking strange carry on because then there you are. And you are not able to look properly. (*BH*, 81)

Hines has come to an understanding about truth which is close to that of Sammy, in *How Late It Was*, who is frustrated by the "system" but understands it well enough to prevent it from bringing him to the point of self-erasure. Hines manages to make connections in his world. He shares a communicative life with his wife and son, as well as his mates at work whom he unites in a sense of brotherhood when he is threatened with nonpayment of wages for the time he will spend meeting with the supervisor. Hines is more aware of himself

and the opportunities the world offers, even though he is incapable of achieving many of them. Through his investigation of language, Hines becomes adept at communicating with himself. His inner censors are forgiving and appear infrequently. They do not demand completion or subservience to higher authority because they generate their own logic. Hines's fragmented thoughts have a cohesion about them that is self-generated and self-perpetuating. He reaches conclusions by circumnavigating the assumptions that lie behind discourse, even inner discourse, that demand language to fulfill and explicate absence:

Contingency by fuck—dependence on a possible future event which is not very likely. Hines would be true under certain conditions and is false under others. If certain conditions had come to pass that they were at large then he would have been being true. He would have been true under such conditions. Their recognition—such conditions. Let us consider absent (*BH*, 99)<sup>14</sup>

Hines is aware of the conditional nature of truth. He comes to problems from many sides and is relatively patient with the process of arriving at an understanding of the nature of things. He is frustrated with the limits of language, but he is also willing to explore its limits and the nature of limitation. Hines does not feel obligated to finish his sentences. He is more likely, however, to turn sentences back upon themselves, to search out the opposite effect of his words, even though those words are framed within his consciousness, within his inner discourse. It is only after Hines has exhausted the possibilities of inner dialogue that he opts for the unfinished sentence, the absence of words. Hines investigates language in a way that is more sensitive to the "experience" of language and in doing so he conducts a never-ending "interrogation" of language. Bakhtin describes the experience of an object as a participative phenomenon, something from which the one who observes or experiences is never exempt from presence in the object:

Insofar as I am actually experiencing an object, even if I do so by thinking of it, it becomes a changing moment in the ongoing event of my experiencing (thinking) it, i.e., it assumes the character of something-yet-to-be-achieved. (*TPA*, 32)

Language is "something-yet-to-be-achieved" for most of Kelman's characters. Inner dialogue, profanity, and dialect all serve to highlight the importance of communication in his work. He presents a consistent concern with an understanding of the self. Self-communi-



cation becomes the most important theme running through Kelman's fiction. Grappling with the truth of self is problematic for many of the characters we have been dealing with because they must overcome the limitations of a language that confines itself to an inner arena. Censorship in this area becomes much more insidious than in the outer world, although it takes its cue from society. Authority is a way of limiting truth, and cultural authority limits the horizons of a culture and the responsible, participative thinkers within that culture.

An emotional-volitional affirmation acquires its tone not in the context of culture; all of culture as a whole is integrated in the unitary and once-occurrent context of life in which I participate. Both culture as a whole and every particular thought, every particular product of a living act or deed, are integrated in the once-occurrent, individual context of actual thinking *qua* event. The emotional-volitional tone opens up the self-seclusion and self-sufficiency of the possible content of a thought, makes it a participant in unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event. Any universally valid value becomes actually valid only in an individual context. (TPA, 36)

While the authority that Kelman's protagonists react to at times seems primarily linguistic, it is imposed from a political center that is primarily English. In this sense, Scotland, and to an even greater extent Glasgow, can be read in Kelman as potentially "postcolonial" geographies that have suffered from systems of English authority that remain in the national (or regional) consciousness after years of economic, linguistic, and cultural dominance. When Kelman's characters leave Scotland for England and elsewhere, one senses that the departure is both an effort to escape from cultural ambivalence as well as an unconscious attempt to redefine a national self. As we've seen in terms of his short fiction, Kelman's Scottish characters are more identifiably Scottish outside of their own country, a place that is controlled by powerful forces of cultural and linguistic ambiguity.

In Kelman's fictions, society obstructs the interaction between its cultural participants. They are isolated from the experience of language as a phenomenon dependent on more than one person and they are even further removed from the notion of language as being a process that is dependent upon the interaction of different societies. An authority that demands adherence to quantitative truth has stifled the polyphonic qualities of their culture. Characters in this world must discover the possibilities of language for themselves within a vacuum of "inner dialogue."

The “inner dialogues” of James Kelman’s characters are good examples of what Bakhtin calls “double-voiced discourse.”<sup>15</sup> In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1963), Bakhtin discusses the word *skaz*, a term which is extremely useful when studying Kelman’s fiction and which would probably be helpful when discussing other contemporary Scottish fiction such as the novels of Irvine Welsh, Janice Galloway, and Jeff Torrington as well as poetry by writers such as Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, Edwin Morgan, Robert Crawford, W. N. Herbert, and others who experiment with an “oral” Scots in their work.<sup>16</sup> The word *skaz* was probably first used in conjunction with Scottish literature by Hugh MacDiarmid in the following section from *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955) in which he celebrates those individuals who have contributed to language formation and development:

(Most cunning dealers in *zaumny* and *skaz*  
 And workers in dialect and slang,  
 Multilinguists and grammarians and philologists,  
 Orismologists, sematologists, semasiologists,  
 And epeolators all). . . .<sup>17</sup>

*Skaz* is loosely rendered into English as “a technique or mode of narration that imitates the oral speech of an individualized narrator.”<sup>18</sup> In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin uses the term *skaz* to assist him in describing different types of double-voiced discourse, or discourse which “is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech*” (*PDP*, 185).<sup>19</sup> Bakhtin insists that the use of *skaz* itself is an example of double-voiced discourse since it anticipates the oral codes of another:

It seems to us that in most cases *skaz* is introduced precisely for the sake of *someone else’s voice*, a voice socially distinct, carrying with it precisely those points of view and evaluations necessary to the author. What is introduced here, in fact is a storyteller, and a storyteller, after all, is not a literary person; he belongs in most cases to the lower social strata, to the common people (precisely this is important to the author)—and he brings with him oral speech. (*PDP*, 192)

Oral speech is very important to Kelman, and it is his characters themselves who are the storytellers in his fictions. Kelman’s characters employ examples of double-voiced discourse and *skaz* in an effort to protect their language from the incursions of linguistic authority. We can see Kelman engaging in this type of activity if we

read him alongside Bakhtin's ideas of discourse which he presents in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, his ideas of carnivalesque responses to authoritarian language found in *Rabelais and His World*, and his belief in the open-endedness, unfinalizability, and flexibility of truth.

Kelman's characters do not want to lose their voices. The frustration they contend with is not simply a matter of dissatisfaction with their ability to communicate. They are very much aware of a power that exists that seeks to deprive them of speech. This power, representing an imperialism of language, is exhibited in many forms. For Hines, "the busconductor" of *The Busconductor Hines*, it is the control of a changing world that will rob him of the identity of "busconductor" in the form of single-driver buses that threaten his job. But even this identity has been created for Hines by a capitalist system that classifies him as "The Busconductor Hines." Hines, more than perhaps any other Kelman character, tends to objectify himself in a Bakhtinian fashion:

Self-objectification (in the lyric, in the confession, and so forth) as self-alienation and, to a certain degree, a surmounting of the self. By objectifying myself (i.e., by placing myself outside) I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relation with myself.<sup>20</sup>

Here, Bakhtin is not saying that one will have an authentically "dialogic" relationship with oneself, but that the "possibility" for having one does exist.

Hines goes outside himself and reflects (in the passage below), using ironically borrowed literary language (such as "speculative musings") and sociological jargon (such as "a pragmatic assessment"), on what he sees when he looks back inside. These types of language are subverted by the fracturing of normal syntax such as "a the" and the breaks in punctuation:

Although predisposed toward speculative musings the Busconductor Hines cannot be described as a dreamer. Yet certain items do not always register. . . . Now: toward the latter stages of his last spell on the broo a certain husband and father's marked aversion to nought led him into what can authentically be called a pragmatic assessment of life, the outcome of which was his renewed determination to become a the Bus-driver Hines. (*BH*, 93-94)

In a sense this is an exercise in self-formation. But it is also an experiment with language. How will Hines refer to himself if he changes his identity to busdriver? Will he be "a" Busdriver Hines or "the"

Busdriver Hines? Up to this point he has been “a” busconductor Hines (one among many busconductors), but the threat of conductorless buses will make him “the” busconductor Hines. Cairns Craig has identified the dilemma facing Hines:

Hines’s identity is in being a Busconductor: his role has taken him over and he cannot evade it; the reification of his identity is such that he cannot simply drop being a Busconductor as he might take off a uniform. Busconducting for Hines is life—a terminal condition.<sup>21</sup>

Hines would like to be able to drive a bus, but he values the possibility of being unique as well. It is this search for identity that the novel encompasses. Hines wants an identity outside the imperium of the bus garage.

Part of Hines’s identity may need to be rearticulated if and when he assumes a new title. We see him struggling with a way in which to refer to himself. This likewise is a consequence of the historical and societal forces that seek to censor Hines’s self-language and which result in his opting for silence when attempting any form of linguistic completion. Hines employs the Kelman technique of constructing incomplete sentences, a style that is expanded upon in *A Disaffection* and which hints at the increasing inability of language to accomplish objectives established by the speakers.

One of the requirements of *skaz*, or double-voiced discourse for that matter, is that it be directed toward the voice of an other. As we’ve seen in Kelman’s works, the identity of this other is quite problematic. The voices of his heroes are more likely to anticipate their own responses instead of those of another consciousness. The voice of this “other” (in Kelman’s fiction) is either an other that has been created by the consciousness as a surrogate for another consciousness or it is an anticipated other to be found in the voices of history, philosophy, or government—voices of “authority.”

Rather than working from silence into language, Kelman’s characters move into silence. Language accumulates and expands within the stories and novels and in the process it becomes less recognizable and less capable of achieving communication or consummation. In such an environment, nonverbal communication and silence take on greater importance:

After the pause came the other pause and it was the way they have of following each other the next one already in its place as if the sequence was arranged according to some design or other, and set not just by the first but them all, a networked silence. It was that way when she entered

the room. The noise having ceased right enough but even allowing for that if it hadnt it would have—which is usually always the case.<sup>22</sup>

This passage is taken from a story in *The Burn* in which absolutely no dialogue takes place between the hero and the woman he is watching. Most of Kelman's fictions depend on the inner dialogue rather than an exterior dialogue between two individuals. What this short story points to, however, is how important movement, nonverbal communication and silence become when discourse between individuals is inhibited or nonexistent. Bakhtin recognizes the importance of silence: "Silence—intelligible sound (a word)—and the pause constitute a special logosphere, a unified and continuous structure, an open (unfinalized) totality."<sup>23</sup>

The novelty of constructing new language remains inside the interior monologues of Kelman's characters. They seldom bring their new creations out into a community of intertextual or interpersonal voices. They exist for the reader, the author and the hero, but remain silent to a larger community of textual voices that could potentially surround them in a text.<sup>24</sup> As readers, we are allowed to experience a multitude of voices that exist in a single Kelman character, but we do not sense a polyphony of communal voices.<sup>25</sup> This may be a reflection of the way Kelman interprets a loss of community through cultural imperialism. On the other hand, Kelman's characters exert a vigorous self-censorship by keeping their monologues bottled up within their consciousnesses. Limitations are most likely to be a result of outside influence seeping into inner discourse and censoring fruitful self-development through contact with the outside world. In such an atmosphere the act of signification takes on new importance. New language must arise where censored and highly impotent forms of communication fail to capture the essence of what it is to be a responsible and active participant in language and culture. Through Bakhtin's highly wrought philosophy of unique truth and his considerations of the liberating forces of *skaz*, Kelman's fictions can be read and analyzed in detail as virulent protests against sterile systems of limitation and linguistic authority.

### Notes

1. James Kelman, Booker acceptance speech, partially delivered 11 October 1994; reprinted in Ian Black, "Kelman Lines Up His Next Shot," *The Sunday Times Scotland*, 16 October 1994, 21.

2. Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) 340.

3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 94.

4. *Ibid.*, 95.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 262–63.

6. Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), provides a detailed analysis of dialogism and reported speech in Kelman's *How Late It Was*; see esp. 91–111.

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 66. For more on Kelman and speech genres see Alastair Renfrew, "Them and Us? Representation of Speech in Contemporary Scottish Fiction," in *Exploiting Bakhtin* (Strathclyde: Modern Language Studies No. 2, 1997), 15–28.

8. James Kelman, "An Old Pub Near the Angel," in *Not Not While the Giro and Other Stories* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1983), 19. This story was originally published in book form by Puckerbrush Press in Orono, Maine in 1973.

9. James Kelman, "Events in Yer Life," in *The Burn* (London: Minerva, 1992), 223. Hereafter "EYL," cited in the text.

10. "Keep Moving and No Questions," "Zuzzed," and "The Hitchhiker" all appear in the collection *Not Not While the Giro*.

11. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 9. Hereafter *TPA*, cited in the text.

12. See Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," pp. 262–63 for a discussion of *heteroglossia* and speech types.

13. James Kelman, *The Busconductor Hines* (1984; reprint, London: Orion, 1992), 97–98. Hereafter *BH*, cited in the text.

14. Kelman provides no period at the end of the final sentence in this quotation. This serves to accentuate the open-endedness of Hines's musings on the nature of truth.

15. Sue Vice makes this point as well; see *Introducing Bakhtin*, 93.

16. An excellent study of *skaz* and the dialect poetry of Tom Leonard is Donald Wesling's "Mikhail Bakhtin and the Social Poetics of Dialect," *Papers on Language and Literature* 29, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 303–22.

17. Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, vol. 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 745. For all of MacDiarmid's praise of "dialect and slang," and despite the many international languages that figure in this poem, it is strangely devoid of Scots.

18. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 8 n.b. Hereafter *PDP*, cited in the text.

19. For a full discussion of the complicated nature of the term *skaz*, see Martin P. Rice, "On 'Skaz,'" *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 12 (Spring 1975): 409–24.

20. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis," in *Speech Genres*, 122.

21. Cairns Craig, "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman," in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 105.

22. Kelman, "That Thread," 107.

23. Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970–71," in *Speech Genres*, 134.

24. Renfrew notes the "antithesis of diversity of speech" in Kelman's *How Late It Was*; see Renfrew, "Them and Us?" 23–24.

25. A possible exception is the more polyphonal community of voices to be found in

"Comic Cuts," which appears in Kelman's new collection of stories *The Good Times* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998). Here, though, as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the characters do not achieve any movement or progress through their dialogue. At the end of the story, the reader leaves them still waiting for their soup. Kelman's new collection of stories appeared after this article was written.

# Chronotopes of an Impossible Nationhood

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**I**F it is true to say, along with the literary critic Linda Hutcheon, that Canadian history has always consisted in “defining itself against centres,”<sup>1</sup> it no doubt behooves us in a theoretical context working with Bakhtin to question most thoroughly what precisely the notion of the “centre” could mean both for Canada’s energetic nationalisms and for its many nationalities. Like several other “bilingual” nations whose cultural and linguistic components make any easy equivalency between culture and state impossible, Canada is a place for which the notion of “nationhood” is at best tenuous and problematic, and at its worst divisive and even explosive. This place we call Canada is a political entity whose geographic center, on any normal scientific calculation, would fall somewhere amidst the most inhospitable of Arctic climates, a country whose population is mainly concentrated within a long but narrow strip on the extreme southern edge of the land mass, a band of some two hundred kilometres in width. Because most Canadians live in this nearly eight-thousand-kilometer-long strip and virtually ignore the rest of a huge “national” territory whose vastness is surpassed only by Russia, it can be said that in hard reality no Canadian could be said to live in the center.

Historically, politically, and culturally, Canada at the present moment is both metaphorically and literally at a crossroads. In a charged and volatile situation where new and old borders are constantly being evoked, and even challenged, with oftentimes bellicose intentions, the ideas of carving out new political spaces or territories, of reinforcing hitherto radically ignored and neglected groups’ rights to self-determination, and of establishing territorial corridors permitting passage from central to eastern regions are increasingly, and aggressively, becoming acceptable bargaining chips in ongoing negotiations which pit vastly different regions and cultural groups



against one another. In such a context, the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope takes on a spectacular relevance in the unending impossibility of defining Canadian nationhood according to a single, over-simplified, and therefore threatening, reconfiguration of an inexhaustible (cultural) space. Canada has always been a place where people are forced to dialogue across enormous geographical distances. The creation, in April 1999 of a huge third territory, henceforth called Nunavut, for the Inuit people of Canada's Eastern Arctic is both praiseworthy and remarkable in these circumstances. The time, space, and energy involved in achieving any semblance of reasonable communication has always meant the need for artificial means and aids, instruments that both assist and hinder the normal processes by which communication processes are naturally dialogized. The historical reality, and subsequent legend, of a single railway being built from sea to sea, or, closer to the present day, of a single "Trans-Canadian" highway (incompletely traversed by even the most courageous of heroes such as Terry Fox), can readily give the impression that Canadians are always on the move, fleeing those nonexistent centers, suitable less for living than for departure, toward yet another periphery which is never ever far enough away, but also never ever very far away from the narrow populated corridor at the south of the country which most Canadians have never left, even when they find themselves "abroad."

Because of an irregularly shaped territory and due to harsh climatic difficulties, it is often easier to cross from one major region of Canada to another by exiting the country. Canadians flee their cold winter, endless political squabbles, high taxes on gasoline, and everyday life by heading south to meet with fellow country folk fleeing the exact same troubles in the exact same way. "The chronotope of the road,"<sup>2</sup> seems particularly appropriate for describing "events governed by chance,"<sup>3</sup> beginning with an unamendable constitution bound by the vagaries of "the roll of the dice" (Brian Mulroney in the dying days of the Meech Lake constitutional accord) and ensuing tension-packed referenda whose results are just as unpredictable as they are useless in settling any pressing issues. For the contemporary Canadian scene, "varied and multi-leveled are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor, but its fundamental pivot is the flow of time."<sup>4</sup> The stunning characteristic of the crossroads at which Canadians now find themselves, as they look toward the horizon (the future), is that all the roads seem to be leading in the exact same direction: nowhere in particular and everywhere at once.

The impression that this "nation" is going nowhere—fast—appears strongly supported by the continual misunderstandings that grow out of a "national" government which speaks with (at least)

two tongues. Although two languages with an astounding number of similar words and common etymons, French and English are able to stir up irresolvable differences around several significantly divergent interpretations for deceptively similar-sounding words. "A language is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other languages, entering with them into one single heteroglot unity of societal becoming."<sup>5</sup> For our purposes here, the words "nation" and "national" are certainly prime candidates for the prize of possessing the most divisive ambiguities imaginable. There are profoundly different ways of "reading" the meaning of the core words in our political vocabularies, ambiguities that are richly revealing for what they tell about typical political and cultural views professed by Canadians speaking different "national" languages. While in everyday Canadian English, especially in the regular "columns" published by newspapers and magazines, the word "national" describes events whose scope takes in several, if not all, of the most important regions of the country, and where Ottawa can be called without any linguistic or political problem whatsoever "the nation's capital," whereas on the other hand, in Canadian French, "national" always refers in the first instance, unless specifically given to mean something else, to the *French-Canadian* nation, or more precisely to the Québécois nation to the exclusion of French-speaking Canadians living elsewhere throughout the Rest of Canada (ROC). For example, the term, "l'Assemblée nationale," refers to the parliament of Quebec City while the name of "la fête nationale" is given by Quebecers to their "national" holiday, June 24 (Saint John the Baptist's feast day). Politically engaged commentators from Quebec are often incensed by repeated calls made by many (federalist) English-speaking Canadians for "national" standards that must be applied uniformly in all provinces of the country, regardless of how the inhabitants of the latter might tend to understand the word "national." A major source of irritation between the political discourses of French and English Canada would therefore appear to derive from the fact that the word "national," as used in English almost synonymously with "federal," inevitably must turn a blind eye to the specific, "national" concerns of the Québécois nation. It is as if one could hear within this singularly ambiguous word a battle cry of one national point of view which cannot coincide with the other, an uneasy coexistence of two basic meanings for a single term which clash inside each linguistic community's desire to speak of the nation in terms that respect its own outlook. When English-speaking Canadians wish to impose "national standards," however good their intentions may be, Québécois nationalists are going to feel that their "national" existence is under attack. The heteroglossia of Canadian

(political) speech develops in part from a systematic slippage of words' meanings, names and labels sometimes claiming to describe the views held by the whole while in reality only representing the perspective of a part.

The political implications attached to variant readings of a single commonly used term such as "national," in particular in situations where we are dealing with the ways in which a word deals with political and cultural realities, point to the inevitable presence of "ideological and conceptual links between objects and phenomena."<sup>6</sup> In the Canadian context, there are not only typical shifts of focus that one can observe when one moves from the political scene in Quebec toward that of virtually any other province or to federal politics in Ottawa. There are in addition historical shifts that occur within the cultural space of a single national language. A very telling example of how Canadian French is inwardly dialogized by Canadian English can be adduced by referring to the various names that French-Canadians have used over time to refer to themselves in their own language. Traditionally, the Quebec government saw itself as the guardian of all French-Canadians regardless of their provincial domicile, but this focus of political ombudsmanship has moved subtly in recent decades from that of the official watchdog of French culture in Canada as a whole to that of French culture within Quebec's territory. Originally, during the French administration of New France and well into the nineteenth century, the term "Canadien" (pronounced [canadjě] or [canayě] with a nasalized "é" at the end: cf. the popular pronunciation of the name of Montreal's famous hockey team) referred in the first instance to the French-speaking descendants of seventeenth-century French farmers or "habitants." With the arrival of British control in "French" Canada, and especially beginning with the relatively massive influx of English-speaking settlers arriving on Canadian soil in the aftermath of the American war of independence near the end of the eighteenth century (a group of immigrants known in English Canada as the "loyalists"), "Canadien" no longer sufficed to distinguish French-speaking "Canadiens" from English-speaking counterparts, and slowly the ethnically centered qualifier "français" [French] was affixed to the name of the Canadian nation, although in practice all English-speaking persons, whether British, American, or Canadian, were simply referred to as "les Anglais" [the English] and, linguistically at least, were still not "Canadiens" at all. The change of the national name which moved from "Canadiens" to "Canadiens français" lasted until the 1960s which saw the slow imposition of another old term, "Québécois," to refer to the French-Canadian nation inside of Quebec, whereas the meaning of "Canadiens français" shifted to that

of designating French-speaking Canadiens of Québécois or Acadian descent who lived outside of Quebec. Likewise, the meaning of the word "Canada" has undergone interesting, politically driven shifts, passing from the original French transcription of an Huron-Iroquois word meaning "village" or "settlement" to that of the homeland of the French-speaking habitants and later to the entire Canadian federation. We see therefore that the proper names Quebeckers use to describe themselves and their homeland are not colorless labels but, quite to the contrary, have recognizable chronotopic overtones. These names are determined by historical forces linked with issues of space and of the presence of the "other" within (and without) that space. Just as the word for the French-Canadian homeland gradually lost its geographical specificity, moving from a specific region to an entire "dominion," so too the word they originally used to designate themselves lost its cultural specificity with the influx of "other" non-French-speaking Canadians who crowded the semantic space of their name. The process is similar in political charge to the ambiguities apparent in present-day Québécois and federalist Canadian political discourses which use semantic variations of the word "national" as a reaction to the others' dominant discourse. The "shifting" identities of the French-Canadian nation in the face of the "other's" constant encroachment is reflected in a series of names whose semantic field historically becomes over-crowded by the others' dominant presence. The process seems to be repeating itself today given the presence of a new Anglo-Quebecker militancy which has brought all Quebeckers to realize that to be "Québécois" does not necessarily entail harmonious or productive participation in French-speaking culture.

The semantic shifts we have described in these proper nouns point to a dialogic situation much more complicated than a one on one relationship set up in a purely dualistic opposition. Indeed, we can see that it is not at all possible to claim that the fundamental characteristic of the modern Canadian state is such simplified ambivalence, the duality ensuing from the founding of a federal state undertaken by two separate nations. For most Canadians living outside of Central Canada (Ontario), "federal" usually means "centralized" whereas in Central Canada "Canadian" usually means a perspective as seen "from Ontario." This is another example of a proper name which slides in extension from a part to the whole, or from the whole to a part. In a "nation" composed of several centers separated by incredible distances, not only geographical and psychological, but also linguistic and cultural, it is politically naïve to assume that either French-speaking or English-speaking Canada con-

stitutes a monolithic "nation" according to most "traditional" definitions of the term: "une réunion d'hommes habitant un même territoire, soumis ou non à un même gouvernement, ayant depuis longtemps des intérêts assez communs pour qu'on les regarde comme appartenant à la même race."<sup>7</sup> Battling with notions of "oneness," Canadian nationhood inevitably gets entangled in a politics of memory, one not entirely sure about what it is best to remember and what one would better forget.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a significant part of the current and past failures of the Canadian political elite to deal with the various culturally derived notions of Canadian nationhood rest on the thorny issues of territory, memory, history, race, and birthright. Certainly the last Quebec referendum was implicitly won and lost along these problematic lines. The ambiguity of what constitutes the French-Canadian nation rides to a large extent on whether it belongs in whole or in part to the moral and historical responsibilities of the government of Quebec or the government of Canada. Current provincial boundaries separating Quebec from its Canadian neighbors (Ontario to the West and New Brunswick to the East) do not at all respect traditional linguistic borders separating English-speaking communities from French-speaking ones. Approximately one million French speakers live outside of Quebec's borders, mostly in Ontario and New Brunswick, but also, as a result of the French-Canadian "diaspora" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in virtually every corner of the country, sometimes in small French-speaking rural communities, and at other times in significant minorities in the various urban centers spread across the country. On the other hand, although well over eighty percent of Quebecers speak French as their mother tongue, a percentage that has remained constant for many decades, several regions of Quebec are still predominately English-speaking and a sizable proportion of Montrealers is neither Anglophone nor Francophone (they are, to speak Canadian jargon, "Allophones"). In a very true sense, native English-speakers and native French-speakers are the two largest Canadian minorities. There is no longer any single ethnic majority in Canada, a fact underlined by recent "news" reports that, currently, in Vancouver, there are more non-English speakers than English-speakers.

The chronotope helps then to describe the fragmented cultural fabric that Canada presently both enjoys and frets about. Because of an historical and geographical situation similar to that of its neighbor, the United States, the history of Canada is a story that can only be told from a multitude of perspectives, in many languages, and many times over with all the appropriate variations in tone, nuance, and stress. Simply put, there is no single Canadian nation: there are

still many "First Nations," and many other national heritages built by immigrants who came from every corner of the planet. Contemporary Canada is a rich terrain for studying the interaction between "centripetal" and "centrifugal" sociocultural and linguistic forces, from the Western-based Reform party, with its strong insistence on a "centrifugal" platform that declares that all Canadians are equal and that no subgroup of Canadians (read French-speaking Canadians, female or homosexual Canadians) should enjoy any special rights, all the way to linguistic policies adopted by successive Quebec governments based on the equally strongly held belief in the importance of a French-speaking community which has managed to survive on a continent where seven million French-speakers are grossly outnumbered by over two hundred and fifty million English-speakers. Canadians living outside Quebec often complain of the "problem" of "hyphenated" Canadians (French-Canadians, Italian-Canadians, Immigrant-Canadians, etc.). The belief is subsequently expressed that the present ill-ease of Canadian politics would be magically solved if everyone started thinking of themselves as "Canadian first" (whatever "Canadian" is) rather than as whatever comes before the hyphen. Not only were many such people "forced" to eat their cornflakes in French (a problem known as the "cornflakes syndrome") but to tolerate such "intolerable" phenomena as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police wearing turbans. If only every citizen could just learn to be a "real" Canadian!

But just as there seem to be so few respectable "real" women floating around these days, there also seem to be very few "real" Canadians to be seen. In other words, many people do not seem to want to accept the reality that "real" Canadians are actually just another minority in this "nation" made up of minority nations. Even the French-Canadian "nation" is hardly a single homogeneous nation according to the definition cited above. Beside the cultural differences between, on the one hand, "old-stock" Quebecers (descendants of the approximately 60,000 French settlers who remained in New France after the Treaty of Paris in 1763) and, on the other, French-speakers who came to Canada from other parts of the world, most "Canadian" French-speakers, especially those living outside of Quebec, are historically divided between descendants of Quebecers, who were heavily involved in the "settling" up of vast tracts of land in Northern Ontario and in Western Canada, and the Acadians, the second significant group of French-speaking Canadians, most of whom presently live along the northern border and eastern and northern sea coast of New Brunswick. If English Canada is not in any way a homogeneous group of citizens either ethnically,

religiously or culturally, likewise French Canada is marked by a rich cultural diversity and an historical dynamics comprising new and old citizens. In other words, within the French language and culture itself as it lives on in Canada, there are extremely vibrant heteroglot forces activated by the interaction between the new arrivers and the old, various social levels of French as a spoken language, regional accents, accents indicative of educational level, all of which contribute to a profoundly diglossic existence of the French language as it is spoken in various French-speaking regions.

The silly-sounding notions of "hyphenated" or "un-hyphenated" Canadians could be said, however, to characterize the wide gulf that has developed politically in both English and French Canada, a gulf separating those who wish to impose an uncompromisingly individualist perspective on what it means to be a "Canadian first" from those who believe in the necessity of preserving collective rights that are strong enough to override, when necessary, individual rights, especially in cases where the collective community's cultural survival is at stake. The colossal *malentendu* that grew out of the notion of the "distinct society" status "almost" granted to Quebec within the Canadian federation is another example of two linguistic communities who not only speak a different language, but who understand the same words (*société distincte*/distinct society) in radically different ways. Whereas, in the failed 1987 Meech Lake Constitutional Accord, the notion of "distinct society" was seen by French-speaking Quebecers as the acid test of whether English Canada was finally, after 120 years of common political existence, willing to make an officially recognized place for their unique history and culture within the Canadian social fabric; for many English-speaking Canadians, "distinct society" had the ominous potential to become a powerful weapon that a future untrustworthy Quebec government could whimsically use to overpower individual rights in the name of promoting and preserving the "distinct" French dimension of Quebec's society. The disagreement between English Canada's insistence on individual rights, as described by Pierre Trudeau's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and French Canada's desire to entrench collective rights played into a carnivalesque scenario whereby there were no longer any detached spectators in the political negotiations that ensued, only large numbers of emotionally captivated would-be participants. Differences in how the notion of rights was interpreted underlined a fear in English Canada of collective rights, in a strong tone reminiscent of some of the harsh criticisms of Bakhtin's praise for collective forces in his *Rabelais* book. The worst of these and other similar fears, anxieties often based on the grossly uninformed

and false belief that the English-speaking minority in Quebec somehow constituted a beleaguered and oppressed minority group, were unfortunately confirmed when, shortly before the Constitutional Accord was to be ratified by the last two hold-out provinces (Manitoba and Newfoundland), the Quebec government led by the Liberal (i.e., federalist) Robert Bourassa invoked the infamous "notwithstanding" clause found in the present Canadian constitution (ironically this clause was the brainchild of Western Canadian premiers afraid of Aboriginal land claims and not that of any Quebeckers) in an effort to defend Quebec's linguistic laws which promote French's visible presence by reducing the *written* or printed size of languages other than French in public spaces. The failure of the Meech Lake accord to attain the approval of "English Canada" (although the combined populations of Manitoba and Newfoundland account for barely five percent of Canada's total population or approximately seven and a half percent of "English Canada") was seen by Quebeckers as the outright refusal of *all* of "the Rest of Canada" to recognize their special French-speaking identity within the North-American context. The federal government of Brian Mulroney (himself an English-speaking Quebecker), desperate for constitutional peace between the two "founding peoples" of modern Canada, led the country further toward the massive "compromise" Charlottetown accord and subsequent "national" referendum disaster of 1992. Once again, while both Quebec and "English Canada" gave a resounding "no" to the constitutional reforms of Charlottetown, in an atmosphere that had become even more complicated than Lake Meech by the fact that the federal government had at last begun to listen to longstanding Aboriginal demands for constitutional recognition of hitherto unrespected historical rights, the actual meaning of these "no's" was in fact a colorful illustration of Bakhtinian polyphony.

The latest chapter of Canada's interesting inability to invent a singular nationhood was the 1995 referendum on sovereignty held in Quebec. Just as it is unclear what a razor-thin "oui" would have actually meant in practical and political terms for Quebec's future relations with the rest of Canada, it is also totally unclear what the razor-thin "non" actually means either. Clearly it was wishful thinking on the part of many English-speaking Canadians who believed that the 1995 referendum was going to settle the "Quebec question" once and for all. Ultimately, the "Quebec question," like the "Canadian question," can never receive a monologically simple answer because the "nation" of Quebeckers is just as post-modernly complex in its internal contradictions and paradoxes as is its "English-speaking"



cousin-nation. Both English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians continue to display an uncanny ability to defy professional politicians' desire to program their political and cultural futures. The narrowness of victory defied all "conventional" wisdom which had invariably predicted a sixty-forty split in favor of the "non" forces. While many English-speaking Canadians think that the Quebec issue has now "blown over," many well-informed observers feel on the contrary that the "Canadian" question is ready to blow up if nothing fundamental is ever allowed to change. The results of the 1998 Quebec general election whereby the nationalist Parti Québécois retained its majority of seats in Quebec's parliament despite an actual minority of votes cast in its favor only complicates an already complicated situation. The immediate reality is that the Canadian political system is incapable of papering over forever the profoundly different purviews commanded by people living in vastly different political climates and cultural-linguistic backgrounds.

Clearly the answer to the questions raised in the present context is not the erasure of all forms of otherness, especially if we value the richness that heterogeneity gives to cultural life as a whole. We must not forget that "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have been enclosed in their own specificity."<sup>9</sup> Like many political campaigns, the 1995 referendum campaign was one of timing, luck, and mistakes. Further tensions were created by the electoral necessity of reducing an enormously complex set of problems into a single yes-no question. The combined effect of repeatedly unanswered historical grievances, a tirelessly energetic and brilliant campaign led by Lucien Bouchard in favor of the "oui" option, over-confidence, blind arrogance, and an inflexibly poor strategy on the "non" side, and a volatile electorate distrustful of a political system which seems totally incapable of reforming itself made for an unexpectedly close vote. English-speaking Canadians felt a sense of betrayal at the closeness of the vote, given the repeated assurances made by the federal government that everything was under control. But the idea of control represents a complicated issue at a time when Canadian cultures are clearly on the move. The chronotope of the threshold can thus be appropriately invoked to describe the present Canadian crossroads, a situation where just one more mistake during a campaign trail, one new blooper, just one more instance of bad timing or another example of a federal government completely out of touch with the Quebec electorate, could result in a "yes" victory which, in turn, would force a present-day nonentity, "English Canada," to provide answers to the hitherto unanswerable

question of what "Canada" means. Each answer cannot be formulated only for itself: from now on each minority, however large or small, and however proud, is obliged to listen to what the other minorities have to say. Canada is in a chronotopic process of becoming, waiting for a richer, multitiered type of dialogue based on respect,<sup>10</sup> one that, for the moment, appears just slightly ahead of our time.

### Notes

1. Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.
2. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 243.
3. *Ibid.*, 244.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *Dialogic Imagination*, 411.
6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), 408.
7. Louis-Alexandre Bédisse, *Dictionnaire nord-américain de la langue française* (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1979), 631: grouping of people living in a single territory, whether under a common government or not, who have a long history of interests shared to a degree sufficient to have them seen as belonging to the same race. My translation.
8. Samuel V. LaSelva uses an interesting comment made by Ernest Renan according to whom the concept of nationhood must not only entail the memory cultivated by its citizens but also, or especially, "their ability to remember some things and to forget others." See on this concept LaSelva's *The Moral Foundations of Canadian Federalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). It is appropriate to point out that the motto of the Quebec state is "Je me souviens" [I remember].
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 2.
10. See for example Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

# National Allegory or Carnavalesque Heteroglossia? *Midnight's Children's* Narration of Indian National Identity

Robert Bennett

THE concept of the nation significantly influences the production and consumption of literary texts: many literary works seek to express some national spirit; most institutions organize instruction according to distinct national languages and literary traditions, and critics frequently invoke some concept of the nation to explain, categorize, and/or evaluate literary texts.<sup>1</sup> When these arguments invoke uncritical conceptualizations of the nation, however, they can lead to erroneous, reductive theoretical models—like Fredric Jameson's reduction of all third world literature to national allegory. Some of these errors can be avoided, however, by developing more sophisticated models of the relationship between national identity and cultural production. One excellent way to do this is to combine a poststructural, constructivist analysis of the nation, in general, with Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical theory of the novel, in particular. This kind of approach reconceptualizes national identity as a narrative construction rather than a natural essence, and it simultaneously redefines the nature of both nations and novelistic discourse as transnational, pluralistic, fragmentary, and historical rather than nationalistic, monological, unitary, and atemporal. By simultaneously reevaluating both the conceptual object of the nation and the nature and function of novelistic discourse, such a method provides a more nuanced explanation of the complex interaction between national identity and cultural production. The effectiveness of such a model can be demonstrated by its ability to explain contemporary novels that explore national identity, like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. When read from a perspective that combines Anderson's and Bakhtin's insights, it becomes clear that Rushdie's novel does much more than simply allegorize some organic, collective national identity, as Jameson's reductive model

would predict. Instead, *Midnight's Children* thoroughly explores how national identities are narrative constructions; it carnivalizes traditional, monological narratives of national identity; and it dialogically rearticulates these traditional narratives as a heteroglot polyphony of multiple voices instead of a single, unified, collective voice.

Fredric Jameson's theory of third world literature is only one of many examples that demonstrate how reductive views of national identity persist within contemporary criticism—even among the most sophisticated critics. Taken collectively, Jameson's critical oeuvre develops one of the most sophisticated, systematic explanations of the relationship between political ideologies and literary forms in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Anglo-European literature.<sup>2</sup> Jameson's nuanced analysis of first world literature, however, quickly deteriorates into nationalistic reductionism when he tries to explain third world literature. According to Jameson, American and European intellectuals have "long since liquidated . . . and rightly so" that "old thing called 'nationalism,'" while their third world counterparts obsessively return to "the national situation itself, the name of the country that returns again and again like a gong, the collective attention to 'us' and what we have to do and how we do it, to what we can't do and what we do better than this or that nationality, our unique characteristics, in short, to the level of the 'people'" ("TWL," 65). Moreover, Jameson adds that these different national and postnational perspectives lead to widely divergent aesthetic practices. Postnational, first world authors generally produce postmodern texts—recognizable by such characteristics as their depthlessness, ahistorical pastiche, schizophrenic waning of affect, antimimetic strategies, fragmentation, and technological sublime—and these texts "are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole system of present-day multinational capitalism" (P, 37). In sharp contrast to the vast scale of these "global" postmodern texts, Jameson reductively limits third world texts to mere reflections of their immediate national locales: "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" ("TWL," 69). Ultimately, Jameson attributes these differences between first and third world views of nationalism and cultural production to different economic modes of production: first world postmodernism reflects multinational capitalism, the most advanced stage of postindustrial capitalism, while third world allegories reflect "primitive or tribal" societies based on

precapitalistic modes of production ("TWL," 68). Taken as a whole, therefore, Jameson's critical oeuvre posits a rigorous *correspondence* between modes of production, concepts of national identity, and cultural forms, but it maintains a strict *dichotomy* between the first and the third world with each world having its own distinct mode of production (multinational vs. precapitalist), concept of national identity (national vs. transnational), and corresponding cultural form (postmodern vs. allegory). For Jameson this dichotomy is absolute: there is no third term; it is either "these nationalisms" or "some global American postmodernist culture" ("TWL," 65). Whatever one thinks about the sophistication of Jameson's Marxist materialist historicism in general, his reductive, binary conceptualization of national identity seems extremely problematic and potentially ruinous to his aesthetics of cognitive mapping.

Fortunately, critics have not let Jameson's reductive model stand unchallenged. Aijaz Ahmad, the most outspoken of Jameson's critics, has thoroughly exposed Jameson's blatant reductionism. Specifically, Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* critiques Jameson's position for its "suppression of the multiplicity of significant difference among and within both the advanced capitalist countries on the one hand and the imperialized formations on the other," and Ahmad clearly demonstrates Jameson's reductionism both methodologically and empirically.<sup>3</sup> Methodologically, Jameson's argument depends on a double standard whereby postmodernism is merely a "cultural dominant" that admits variations, including oppositional forms, but "all" third world texts are "necessarily" and "in a very specific way" national allegories (*P*, 4; "TWL," 69). Jameson never explains why there can be room for variation and innovation within postmodern culture but not among cultural texts from the third world, while Ahmad gives us every reason to doubt Jameson's reductive claim. As Ahmad points out, it is first, not third, world cultures that have been "deeply tied together over roughly the last two hundred years" by "capitalism" and the "circulation of cultural products" so that "one could sensibly speak of a certain cultural homogeneity among them" (*T*, 104). These kinds of extensive historical and cultural ties, however, simply "do not exist among countries of backward capitalism" (*T*, 105). Consequently, if one wants to posit a "material basis for a fair degree of cultural homogenization," then Ahmad argues that it might be best located in the first rather than the third world (*T*, 105). In addition, Jameson's claim that all third world texts are national allegories does not even come close to dealing with empirical reality: there is simply such a "fecundity of real narratives in the so-called Third World"

that they cannot be crammed into the critical straitjacket of a “unitary search for a cognitive aesthetics for third-world literature” (T, 103).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Jameson’s theory does not even account for the vast diversity among third world authors using allegorical forms. How can *Midnight’s Children* be allegorical in the same sense as Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* when these three novels use very different forms of allegory: folkloric, modernist, and postmodernist respectively? Does it even make sense to say that Achebe’s anticolonial *Things Fall Apart* is a national allegory in the same sense as his antinationalist *Anthills of the Savannah*? Moreover, isn’t it possible to use allegory to critique notions of collective identity, like Soyinka does in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, or to extend notions of collective identity beyond national boundaries, like Wilson Harris does in *The Carnival Trilogy*? When one looks more carefully at the fecundity of third world texts, it is clear that they both explore national identity and experiment with literary forms in ways that are far more complex than Jameson’s reductive view of nationalism permits.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Ahmad points out that Jameson’s theory does not even explain first world literature since national allegories are not unique to the third world: one can point to a wide variety of first world texts—from Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Ellison’s *Invisible Man* to Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*—which are, in varying degrees, allegories of American national identity, and they are *not* as unconscious of this allegorization as Jameson would lead us to believe.

As Ahmad’s critique demonstrates, contemporary criticism needs more complex models of the relationship between nations and narratives. A particularly effective way to construct such a model is to combine a poststructural reconceptualization of the nation, like the one developed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse, as explained in essays like those collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*.<sup>6</sup> These two critical approaches advance complementary theories of the nation and narration, and collectively they develop a less reductive model of how the articulation of national identity relates to the construction of aesthetic form. In general, Anderson’s and Bakhtin’s theories concur on several points. For example, they both describe a fundamental, epochal shift in human consciousness that has caused both social structures and cultural forms to be reconceptualized based on secular rather than sacred models.<sup>7</sup> Anderson describes this shift as a transition from “conceptions of immense communities” derived from “great sacral communities” or “dynastic realms” to nationally

oriented, "secular, historically clocked, imagined communit[ies]."8 In addition, Anderson argues that this reconfiguration of social structures occurs in tandem with the development of new cultural forms such as the novel and the newspaper, which are better adapted to express such new national alliances. Bakhtin also describes a similar epochal shift that occurs as Europe emerges from a "socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society" into a global community based on "international and interlingual contacts and relationships" (*DI*, 11), and he concurs that this shift has profound consequences for cultural production. In particular, it causes epic aesthetic forms to be replaced by novelistic discourse. Moreover, Anderson and Bakhtin agree that this secularization of culture and communities is made possible because "three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds" (*IC*, 36): first, the privileging of a particular, sacred script language was replaced by an increased respect for the heteroglossic interplay of multiple national print-languages; second, a cosmological, mythical sense of time was replaced by a historical one; and third, centralized, hierarchical, and totalizing conceptions of authority were increasingly replaced by more popular, carnivalesque, and anti-authoritarian sentiments. Since I do not have enough space to focus on all three of these changes, I will focus primarily on the first.

One of the most innovative aspects of Anderson's theory is that it focuses on how language plays a fundamental role in the transformation of religious communities into national ones. In fact, Anderson's theory fundamentally redefines the conceptual object of the nation, not as a political essence, but as an "imagined political community" (*IC*, 6). Quoting Ernest Gellner, Anderson argues that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (*IC*, 6), and Anderson emphasizes that language is what enables such political communities to be imagined. As Anderson explains, "what the eye is to the lover . . . language—whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue—is to the patriot" (*IC*, 154). In particular, Anderson isolates two major changes in linguistic practice that enabled people to begin imagining national communities. First, exposure to new cultures and languages as a result of colonial expansionism transformed Europeans' view of language by creating an "irremediable human pluralism," which demoted privileged languages such as Latin onto an "equal ontological footing with a motley plebeian crowd of vernacular rivals" (*IC*, 69–70). In addition, the development of new print technologies and the expansion of print-capital-

ism further transformed European linguistic practices by stabilizing, disseminating, and promoting multiple national print-languages. As these national print-languages gained power, they enabled a radical transformation of how people imagined their relationship to their communities. In particular, these national print-languages formed new “bases for national consciousness” because they “gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized” the “sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages” (*IC*, 44, 19). In the place of these vast sacred communities, national print-languages helped unify new national communities based on new “fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars” (*IC*, 44). Thus, Anderson demonstrates a strong interrelationship between linguistic and political systems by showing how new linguistic practices influence the construction of new political communities, and vice versa.<sup>9</sup>

The more nations are taken seriously as narrations, however, the more critics tend to reconceptualize nations, narrative forms, and the relation between them from a poststructural perspective. In “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida articulates the basic poststructural critique of the concept of structure, arguing that the “concept of a centered structure” is “contradictorily coherent” because it is the “concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Derrida advocates the “abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*” (“SSP,” 286), and this decentering turns the quest for a unifying, stabilizing structure into an affirmation of interpretive ambivalence: a “Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, without truth and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation” (“SSP,” 292). Poststructural analyses of the nation, like those found in Homi Bhabha’s anthology *Nation and Narration*, seek to expose a similar “ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.”<sup>11</sup> Employing poststructuralist techniques, these critics generally emphasize ambivalences obscured by traditional concepts of the nation: they decenter its privileged centers; deconstruct the binary oppositions that attempt to fix its meaning; expose the disruptive voices located on its margins; and point out how the conceptual object of the nation, like all conceptual objects, is a contingent, transitory, historical, and discursive construction—not an essential, originary, natural, or fixed category. For



example, Geoff Bennington argues that “the pretension to reach the [national] centre directly . . . is generally illusory” because any “approach to the nation implies borders, policing suspicion, and crossing (or refusal of entry).”<sup>12</sup> Thus, Bennington refocuses critical attention on the frontiers and borders of the nation rather than on its center. By refocusing on the nation’s borders, Bennington draws attention to the fact that the nation is never a self-sufficient entity but rather is “dependent on a differentiation of nations.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the nation can never establish a center that can ensure its own national purity by fixing the play of its borders. Taking a complimentary approach, Sneja Gunew shows how increasing our awareness of writers located on the nation’s margins, such as Australian Aboriginals of “non-Anglo-Celtic background who are often bi- or multi-lingual” inevitably subverts “the genealogy or legitimating myth of origins on which all national cultures are based.”<sup>14</sup> Taken together, these poststructural postcolonial interpretations multiply, exposing what Bhabha describes as the “impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” because neither centers, borders, cultural products, nor language can fix national identity.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, extending the claim that nations are narrations tends to subvert the claim itself because it draws attention to the impossibility of narrating a stable, unified national narrative. Ultimately, however, Bhabha argues that such a poststructural perspective relocates the locus of a critical analysis of the nation by moving it away from the “problematic unity of the nation” toward the “articulation of cultural difference in the construction of an *international* perspective.”<sup>16</sup> This change in perspective has profound implications for analyzing how national identity relates to narrative form: it shifts critical attention from national capitals to borderlands, from national origins to the ongoing performance of national identities, from national unity to intranational fragmentation, from sameness to difference, from consensus to negotiation, and from national identities to international diasporas and nomadism.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse offers an excellent perspective for analyzing narratives that explore Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imaginary construct and Bhabha’s concept of the nation as not only constructed but also fragmented, unstable, polysemous, etc. Like Anderson, Bakhtin sees language, and especially linguistic diversity, as a primary factor influencing the development of novelistic discourse. In fact, Bakhtin repeatedly argues that the essence of the novel is that it does “not acknowledge any unitary, singular, naively (or conditionally) indisputable or sacrosanct language” but instead sees language as always “stratified and

heteroglot" (*DI*, 332). Consequently, Bakhtin defines "social heteroglossia and the variety of individual voices in it" as the "prerequisite for authentic novelistic prose" (*DI*, 264), and his history of the novel emphasizes how "the novel emerged and matured precisely when intense activation of external and internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity; this is its native element" (*DI*, 12). Novelistic discourse seeks to represent such an "actively polyglot world," and Bakhtin describes several novelistic strategies for doing this (*DI*, 12). One strategy is simply to represent what Bakhtin defines as heteroglossia, or the "internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and passing fashions, languages that serve the various sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour" (*DI*, 262–63). Another is to represent or perform what Bakhtin defines as dialogization, or the process by which a language user enters into a dialogue with other people's language in an effort to "populate it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention . . . forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents" (*DI*, 293–94). In particular, Bakhtin emphasizes how language can be reaccentuated through literary parody of past literary conventions and popular carnivalizing of authoritative social and linguistic norms. Yet another strategy is to create what Bakhtin describes as a polyphonic form, or a series of "never-ending, internally unresolved dialogues among characters (seen as embodied points of view) and between the author himself and the characters; the characters' discourse is never entirely subsumed and remains free and open (as does the discourse of the author himself)" (*DI*, 349). Bakhtin's theory of the novel always emphasizes the open-ended expression of multiple, heterogeneous voices, and the representation of heteroglossia, dialogization, parody, carnivalization, and polyphonic forms are all narrative strategies that novelists use to represent such sociolinguistic diversity.

Bakhtin's emphasis on heteroglossia also has important consequences for how we conceptualize the relationship between aesthetics and the construction of national identity. To begin with, the novelistic techniques described by Bakhtin are especially useful for representing national identity as an ongoing, historically situated negotiation between multiple, irreducible voices: parodic and carnivalesque narratives expose the ambivalences within monological national narratives, heteroglossic and polyphonic narratives express a nation's silenced voices, and dialogization draws attention to the

fact that all national narratives are continually contested and renegotiated. In addition, Bakhtin's emphasis on sociolinguistic diversity also redefines the essence of aesthetic form. Instead of defining aesthetic form as the unified expression of a single, unitary voice, Bakhtin's theory redefines it as an ability to bring diverse languages—both between and within nations—into an unending creative conversation with each other. Consequently, Bakhtin's theory redefines the essence of literary form as open rather than closed, multiple rather than singular, fragmented rather than unified, constructed rather than organic, and engaged rather than abstract. Ultimately, Bakhtin's new aesthetic perspective reconceptualizes the very nature of literary traditions themselves by making the attempt to isolate distinct national languages and literary traditions less important and the interaction between diverse languages and traditions more important. In fact, Bakhtin makes the exchange between diverse sociolects and languages the catalyst driving literary history, and this in turn makes culture less the expression of some superior national identity and more a pluralistic awareness of cross-cultural dialogue between a multiplicity of sociocultural systems.

This brings to light one of the biggest differences between Anderson's and Bakhtin's explanations of the novel. In Anderson's theory, national languages and modern cultural forms, like the novel and the newspaper, facilitate the construction of a national identity because they enable people to imagine a particular type as representative of a contemporaneous collective identity that is more or less shared by all. At the same time that national languages cause the fragmentation of sacred communities, therefore, they also seek to reconfigure new secular ones. This makes modern cultural forms function in a manner that is fundamentally unified and unifying: novels roughly function as diminutive scriptures, and newspapers function as secular prayer books. Bakhtin, on the other hand, argues that national languages are fundamentally and irreparably heteroglossic, and novelistic discourse seeks to heighten rather than diminish our awareness of this sociolinguistic diversity. For Bakhtin, therefore, the novel actually subverts attempts to represent national identity as a coherent whole representative of the entire community. To put this distinction into Bakhtin's terminology, Anderson emphasizes how novels help construct a centripetal, monological voice that unifies heteroglossic diversity into a national form, while Bakhtin emphasizes the novel's centrifugal function of exploring all of the heteroglossic sociolinguistic diversity that irreparably fragments national languages and identities. In summary, Bakhtin and Anderson concur that the fragmentation of older transnational sacred lan-

guages such as Latin, combined with the multiplication of newer secular national print-languages, has been one of the primary causes enabling the development of national communities and novelistic forms. They differ, however, in their understanding of how novels function at this junction between the sacred and the national: Anderson sees novels as providing a new medium for imagining collective unity, but Bakhtin sees them as simply another turn of the screw in the ongoing multiplication and fragmentation of sociolinguistic heteroglossia.

Either way, Anderson and Bakhtin both provide a less reductive view of the relationship between national identity and cultural production than Jameson does because both argue that nations are fundamentally heteroglot rather than organically whole. The difference between Anderson and Bakhtin is simply that Anderson sees novels as centripetally organizing heteroglossia into a collective, though imaginary, national identity, but Bakhtin sees novels as centrifugally disorganizing such collective narratives in order to liberate the heteroglossia that they seek to control. Many contemporary novels that explore national identity raise the same kinds of issues as those raised by Anderson and Bakhtin. For example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* clearly emphasizes the constructed, fictional nature of national identities, and it also draws on virtually all of the novelistic techniques described by Bakhtin: heteroglossia, polyphony, carnivalization, dialogization, etc. Taken together, therefore, Anderson's and Bakhtin's more nuanced approaches to national identity present a much more effective method for analyzing Rushdie's novel than Jameson's reductive approach to nationalism does. Ultimately, however, Rushdie seems to follow more in Bakhtin's direction than Anderson's because he constructs a national allegory that is not only self-consciously fictional but also aggressively heteroglot and fragmentary.

On the surface, *Midnight's Children* appears to exemplify what Jameson describes as a third world national allegory because Rushdie repeatedly associates his protagonist, Saleem Sinai, with the collective national identity of India: Saleem reflects India's collective identity because he embodies the consciousness of "multitudes . . . jostling and shoving inside [him]" (*MC*, 4). The major events of Saleem's life correlate with and often cause the major events in Indian history, making his "destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country" (*MC*, 3); the Prime Minister's letter concurs, proclaiming Saleem's life as a "mirror of our [India's] own" (*MC*, 285); Saleem is also the joint boss of the *Midnight's Children's* Conference, the 1,001 children born during the midnight hour of India's indepen-

dence who are another allegory of India's collective national identity; and Rushdie endows Saleem with unique telepathic powers so that he can "get beneath the surface" of his compatriots' "infinitely various minds" (*MC*, 262). Each of these narrative devices suggests that Saleem represents, or at least intimately understands, India's collective national identity.

A closer reading of *Midnight's Children*, however, significantly complicates any attempt to read it as a straightforward national allegory. To begin with, Rushdie obsessively draws attention to the fact that his description of India is a narrative construction rather than a realistic description or even an allegorical representation. Rushdie himself describes *Midnight's Children* as an attempt to "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the best example of this can be seen within the novel itself when Saleem describes the birth of the Indian nation as:

an extra festival on the calendar, a new *myth* to celebrate, because a nation which had *never previously existed* was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite *imaginary*; into a *mythical* land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a *phenomenal collective will*—except in a *dream we all agreed to dream*; it was a *mass fantasy* shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth—a *collective fiction* in which anything was possible, a *fable* rivaled only by the two other mighty *fantasies*: money and God. (*MC*, 129–30; emphases added)

In this short passage alone, Rushdie refers at least ten times to the fictional, mythic, imaginary, and fabulous nature of the Indian nation, and Rushdie further emphasizes the fictional nature of the nation throughout the novel by repeatedly drawing attention to the partiality, inadequacy, distortions, and unreliability of his own narrative. As Saleem explains to Padma, "memory's truth . . . selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (*MC*, 253). In fact, Rushdie purposefully introduces historical inaccuracies, hyperbolic exaggerations, and other errata that violate the unities of time and place and fly in the face of empirical reality. It is perhaps true that all allegories are rhetorical constructions, but they are usually construc-

tions that claim to represent some factual or intellectual truth—at least this is the sense of allegory used by Jameson. Even though Jameson points out that third world allegories are complex and polysemous, he still sees them as fundamentally representations, not constructions, of some organic collective identity. Rushdie's allegory, however, actively produces rather than merely represents the collective identity that it describes, and it does so self-consciously. By emphasizing the fictional construction rather than political essence of the nation, these metafictional elements of Rushdie's novel critically interrogate the conceptual object of the nation itself instead of merely advancing an alternative representation of national identity.

In addition, Rushdie further complicates his "allegory" of Indian national identity by radically multiplying and fragmenting its allegorical gestures. He self-consciously avoids creating a coherent allegory that would represent India as a unified, monological voice, and instead he creates a more poststructural, polyphonic narrative form that emphasizes India's heteroglossic diversity. Consequently, even though *Midnight's Children* imagines the "phenomenal collective will" of Rushdie's "imaginary homeland," it also radically questions whether a monological narrative could ever center Indian national identity. As Rushdie explains in "The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987:"

After all, in all the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then, that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly "free." But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand?<sup>18</sup>

It is not accidental, therefore, that Rushdie's narrative removes the traditional center of Indian independence by having "Gandhi's National Movement . . . impertinently excised from the narrative outright" as the story "rushes from Amritsar in 1919 to Agra in 1942 without so much as a passing comment."<sup>19</sup> In fact, even Rushdie's reference to Gandhi's assassination purposely gets the date wrong.<sup>20</sup> Instead of using a central event like Gandhi's National Movement to organize a coherent narrative, Rushdie creates multiple, divergent, conflicting allegories of India. In essence, these multiple allegories create what Bakhtin describes as a polyphonic narrative or a narrative in which there is no single voice that functions as an ultimate authority, and Rushdie does this in order to represent the heteroglossic multiplicity of Indian voices. Consequently, even though *Midnight's Children* gestures toward creating an allegory of India, it re-

peatedly multiplies and fragments the two "centers" that purport to organize such a coherent national identity: references to monumental events in India's national history and the novel's (anti-)narrator/hero, Saleem Sinai, who boasts of taking his rightful "place at the centre of the universe" where he will "give meaning to it all" (*MC*, 148). By refusing to stabilize these "centers" into a monological, authoritative voice, Rushdie suggests that there is no stable center (or borders, or organic community, or common ground) that can fix Indian national identity.

Even the relatively more stable of these two "centers," the historical references, do not center a sense of the Indian nation. If any date in the novel does function as a center it is the stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947, which simultaneously marks the birth of Indian independence and Saleem's birthday. Rushdie carnivalizes this significant moment, however, by associating it with a wide variety of bizarre events: the curious conditions under which Methwold's state is transferred to new owners, but they are not allowed to change it; Saleem's father's invention of a fictional Mughal ancestry; and Saleem's birthday itself along with the prize he receives from *The Times of India*, his switched identity, and his belief that his own birthday is more significant than Indian independence. Throughout the novel, Rushdie continually evokes these kinds of farcical correlations between Saleem's life and Indian history. Saleem is always reputedly shaping Indian history, but only through Forest-Gump-like mistakes such as riding a runaway bike into a crowd of language rioters. The disparity between the gravity of the historical events and the levity of Saleem's actions underscores the fact that Rushdie's allegory is more a carnivalesque parody of national narratives than it is a serious national allegory itself.

Of course, if Indian independence fails to center the narrative, then there is little chance that Saleem can do it. Virtually everything about Saleem calls into question whether he can even center his own identity—let alone an entire nation's. Despite his boast that he will "give meaning to it all," Saleem frequently comes up short—way short. Ultimately, he has to swallow the bitter pill that his "much-trumpeted existence might turn out to be utterly useless, void, and without the shred of a purpose" (*MC*, 180). Moreover, the narrative constantly calls attention to Saleem's lacks, excesses, inconsistencies, and impurities: his physical and metaphysical abnormalities; his multiple, false progenitors; his unreliable memory and willful deceptions; his increasing disintegration into a "nine-fingered, horn-templed, monk's-tonsured, stain-faced, bow-legged, cucumber-nosed, castrated, and now prematurely aged" man by the age of thirty (*MC*,

534); and his uncontrollable schizophrenia, which causes him to progressively fragment until he ultimately explodes into “(approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust” (*MC*, 37). If you are looking for a transcendental signified for Indian national identity, this guy is not where it is at! Like Indian history itself, Saleem lacks any kind of stable center; his origins, borders, history, body, and even his imagination are fragmented and uncertain beyond repair.

What we find in Rushdie’s narrative, therefore, is not so much a national allegory as a polyphonic exploration of India’s irreducible heterogeneity. Even if the central allegory between Saleem’s and India’s births is not completely farcical, the complications, hybrid origins, and switched identity surrounding Saleem’s birth at least remind the reader that India is pervasively hybrid and heteroglot. After all, the novel’s “Indian” hero is part Anglo by birth, has an Arabic-Hebraic name, and is mistakenly raised by Muslim parents because a Christian nurse switched him with another child to please her radical socialist boyfriend. In addition, Rushdie uses a carefully placed passing aside to further pluralize this historical “center” of Indian history by showing how the articulation of the nation’s birth depends on acts of violent repression along its borders. The optimistic unity of the newly independent nation, therefore, can only be maintained by ignoring other voices that are also a part of India: the voices of “the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab” and “the violence in Bengal” (*MC*, 130). Throughout the novel, Rushdie repeatedly returns to India’s various external and internal border wars—the massacre of Jallinwallah Bagh in Amritsar, Ayub Khan’s coup, the Indo-Chinese war, the Indo-Pakistani wars, and the Indian Emergency—in order to remind the reader that this new myth of India “periodically needs the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood” (*MC*, 130). By emphasizing the violence needed to create a coherent, unified collective identity, Rushdie undermines the accuracy and authority of traditional, monological narratives of the Indian nation, which must silence the multiplicity of India’s diverse voices in order to achieve their coherence.

Instead, Rushdie draws attention to the fact that there are multiple, alternative Indias because each India is, after all, a partial and biased fiction. Even if 15 August, the moment of Indian independence, does partially center some version of Indian history, Saleem reminds his readers that this version can always be replaced by “another version” in which “that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga,” which “began



on Friday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 3102 BC; and will last a mere 432,000 years" (MC, 233). Rushdie repeatedly points out the possibility of alternative historical narratives by creating multiple allegories based on alternative, mythical histories, such as the comparison between the arsonists and Ravana or between Shiva and the combined forces of the Kurus and Pandavas. Consequently, even if midnight 15 August 1947 is something of a "center"—both for Indian national identity and for Rushdie's narrative—it is only a "center" in the sense described by Derrida or Bhabha: it is one of many possible, arbitrary, unstable "centers," each of which only partially stabilizes a Nietzschean sense of radical interpretive play. By giving utterance to diverse moments in Indian history and divergent versions of that history, Rushdie draws attention to the fact that the Indian nation contains a multiplicity of heteroglossic voices in addition to the more traditional Gandhian voice that focuses on 15 August 1947. From beginning to end, Rushdie suggests that the nation of India is not only fictional but also fragmented, hybrid, and multiple—as demonstrated by the cultural diversity among the 1,001 Midnight's Children; descriptions emphasizing the hybridity of Indian history, geography, and culture; Saleem's own hybrid genealogy; and his family's interstitial, migrant history lived on the nation's margins: "The boatman Tai drove my father from Kashmir; Mercurochrome chased him out of Amritsar; the collapse of her life under the carpets led directly to my mother's departure from Agra; and many headed monsters sent my father to Bombay, so that I could be born there" (MC, 102–3). Moreover, Rushdie's descriptions of the language riots and the Indian Emergency emphasize that this transnationalism is not simply a matter of unstable borders, but rather it is a hybrid fracturing that permeates India from top to bottom because India's internal borders are just as volatile as its external ones. Even India's internal boundaries must continually be "divided anew" because they are "not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain" but instead by a "wall of words" (MC, 225). Throughout the novel, these boundaries—both internal and external—are continually redrawn as India repeatedly imagines itself, and this constant changing further demonstrates how the nation of India is a historically contingent process rather than a metaphysical, geopolitical, or even ontological given. Like Bakhtin's description of novelistic dialogization, Rushdie describes India as a fiction that must be continually rewritten because no narrative can ever contain "such an excess of intertwined lives" (MC, 4).

In conclusion, *Midnight's Children's* two-pronged narrative strategy draws on the kinds of techniques described by Bakhtin: it carnival-

izes traditional allegories of Indian national identity by removing their stable centers and challenging their authority, and it simultaneously creates a polyphonic narrative that gives utterance to India's diverse, heteroglot voices. Moreover, this rewriting of Indian history is an excellent example of what Bakhtin means by dialogization: Rushdie's carnivalesque narrative takes traditional, authoritative, monological narratives of India and reaccentuates them to reflect his own ideological purposes. In particular, he decenters their Hindu-centric focus, gives utterance to their silenced multicultural margins, and injects them with a polyphonic chorus of heteroglot voices. In so doing, Rushdie not only develops a broader view of Indian national identity but he critically examines the conceptual object of the nation itself.

### Notes

1. For example, Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia*, trans. Marianne Shapiro (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) draws on a nationalistic sensibility in order to defend the cultural and political significance of a national vernacular language and literature; Johann Gottfried Herder's *Fragmente über die neue deutsche Literatur* (London: Blackwell, 1969) articulates the German Romantics' view that national identity is intimately connected to national languages and literatures; and Hippolyte Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, 1921) extends these kinds of arguments into a full-scale critical method that makes authors' national origins a primary cause of their aesthetic development. In fact, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993) goes so far as to argue that our notion of culture itself is intimately connected to the historical development of nationalism:

It is not a vulgarization of history to remark that a major reason why such a [ethnocentric, humanist] view of human culture became current in Europe and America in several different forms during the two centuries between 1745 and 1945 was the striking rise of nationalism during that same period. . . . it is nevertheless evident that when most European thinkers celebrated humanity or culture they were principally celebrating ideas and values they ascribed to their own national culture, or to Europe as distinct from the Orient, Africa, and even the Americas. (44)

More contemporary analyses of how the construction of national identity relates to cultural production can be found in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) and *Culture and Imperialism*; Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso Books, 1983); Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1983); Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1986); Homi Bhabha's anthology *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Terry Eagleton's, Fredric Jameson's, and Edward Said's essays collected in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso Books, 1992); and Kwame Anthony Appiah's *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

2. Virtually all of Jameson's most influential works—e.g., *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca,

N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981); "Cognitive Mapping," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347–57; "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88—hereafter "TWL," cited in the text; and *Postmodernism, or, The Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), hereafter *P*, cited in the text—demonstrate how particular literary forms reflect specific political ideologies, which are themselves primarily reflections of economic modes of production. Having argued, in *The Political Unconscious*, that Marxism provides the "absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation," Jameson's criticism consistently "maps" the relation between economic modes of production and their corresponding political ideologies and cultural forms (17). In "Cognitive Mapping," for example, Jameson argues that the three stages of capitalism described by Ernst Mandel (classical, imperial, and multinational) have produced three different concepts of space (abstract, relativistic, and fragmented), which correspond to three different literary forms (realism, modernism, and postmodernism) and reflect the political ideologies of the economic systems within which they are produced. In *Postmodernism*, Jameson extends and focuses this argument on the third stage of multinational or global capitalism. According to Jameson, such first world texts predominantly use postmodern cultural forms that both reflect and represent "the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (44). Thus, Jameson links postmodern aesthetic forms to multinational modes of production. These works provide a necessary background for understanding Jameson's essay on third world literature for two reasons: first, Jameson's essay on third world literature continues this same project of formulating a "cognitive aesthetics" that maps the relationship between political/economic structures and cultural forms; and second, the third world literature essay also acts as a foil—structured in diametric opposition—to Jameson's essay on postmodernism. Jameson himself invites such a comparison by describing the third world literature essay as a "pendant to the essay on postmodernism" (88). In virtually every respect, this "pendant" essay plots the third world as the antithesis to the first world of postmodern, global capitalism.

3. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 95. Hereafter *T*, cited in the text.

4. Not only do many third world texts develop nonallegorical forms (e.g., Wilson Harris's *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*, Ben Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew*, and Jorgé Louis Borges's *Ficciones*), but there are also numerous third world texts that advance decisively non/anti/transnationalistic perspectives (e.g., Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*, and Wilson Harris's *Carnival Trilogy*) or explore individual rather than collective identities (e.g., Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond*, U. R. Anantha Murthy's *Samshara*, and Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*). In addition, numerous third world texts explore themes other than nationalism, such as mythology, religion, gender, philosophy, narration, etc.: for example, Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, Naguib Mahfouz's *The Children of Gebelawi*, R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Storyteller*—to name only a few.

5. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980)—hereafter *MC*, cited in the text—is another clear example of a third world allegory that does not begin to fit under Jameson's rubric of collective national allegory: how can it be a national allegory when it completely leaves out Gandhi's movement for national independence and the better half of the book chronicles India's repeated external and internal border wars; and how can it allegorize a collective identity when it makes its hero's personal birthday more significant than the nation's collective independence, and it fractures its allegorical hero into 600 million pieces? Even when Rushdie does use allegory, he uses it for a variety of purposes: to represent cultural hybridity, to emphasize the quotidian events of everyday life, to aggrandize the importance of his narrator, and to metafictionally raise historiographical questions. As the

novel's protagonist, Saleem, clearly explains, allegory functions simultaneously on multiple levels in *Midnight's Children*: it functions both "literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively" to create "actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically, and passively-literally" modes of signification (285–86). I'm not going to give an exegesis of this confusingly hyphenated passage, but suffice it to say that it outlines a complex theory of allegory that is much more than mere national allegory. Even though *Midnight's Children* is an allegory about national identity, its use of allegory is more multifaceted and postmodern, just as its representation of national identity is less organically collective and more cosmopolitan than Jameson's theory allows. Jameson's theory might specify *Midnight's Children's* aesthetic form as an allegory, but how specific can this appellation be if it applies across the board to all third world narratives?

6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Hereafter *DI*, cited in the text.

7. Bakhtin dates this shift at the transition from classical to Hellenic Greece while Anderson dates it much later during the early modern period, but one could at least partially explain this difference in terms of Bakhtin being focused more on the early roots of this change while Anderson is interested more in the eventual consequences of this change.

8. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12, 19, 35. Hereafter *IC*, cited in the text.

9. Anderson strongly cautions, however, that this interaction between language and politics cannot be explained through reductive, mechanical models because such changes are caused by multiple, fragmentary historical events rather than a single, preconceived master plan. Consequently, even though both communal boundaries and linguistic systems undergo similar, interrelated processes of fragmentation, these processes are not symmetrical, making the "concrete formation of contemporary nation-states . . . by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages" (*Imagined Communities*, 46).

10. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279. Hereafter "SSP," cited in the text.

11. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

12. Geoff Bennington, "Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation," *Nation and Narration*, 121.

13. *Ibid.*, 122.

14. Sneja Gunew, "Denaturalizing Cultural Nationalisms: Multicultural Readings of 'Australia,'" *Nation and Narration*, 100.

15. Bhabha, "Introduction," 1.

16. *Ibid.*, 5.

17. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (New York: Granta Books, 1991), 10.

18. *Ibid.*, 27.

19. Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 84.

20. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 25.