

The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative

ANCIENT NARRATIVE

Supplementum 3

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Barkhuis Publishing
Zuurstukken 37 9761 KP Eelde the Netherlands
Tel. +31 50 3080936 Fax +31 50 3080934
info@ancientnarrative.com www.ancientnarrative.com

The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative

edited by

R. Bracht Branham

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For Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson

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Bakhtin's ultimate value—full acknowledgements of and participation in a great dialogue—is thus not to be addressed as just one more piece of “literary criticism;” even less is it a study of fictional technique or form (in our usual sense of form). It is a philosophical inquiry into our limited ways of mirroring—and improving—our lives.

Wayne C. Booth, Intro., *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1984).

We do not know what kind of world we live in. The novel wants to show it to us.

M.M. Bakhtin, “Toward a Stylistics of the Novel” (1940).

‘In any case, I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating my activity.’

Goethe as quoted by Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” *Untimely Meditations* (1874).

The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative

“I am an obsessed innovator...

Obsessed innovators are very rarely understood.”

M.M. Bakhtin (at the defense of his dissertation on Rabelais: 1946)

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) has become a name to conjure with. We know this because he is now one of those thinkers everyone already knows—without necessarily having to read much of him! Doesn't everyone now know how polyphony functions, what carnival means, why language is dialogic but the novel more so, how chronotopes make possible any “concrete artistic cognition” and that utterances give rise to genres that last thousands of years, “always the same but not the same”? Like Marx and Freud in the twentieth century, or Plotinus and Plato in the fourth, a familiarity with Bakhtin's thinking is so commonly assumed, at least in the Humanities, as to be taken for granted. He is no longer an author but a field of study in his own right. As Craig Brandist (of the Bakhtin Centre at Sheffield University) reports: “the works of the [Bakhtin] Circle are still appearing in Russian and English, and are already large in number...There are now several thousand works about the Bakhtin Circle.”¹

The problem is, the better we get to know Bakhtin, the less we seem to know.² How can both Marxists and Formalists claim him? How do the early philosophical works bear on the groundbreaking studies of Rabelais and Dostoyevsky? Does he, like Auerbach, have a coherent story to tell about the whole of European literary history? How does he understand the relation of ethics to aesthetics, philosophy to literature, culture to politics? Whether we consider his biography, his relation to other members of the Circle and their sources in German philosophy and scholarship, or the meaning of his most

¹ Brandist 2002, 204: For a bibliography “of the work of and about the [Bakhtin] Circle,” Brandist refers the reader to the Sheffield University Bakhtin Centre site on the World Wide Web at the following URL: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/A-C/bakh/bakhtin>. For a discussion of Brandist 2002, see Branham 2004.

² See Morson's characterization of the prosaic aphorism *inf.*

influential terms and concepts, we find new questions being posed that will frame the debate for years to come.³ This debate will necessarily include the questions that give rise to this volume: what is the significance of Bakhtin's work for our understanding of ancient literary culture and its role in the history of European literature? And, conversely, how did Bakhtin's lifelong interest in the classics shape his thinking about the dialogic nature of language and the carnivalesque traditions in culture?

It is this same pair of questions that makes *The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative* an intellectual successor to my *Bakhtin and the Classics*.⁴ I was not planning to edit another collection on Bakhtin, but when Gareth Schmeling suggested the idea, I remembered how many classicists had told me they would like to bring Bakhtin into their work, given the opportunity. Since *Bakhtin and the Classics* was an attempt to foster a dialogue—or provoke an argument—about the value of Bakhtin's work for Classics, the idea of expanding the conversation was an opportunity I couldn't refuse, particularly in a journal which is devoted to one of Bakhtin's own interests—the varieties of ancient narrative—and encourages dialogue as a matter of editorial policy.

Unlike *Bakhtin and the Classics*, which was planned as a book to which authors were invited to contribute articles assessing the relevance and value of Bakhtin's global concepts—of carnival, genre, chronotope, and dialogue—to their own areas of expertise, this volume was in principle open to anyone who wanted to explore Bakhtin (and/or the Russian Formalists) in connection with ancient narrative in any genre. As it turned out, while the texts and approaches contributors have chosen vary greatly—from the *Bible* to Petronius—from Voloshinov to Lotman—surprisingly little use was made of the Russian Formalists per se. Consequently, I have dropped the "Formalists" from the title of the volume in favor of the more strictly relevant "Bakhtin Circle." While only one member of the circle, V.N. Voloshinov, is discussed in detail in this collection⁵, it is obvious by now that Bakhtin himself cannot be understood historically apart from the Circle, since three important works closely associated with him and sometimes actually attributed to him—*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, *Freudianism: A Critical*

³ See, e.g., Hitchcock 1998.

⁴ Branham 2002.

⁵ See Behr's contribution *inf*.

Sketch, and *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*⁶—were evidently written by members of the Circle (V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev) in collaboration with Bakhtin.⁷

The freedom given to contributors to address any text or topic under the general rubric of “The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative” has produced a remarkable variety of essays ranging widely over different periods, genres, and cultures. While most of the contributors chose to explore Bakhtin’s theory of genre or to take issue with his account of one genre, Greek romance, the remaining contributions defy such convenient categories. What all the essays share with one another (and those collected in *Bakhtin and the Classics*) is the attempt to engage Bakhtin as a reader and thinker reflecting on ancient texts, traditions, and narratives in the broadest sense.

Genre: Theory and Practice

It is appropriate that our collection opens with four essays on the theory and practice of genre since Bakhtin regarded “the problems of the functions of the text and textual genres”⁸—including both primary (simple) and secon-

⁶ i.e., Voloshinov 1973 and 1987; and Bakhtin/Medvedev 1985.

⁷ The exact nature and extent of Bakhtin’s contribution to the “disputed texts” (by Voloshinov and Medvedev) will never be known, since Bakhtin reportedly both affirmed and denied his authorship on various occasions (Hirschkop 1998, 531). Bakhtin was clearly worried about diminishing his dead friends’ claims to originality, but in a letter to V. Kozhinov of January 10, 1961 (cited by Hirschkop 1998, 596) he wrote: “The books *The Formal Method* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* are very well known to me. V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev were my dear friends; in the period of the creation of these books we worked in the closest creative contact. Even more, at the base of these books and my book on Dostoyevsky there lies a common conception of language and the production of speech.”

In addition to the three best known members of the Circle—M.M. Bakhtin (1895–1975), V.N. Voloshinov (1895–1936), and P.N. Medvedev (1891–1938)—Brandist reports that at various times it included M.I. Kagan (1889–1937), L.V. Pumpianski (1891–1940), I.I. Sollertinski (1902–1944), and K.K. Vaginov (1899–1934): “[The Circle] began meeting in the provincial town of Nevel and the major Belorussian town of Vitebsk in 1918, before moving to Leningrad in 1924. Their group meetings were terminated following the arrest of some of the group in 1929” (Brandist 2002, 5–6).

⁸ Bakhtin 1986, 104: See “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis” and “The Problem of Speech Genres” in Bakhtin 1986.

dary (complex) genres—as the defining object not only of literary studies but of the human sciences in general:

Genres are of special significance. Genres of literature and speech throughout the centuries of their life accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world. For the writer-craftsman the genre serves as an external template, but the great artist awakens the semantic possibilities that lie within it. Shakespeare [for example] took advantage of and included in his works immense treasures of potential meaning that could not be fully reached or recognized in his epoch. The author himself and his contemporaries see, recognize, and evaluate primarily that which is close to their own day. The author is captive of his epoch...Subsequent times liberate him from this captivity and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation.⁹

The conception of genre as a form of seeing and interpreting the world that accumulates semantic possibilities over time underlies Bakhtin's single most influential theory—that of the nature and origins of the novel as a genre—which is the focus of our opening essay. Branham constructs a detailed assessment of Bakhtin's controversial genealogy of the ancient origins of the modern novel, analyzing both his conception of “the poetics of genre” and his specific historical contention that the “seriocomic” or “carnivalized literature” of antiquity is the ultimate matrix of the genre. No one before Bakhtin had ever made this claim. Branham attempts to do justice to the complexity of Bakhtin's approach, which evolved over many years, both by historicizing his account with reference to particular examples of “seriocomic” literature and by reading Bakhtin himself historically, placing his theory of the carnivalesque origins of one type of novel in the context of: (1) his understanding of the classical vs. the non-classical as the fundamental categories of literary history; (2) the specific literary significance attributed to the carnivalesque traditions in ancient culture. It turns out that the dialogic character of the novel as evaluated by Bakhtin is inextricably tied to the meaning of carnival laughter as a “potent if unstable cultural force”¹⁰ operating across societies and centuries.

⁹ See “Response to a Question From *Novy Mir*”: Bakhtin 1986, 5.

¹⁰ Branham 2002, xvii.

We move from the theory of genre to its practice with Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan's *tour de force* reading of Plato's *Symposium* "as demonstrably a novel in the Bakhtinian sense; if it is characteristic of the novel as a genre that it be essentially dialogical and that, if dialogical, it also be aware of itself as dialogical and also aware of its difference from other kinds of voice (e.g. epic, drama, lyric, etc.), then the *Symposium* in the strict sense is the first novel in history." Their Bakhtinian analysis of how the multiple frames of the dialogue function, of the polyglossial world in which the various speeches "address" and "comment upon" each other, and of the serio-comic figure of Socrates at the center of it all—"transformed by the beautiful, in search of the absent good"—opens up new perspectives on a familiar masterpiece.

Ahuvia Kahane's contribution, "Epic, Novel, Genre: Bakhtin and the Question of History," develops a subtle critique of one of Bakhtin's most oft cited works, his famous essay of 1941, "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," in which he constructs a systematic contrast between these two forms of narrative as a way of highlighting their defining features. Kahane explores some of the complexities such polarities tend to occlude by focusing his analysis on the language and style of Homer, which is often used to exemplify what is distinctive of epic as a genre. His analysis leads him to pose the fundamental question: precisely what would constitute a dialogic moment in Homeric discourse?¹¹ His answer turns on an examination of the characterization and speech of Thersites as an example of how Homeric epic can include voices ideologically and stylistically at odds with the norms of the genre as embodied, e.g., in Achilles.

Our final essay of this section, "Genre, Aphorism, Herodotus" by the eminent Slavicist and comparatist Gary Saul Morson, is an experiment in genre theory and criticism that attempts to formulate and apply a Bakhtinian approach to the aphorism. He begins by distinguishing the aphorism from other short, "quotable" literary forms, particularly the dictum. He then posits two ideal types of aphorism: the "poetic," which bespeaks mystery—the truth lies outside this world; and the "prosaic," which evokes the sheer contingency and complexity of experience—the truth of the world defies understanding. He explores the essential differences between the two types as they appear in authors as different as Montaigne, Wittgenstein, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Sophocles and concludes with an analysis of the ramifications

¹¹ For an alternative account, see Peradotto in Branham 2002.

of both forms of utterance for reading Herodotus and his philosophy of history.

Rereading Bakhtin on Ancient Fiction

If we are going to engage Bakhtin fruitfully, interrogating and challenging his generalizations, it is important that we begin by understanding precisely what his own project was and what made it so distinctive. Bakhtin's study of ancient literature was motivated primarily by his desire to discover what light it could shed on the nature and genesis of what he considered to be the uniquely valuable genre of the modern novel. It will help if we keep this perspective in mind when assessing his work on ancient fiction. Bakhtin never wrote a "reading" of an ancient text such as those he produced of Rabelais or Dostoyevsky. What he did instead was to analyze the characteristic features of those genres that have the most to teach us about the emergence of prose fiction as a complex literary category that branches out in various cross-fertilizing traditions leading toward Medieval, Renaissance and Modern forms of narrative. In doing so his method is "to advance as typical the extreme to which [poetic] genres aspire."¹² What was most radically original about this work was not so much his specific and sometimes novel claims about a given tradition, e.g., about the importance of space in Greek romance and why this correlates with the relatively static characters that inhabit it, but his working hypothesis, namely, that ancient traditions have something genuinely significant to contribute to the history of the novel as a genre. While many classicists now treat this claim as self-evident, it is by no means universally accepted.¹³ And the state-of-the-art account of the Greek romance in Bakhtin's time—E. Rohde's *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer* (Leipzig 1876; 4th ed. 1960)—runs directly counter to this belief. Where Rohde saw in the ancient novel little more than the detritus left by the decay of classical genres, Bakhtin saw the coalescence of something unprecedented, the first stages of a long process of evolution. As Bakhtin observes "everything new is born out of the death of something old...It was primarily what was new in all this that [Rohde] failed to see."¹⁴

¹² Bakhtin 1981, 287 n.12.

¹³ Bakhtin 1981, 64–5.

¹⁴ See, e.g., two recent, major anthologies on the subject, which attribute little or no importance to the classical origins of the novel: Hale 2004 and McKeon 2000. McKeon has ar-

Critics of Bakhtin who ignore his own purpose in writing about ancient literature—in evaluating the distinctive contributions that ancient traditions made to the evolution of the novel as a genre, in tracing the literary and cultural forces that made its emergence possible—often resort to mere contradiction arguing, e.g., that Greek romance actually exhibits the qualities and concepts—the dialogic, the carnivalesque, polyphony—that Bakhtin formulated to explain the achievements of such writers as Rabelais and Dostoyevsky and also ascribed to the traditions (e.g., parodic, seriocomic, Menippean) that they allegedly drew on in their masterpieces. The revisionist essays in this section attempt to get beyond that kind of conventional (and not very interesting) critique and to deepen our understanding of how Bakhtin’s focal concepts do and do not apply to ancient fiction. I invite the reader to judge to which extent they succeed in revising—or extending—Bakhtin.

Chariton is the focus of our first two essays. In “Dialogues in love: Bakhtin and his Critics on the Greek Novel” Tim Whitmarsh examines the complicated way public and private roles are played off against each other in Chariton in order to challenge Bakhtin’s assertion (in his essay on *Chryseis*) that public “events are illuminated in the [Greek] novel only insofar as they relate to private fates.”¹⁵ Whitmarsh’s first counter-example, the scene where Dionysius unexpectedly intercepts a love letter to Callirhoe from her husband while entertaining the leading men of Miletus at a symposium, (4.5), is subtly analyzed, but nevertheless seems perfectly consistent with Bakhtin’s observation. The public event, the symposium, is mentioned in the narrative only as the setting for a private discovery. The entire focus of the narrator is on the erotic intrigue that drives the plot and its effect on the actors who seem to have nothing in the world better to do than to plot and scheme how to get possession of Callirhoe—even if they have never seen her! The only “politics” on their minds are the politics of eros.

A second example adduced to show how “competing obligations” on the individual, e.g., between public duties and private passions, “dramatize exactly the Bakhtinian principle of dialogism” is far more telling. It is the scene where Dionysius reproaches himself for falling in love:

gued that the temporal and cultural gap separating the modern from the ancient novel makes the latter of little importance for understanding the former.

¹⁵ Bakhtin 1981, 109.

Dionysius, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! The most virtuous, the most distinguished man in Ionia, the admiration of Satraps, kings, whole populations—and you behave like a boy! You’ll fall in love at first sight—and while you’re in mourning at that, before you’ve even paid proper respects to your poor wife’s departed spirit! Is that what you’ve come into the country for—to marry in your mourning clothes? And to marry a slave? She may not even belong to you—you haven’t even got the registration deed for her” (2.4).

The reproach, addressing him by name as if it were someone else speaking¹⁶ and expressing in direct speech what social convention would say if it could, becomes a voice that is and is not Dionysius’. Here the voice of authority—or of reason, morality, society or the super-ego—has been internalized but not persuasively. Dionysius ignores it. As Whitmarsh observes: “this is precisely the self in dialogue: not only in the literal sense that he is addressing himself to himself...but also in that his protreptic depends fundamentally upon confronting the private, eroticized self with the public role demanded of him by his political station. It is the mismatch between these two selves—the adult male behaving like a boy—that generates the narrative crisis.” He argues in conclusion: “Bakhtin’s formulation could be reversed: the erotic, it appears, signifies primarily thanks to its connection with (even subversion of) the political.” But doesn’t this formulation of the political risk conflate the distinct if overlapping concepts of the social, the public and the political?¹⁷ And, as Whitmarsh rightly concedes, there can be no doubt that the plots of Greek romance are “driven primarily by erotic rather than political energy.” Isn’t this a question of foreground and background? The voices of public, social or political convention provide a necessary normative background to the transgressive counsel of eros and can, as in this example, but be brought into dialogue with it.¹⁸

In a brave debut performance Steven D. Smith has also chosen to focus his critique on *Chaereas and Callirhoe*—a text Bakhtin never discussed!—and begins by using it to raise questions about the way time and space actu-

¹⁶ Cf. Bakhtin 1984, 184: “A dialogic reaction personifies every utterance to which it responds.”

¹⁷ The distinctions among these concepts are brilliantly elucidated in Arendt 1958.

¹⁸ The difficult question of what if anything is actually new about the way the Greek novel represents such conflicts—between “normative duty and subversive desire”—is discussed in the first section of Whitmarsh’s essay.

ally function in a Greek novel. If the Bakhtin invoked here sometimes seems a bit thin, in his third section (on heteroglossia) he succeeds in engaging Bakhtin more fully, as he attempts to demonstrate “how Chariton’s novel *does* incorporate heteroglossia...and that it does ‘involve a sideways glance at others’ language, at other points of view and other conceptual systems, each with its own set of objects and meanings’.”

In “Below the Belt: Looking into the Matter of Adventure-Time” Jeniffer Ballengee develops an ambitious analysis of the significance of the physical suffering repeatedly experienced and witnessed by the primary couple in Achilles Tatius on their journey through adventure-time to marriage, challenging Bakhtin’s reading of their identity in rhetorical and juridical terms that tend to minimize its physical and biological basis. Foregrounding the body, “as the basis of desire which ignites the plot” enables her to reframe questions bearing on the sexual symmetry of the primary couple, the role of the gaze, and the relation of adventure-time with its violent spectacles of dismemberment to the trial scenes that restore the beleaguered lovers to society by making a public spectacle of their integrity.

Along with the idea of the “dialogic,” “polyphony” has become one of the most widely appropriated concepts formulated by Bakhtin, but its application often lacks precision. The musical metaphor seems to speak for itself. But how does “polyphony” differ from ordinary “intertextuality,” which is ubiquitous or “dialogism *in praesentia*,”¹⁹ or more traditional critical concepts such as “allusion,” “echo,” or “quotation”?²⁰ If there is no significant conceptual difference, why use the term at all? In “The Limits of Polyphony: Dostoyevsky to Petronius” Maria Plaza offers a precise definition of the concept as it was developed by Bakhtin to explain the form of discourse unique to the novels of Dostoyevsky. While Bakhtin’s original analysis makes clear that Dostoyevsky’s *discovery* of the polyphonic novel was made possible by the specific conditions of his own epoch,²¹ can the “structural principle of polyphony” which, Bakhtin insists, retains “its artistic significance under the completely different conditions”²² of later epochs, be applied by analogy to Petronius? Whether or not one is finally persuaded of her spe-

¹⁹ Todorov’s phrase for the type of “intertextuality” that he claims Bakhtin used to define the second stylistic line of the European novel: Todorov 1984, 87.

²⁰ For the vicissitudes involved in defining these terms, see Richard Fletcher’s contribution *inf.*

²¹ I.e., the “acute contradictions of early Russian capitalism...”: Bakhtin, 1984, 35.

²² *Ibid.*

cific conclusions, Plaza's lucid analysis of Bakhtin on Dostoyevsky and its implications for Petronius will be the starting point for any serious discussion of polyphony in the ancient novel.

Centrifugal Voices

As its title suggests, our concluding section spins off in several unexpected directions, but each of these disparate essays offers a highly original exploration of some aspect of the Bakhtin legacy, while also addressing questions of narrative theory as it bears on ancient texts of very different kinds. Our opening essay is a notable debut performance by Richard Fletcher, who investigates how the "discovery" of Bakhtin and his genealogy of the novel in Paris in the 1960's is intimately related to the emergence of Julia Kristeva as an acknowledged voice of French literary theory: "By introducing Kristeva, as a 'Bakhtinian theorist' into such a 'Bakhtin and the Classics' project, I aim to critique the simplistic notions of (ab)use and (mis)understanding in both classicists relationship to her and her relationship to the classics." But his examination of this particularly influential episode in the reception of Bakhtin is also used to pursue larger questions about the complex ways in which "genealogy," "genre" and "theory" interact in attempts to theorize ancient literature from the great Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky's reflections on the Greek novel to the recent efforts of classicists to define "intertextuality"—a term coined by Kristeva for a "discovery" (*une découverte*) she attributes to Bakhtin. But just as the word "intertextuality" cannot be found "in any index of Bakhtin's texts or the texts themselves," neither can the "discovery" it was coined to denominate: "The Bakhtinian text from which Kristeva quotes does not exist, except as a 'quotation'." This raises the question of whether "intertextuality" and "dialogism" (or the "dialogic") should be treated as synonymous—as they are, for example by Todorov²³—or are better understood as distinct concepts, each with its own "genealogy."

Equally unexpected and impressive is Francesca D'Allesandro Behr's use of the work of Bakhtin and Voloshinov to explore the nature of the satirist's voice as constructed by Persius in his *Saturae*. Her aim is to show "how satirical discourse is narrated...and characterized by quoted discourse,

²³ Todorov 1981, 60, where he credits Kristeva for introducing the term "in her presentation of Bakhtin."

how it tends toward a fluid form which is not easily classified according to established categories (e.g., monologue or dialogue, direct modes or indirect modes, etc.).” Drawing specifically on V.N. Voloshinov’s seminal analysis of the “pictorial style” (in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*) as one that dissolves the rigid boundaries between reported speech (i.e., the speech of characters) and reporting context (i.e., the speech of the author or narrator) and as such is formally incompatible with authoritarian or monologic expressions of ideology, she argues that in Persius satire “is revealed as an exceptionally self-critical genre, which through multiple perspectives, tonal diversity and laughter, confronts the closed self and univocal signification.” Her formal analysis of Persius’ discourse is supplemented by her close reading of the way bodies and embodiment are used by the satirist to complicate simplistic oppositions between the mind and the body, the healthy and the sick, the sage and the fool, the very dichotomies that Persius has often been read as endorsing on Stoic grounds.

Christina Mitchell also pioneers new terrain in her remarkable “Bakhtin and the Ideal Ruler in 1–2 Chronicles and the *Cyropaedia*.” As she candidly observes in her opening paragraph, Chronicles may be plodding and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* may be “one of the most tedious books to have survived classical antiquity,” but they are plodding or boring “for interesting reasons.” The focus of her comparative analysis of ancient Hebrew narrative and Xenophon is “the intertextual construction of the figure of the Ideal Ruler.” In a thoughtful theoretical introduction she offers a succinct and lucid account of Bakhtin’s fundamental concepts of genre and dialogism, which she usefully supplements with Yuri Lotman’s conception of “tradition”—“a system of texts in the cultural memory” that serve as interpreters (or filters) of other texts—and Riffaterre’s strict interpretation of intertextuality as a “structural network of text-generated constraints on the reader’s perceptions.” Her close reading of Xenophon and the Chronicles shows how both construct the ideal ruler in similar ways creating dialogic relationships with their predecessors by recasting “the meaning of previous traditions or episodes while still keeping them in the text.” The results of their rewriting of tradition are also analogous: “Chronicles’ David stands in the same relationship with the David of Samuel-Kings as Xenophon’s Cyrus does to the Cyrus of Herodotus and Ctesias.” She concludes by considering in what sense these texts can be read as works of political philosophy.

Our final essay by Francis Dunn is also *sui generis*. The topic he addresses is that of interpreting change and development in culture and individual identity. How can a culture be understood diachronically without imposing anachronistic schemata? If, as Nicholas Thomas has argued, “the modern discipline of anthropology was founded upon the exclusion of time,” where can new perspectives and models be found? In a surprising move, Dunn turns to ancient medicine for an alternative approach: “In the first part of this paper I look at *Ancient Medicine* and its narrative of cultural development. This treatise offers a sophisticated model of change that I call ‘cultural hermeneutics’—a model that accommodates change and contingency without requiring a modern trajectory of growth or evolution.” Dunn then applies this model of “ancient anthropological narrative” to interrogate the understanding of time and change in two modern theories: 1) Bakhtin’s notion of temporality with the value it places on the freedom of individuals; and 2) “recent versions of the New Realism that attempt to recover change and agency through a ‘hermeneutics of identity.’” He concludes by suggesting what might be learned from Bakhtin’s conception of “prosaic time,” in which change is incremental—a narrative model Bakhtin associates with certain forms of the novel.

In the introduction to his last book of academic criticism, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, the novelist and critic David Lodge observes that “a lot of academic literary criticism and theory—the kind published in learned journals and by American University Presses—frankly no longer seems worth the considerable effort of keeping up with it. *A vast amount of it is not, like the work of Bakhtin, a contribution to human knowledge, but the demonstration of professional mastery by translating known facts into more and more arcane metalanguages.*”²⁴ I agree with this judgment and for that reason believe that lumping Bakhtin into the category of literary theorist is potentially misleading. Bakhtin rightly considered himself a “thinker” (*myslitel*),²⁵ or philosopher: “Our analysis must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary or any other particular kind of analysis... On the other hand, a positive feature of our study is this: [it moves] in spheres that are liminal, i.e., on the borders of all aforementioned disciplines at their junctures and points of

²⁴ Emphasis mine: Lodge 1990, 8.

²⁵ Branham 2002, XXV n.6

intersection.”²⁶ He began his career by tackling fundamental problems in ethics and aesthetics in his notebooks in the 1920’s and later turned to literary studies as an alternative, more “concrete” way to investigate related concerns in highly specific historical contexts (e.g., the book on Dostoyevsky [1929] and the dissertation on Rabelais [1940]). Our aim here has been to amend and extend Bakhtin the thinker, the “obsessed innovator”—to engage him in an ongoing dialogue—not simply to apply him or to translate what is already known “into more and more arcane metalanguages.” The last word on the success or failure of our project has of course not yet been spoken. And if Bakhtin is right, it never will be.²⁷

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²⁶ *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow 1979); cited by Holquist 1990: 14.

²⁷ Cf. Bakhtin 1984, 166.

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Ancient Narrative Supplementa

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