

NARRATIVE DISCOURSE: AUTHOR/HERO/OTHER I

The names of Umberto Eco among semioticians, Gerard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov among structuralists, and Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida among post-structuralists suggest that a sizeable degree of continental thought in philosophy and criticism since 1960 has worked in one way or another to expose and deflate representation. (By "representation" I mean Auerbach's notion of "realism" as he traces its evolution in Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1953) and accords it the highest cultural function.) Late twentieth century literary theory in particular has detrivialized the literary to the extent that deconstructive rhetoricians regard all language as evolving through the metaphoric substitution of figurative terms for other equally figurative terms with no final nonfigurative reference point.

An imperfection that stands out of these various metaphors of textuality is the absence of a real-world correlate of the authorial function in literary activity. Intentionalist fallacy (Wimsatt 1946) had

been exposed earlier and the late sixties (Barthes 1968; Foucault 1969) saw the last nails driven into the authorial coffin.

Although Bakhtin comes quite close to the nexus of intertextuality (especially Bakhtin 1978) as we have had occasion to see, his theory of dialogical interrelationship requires that texts be embodied in flesh and blood material points of view:

In language as the object of linguistics, there are not and cannot be any dialogical relationships: they are impossible both among elements in a system of language (for example, among morphemes, and so forth), and among elements of a "text" when approached in a strictly linguistic way. (...)

Nor can there be any dialogic relationships among texts when approached in a strictly linguistic way. Any purely linguistic juxtaposition and grouping of given texts must necessarily abstract itself from any dialogic relationships that might be possible among them as whole utterances.

(Bakhtin 1984: 182)

Todorov also uses the term intertextuality (Todorov 1981: 95) to designate Bakhtin's dialogism in its "most inclusive sense" and keeps the term dialogic for certain specific instances of intertextuality, such as reciprocation of rejoinders between speakers.¹

Crucial to an understanding of Bakhtin's version of the addressor-addressee or author-character dynamic are the two texts: Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (English translation 1990) and The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. In the course of the exposition it will be my effort to scrutinize Bakhtin's theories concerning the creative act.

In the earlier text (ca. 1920-1923) Bakhtin opens analeptically in dealing with the problem of the relationship of the author to the hero:

Enough has been said, perhaps, about the fact that every constituent of a work presents itself to us as the author's reaction to it and that this reaction encompasses both an object and the hero's reaction to that object (a reaction to a reaction). In this sense, the author intonates every particular and every trait of his

hero, every event of his life, every action he performs, all his thoughts and feelings, just as in life, too, we react valuationally to every self-manifestation on the part of those around us. (1990: 4)

Two basic presuppositions are therefore assumed right from the start. First, that a work comes to us only as an author's reactions to the objects and characters in that work; and further the reactions of the characters also come to us only from the position of the author. Secondly, that the above assumption is analogous to our reactions to the others around us who constitute our world.

A work of art is co-created in the sense that a reader's experience is controlled through the spatial, temporal and semantic perspective of the author. Experience of characters from within, from the characters' own foci of vision, is not available to the reader in the aesthetic act. This position of the author outside of the characters he creates and responding to the characters in the very creative act

which authors them, Bakhtin describes by calling it vnenaxodimost, "extralocality" as Todorov translates it, or "exotopy" as Clark, Holquist, and Emerson prefer to render it. A person also, like a character in a book, is not complete within his or her own consciousness, but is only completed from without, from the extralocality and 'transgredience' of **another**.²

The authority of the author, however, is far from totalitarian.

The author is authoritative and indispensable for the reader, whose relationship to the author is not a relationship to him as an individual, as another human being, as a hero, as a determinate entity in being, but rather a relationship to him as a principle that needs to be followed...

(1990: 207)

Once the creative act is complete, the flesh and blood author retains no privileged position. In dealing with aesthetic problems, biographical criticism is thus given no importance.

The determination of the hero as a spatial totality, as a temporal totality, and as a semantic whole, make up the three categories in the author's extralocal act of totalization. Examining the author's spatial relationship to the hero, Bakhtin asserts that the self can be perceived and determined only from without, by another; and one's inner perception of oneself is only the cumulative ratio of the perceptions of ourselves which we have seen reflected in others. In a Lacanian or proto-Vygotsian (see Emerson 1986 on how "inner speech" issues from "outer speech") mode, Bakhtin traces the distributive valorization of our externally manifested self.

The child begins to see himself for the first time as if through his mother's eyes, and begins to speak about himself in his mother's emotional - volitional tones (...) it is his mother's loving embraces that "give form" to him axiologically. (1990: 50)

We as selves - that is, as others - are not created from a single centre of authority. One falls victim

to the "expressivist" fallacy when one ignores the author's role as transgredient other. Similarly one falls into "impressivist" aesthetics when one ignores the hero's role as an autonomous element.³ The aesthetic event, for Bakhtin, is to be seen as an interrelationship of two consciousnesses in which one gains wholeness through the other's extralocal transgredience.

As the other person is completed from the author-other's surplus of spatial vision, so the inner self is totalized from an extralocal surplus of temporal vision. Actual semantic totality is denied to my perspective: "The whole of my life has no validity within the axiological context of my own lived life". (105) One can never see oneself as a spatial temporal whole; in the very act of attempting to make myself both subject and object one fails to coincide with oneself from within.

Meaning is open in the direction of the future, and it only becomes fixed once it can be located in the past. The author is always positioned vis-a-vis the

hero "always later, and not just temporally later, but later in meaning. (118) It is precisely in attempting to "be for oneself" that one remains "still to come", unclosed, undefined.

As soon as I attempt to determine myself for myself (and not for and from the other), I find my self only in that world, the world of what is yet to be achieved, outside my own temporal being - already - on - hand; that is I find my self as something-yet-to-be with respect to meaning and value. (123)

One is always still in the making, the meaning is yet to come; but another can be fixed in a semantic whole.

For me, the other coincides with himself, and through this integrating coincidence that consummates him positively, I enrich the other from outside, and he becomes aesthetically significant - becomes a hero. (129)

Opening his discussion of the semantic totality of the hero with a discussion of acts (or deeds), Bakhtin observes that acts are future-oriented, they

are opened; what defines an act is its "not-yet-being". To be is to be determined and whole, while active consciousness is always still becoming. Thus, for Bakhtin, one can be for another.

Discussing author-hero relationships as they are manifested in the confession, he considers it as an attempt at an axiological relationship toward oneself, but

Pure, solitary self-accounting is impossible; the nearer a self-accounting comes to this ultimate limit, the clearer becomes the other ultimate limit (126);

the more one tries to coincide with oneself, the more certain one's lack of self-identity.

In confessional self-accounting, there is no hero and there is no author, for there is no position for actualizing their interrelationship, no position of being axiologically situated outside it. (147)

In such a situation it is the reader who must provide the position of extralocality. The confession provides

raw material for a potential aesthetic event which would have to be found in the reader's valuational and meaning-framing response. The confession then is an open work which can only be closed in a reader's response.

The contemplator begins to gravitate toward authorship, and the subjectum of self-accounting becomes a hero (of course, the beholder does not co-create here with the author, as he does in the perception of a work of art, but performs a primary act of creation - a primitive one).

(148)

The act of confession may be approached cognitively from an aesthetic or theoretical point of view, but these approaches do not in essence carry out its task.

Bakhtin's acute stance on the absolute extralocality of the authorial point of view begins to weaken a little as he proceeds. What he discerns in the autobiographical act is a kind of posterior position of extralocality vis-a-vis oneself, admittedly finally involving recourse to actual alterity.

The "biographical form" is the most "realistic" form (152), since the extralocality of the author is more or less limited to a partial spatio-temporal exteriority, while the field of meaning remains "life"-like.

The author in the autobiographical relationship is not really the self but rather the introjected other. Recollecting one's past can be seen as a kind of narrative fabrication, in which the transgradient elements come from others.

Without these stories told by others, my life would not only lack fullness and clarity in its content, but would also remain internally dispersed, divested of any value-related biographical unity. (154)

The author as an element of the work of art never coincides with the hero. They are two, but there is no basic opposition between them. "Their axiological contexts are the same in kind (...) Both of them - hero and author - are others". (164)

The work still remains open at some level, and the reader may have to flesh it out into a finished aesthetic whole. The value of openness, at this point, begins to assert itself and Bakhtin's discussion of autobiography contains much that prefigures his later work on the evolution of novelistic discourse collected together in The Dialogic Imagination.

If in the autobiography the authorial position is weakened by the necessity of constant recourse to extra-authorial extralocal positions, in the lyric there is an inverse situation: the hero loses all "authority" and has only a kind of potential autonomy; the author predominates. The author's semantic surplus overcomes the hero, who can offer no resistance. The hero "does not really live a life of his own, but only reflects himself in the soul of the active author - the other by whom he is possessed. (172)

In terms of extralocality the most paradigmatic example of proper author-hero relations would seem to be found in the creation of a character. Here the hero is an autonomous element while the author for his part makes use of the full range of his extralocal surplus

of vision to complete the hero as a total determined character. The classical dichotomy of Classical and Romantic are seen by Bakhtin as the two main tendencies in characterization. The classical approach sees the character as a whole in terms of his destiny, inscribing the hero within a genealogy and a tradition. Whereas in romanticism the hero takes on more responsibility for his destiny. This already destabilizes the authorial position; the hero becomes an "infinite" character.

"Type is the passive position of a collective personality". (183) Such a position is an apparent given-ness, the author completes it with a "cognitive surplus", the character of a collectivity stands before the author, transparent to his scrutiny. The position of the type is the most objectified position which the subject of an aesthetic event can occupy. This is the position of the character in a satire. The type presupposes the superiority of the author, even allowing him to uncover the contextual factors determiniⁿg the hero, whose independence, obviously, is greatly reduced.

The modes of characterization which Bakhtin has investigated are, of course, generalizations, abstractions. In actual terms, aesthetic activity is not static, and includes many different degrees of approximation between author and hero.

(T)he author and the hero contend with each other; now they approach and join each other, now they abruptly dissociate themselves from each other. But the precondition for the fullest consummation of a work consists in their dissociating themselves decisively from each other and in the author's being victorious. (186-87).

In the last section of the essay, after reasserting the impossibility of true self-reflection, of knowledge of oneself as totality, Bakhtin restates his views on the limitations of formal linguistic analysis and places himself in diametric opposition to the Mallarmean insight that literary works of art are made of words. The verbal material, for Bakhtin, is shaped by the dispositions of the created world.

In summing up, Bakhtin refers again to the reader-author position. The reader does not perceive the author, but through the author. Regarding the author himself would lead to a situation where the reader would set up an extralocal position of his own, performing his own act of transgradient creation. The author's individuation

as a human being is no longer a primary but a secondary creative act performed by the reader, the critic, the historian, independently of the author as an active principle of seeing - an act in which the author himself is rendered passive. .(208)

NOTES

1. It was Julia Kristeva who first saw Bakhtin formulating the concept and coined the term intertextuality for him. (Kristeva 1967). But Ann Shukman, among others, points out that "... Kristeva's epistemological void is alien to Bakhtin's personalism, steeped as it is in Western humanist values". (Shukman 1980: 223). Even if Kristeva's Bakhtin is a bit too materialist, the burden of my thesis has been partly to demonstrate the politics of relegating Bakhtin in the "humanist" tradition.
2. Transgression, a term Bakhtin borrows from the German aesthetician Jonas Cohn, is used "to denote elements of consciousness which are external to it, but are nevertheless crucial to its completion and totalization". (Todorov 1981: 146)
3. The "expressivist" view (Herman Cohen et al) holds that the works of art express inner states of being and that the aesthetic event involves the experience of those inner states. Bakhtin contends that

In itself, the moment of co-experiencing (empathizing, "identifying" oneself with the inner life of the other) is, in essence, extra-aesthetic. (1990: 64)

In the "impressivist" view (Bakhtin cites the names of Konrad Fiedler, Adolf von Hildebrand, Eduard Hanslick, Alois Riegl and Stephen Witasek; Kant, says Bakhtin, occupies an ambivalent position.) the hero is ignored and becomes merely a by-product of the material with which the author plays.