

REVIEWS/RESENHAS

Morris, Pam (ed.). *The Bakhtin Reader*. Edward Arnold: London, New York, 1994. 225pp. £14.99

by Helen Reid Thomas

The publication of Caryl Emerson's book *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* in December 1997 is an indication that interest in Bakhtin continues to flourish, among both Russian and Western scholars. Emerson's book traces the interesting differences of attitude and emphasis between these two groups of critics and provides a broad-ranging and scholarly history of Bakhtin studies. The book I am concerned with here, *The Bakhtin Reader*, though of a different nature and designed for a different audience, is perhaps an even more significant testament to Bakhtin's extraordinary and continuing influence.

Until the late fifties, Bakhtin (1895-1975) was virtually unknown in Russia. Almost by chance, his Dostoevsky study (1929) was discovered by a group of students at the Gorky Institute of World Literature, who on learning that he was still alive and teaching at a provincial education centre, persuaded him to reissue the book and also publish for the first time his thesis on

Rabelais. These two books were eventually translated into English to find an enthusiastic response in the West. In 1984, the American academics Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark published the first scholarly biographical study of Bakhtin, which for years was circulated in a samizdat version in his native Russia. Since then more of his work has become available in the West and been translated into English, a process which is still continuing with the discovery of an early draft of his work on the German Bildungsroman, which, it was thought, had been destroyed during the war. There are thorny problems associated with the authorship of the body of texts that are linked to his name, in that some scholars argue that three books published in the twenties under the names of Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev and Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov were actually written by Bakhtin. Most Russian Bakhtinians support the claim of Bakhtin's authorship but certainly the issue remains controversial among Western scholars.

Whether scholars decide to include the Medvedev and Voloshinov texts in Bakhtin's oeuvre or not, there is general agreement that his work is extraordinary in its scope and variety. It is diffuse, discursive and ranges across a remarkable diversity of academic disciplines. It is difficult to do justice to it in a small space, yet there are certain

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key concepts—dialogics; heteroglossia; carnival; the chronotope — that have become part of the common language of criticism and been adopted by almost bewilderingly diverse array of critics. This is in part at least because, for many, Bakhtin's ideas seemed to provide a way forward from the impasse of post-structuralism and to offer the possibility of a re-engagement between art and life. In Russia, moreover, he is admired as one who was willing to be genuinely marginal, independent in his thinking and unswayed by the powerful institutional pressures of Stalinism. For many he has become a heroic figure.

However, the breadth and allusiveness of Bakhtin's work pose special difficulties for both the graduate student and the non-specialist reader, and it is the needs of this audience in particular that Pam Morris, the editor of *The Bakhtin Reader*, is concerned to address. In a perceptive and lucidly written introduction, she supplies the essential historical background, including the debate on the authorship of works bearing the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev and concurring with Todorov's generous view that "it would seem horrifying to repeat the terrible practices of those years (of Stalinist persecution) by denying rightful authorship and identity to any of them" (pp.3-4); this initial discussion leads into a succinct guide to Bakhtin's works, presented chronologically, from his early work on aesthetics ('Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' 1920-24),

through the Voloshinov/Bakhtin critique of Freud (*Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* 1927) and of Marxism (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 1929), in the latter of which the term "dialogic" makes its first appearance in opposition to the "isolated, finished, monological utterance" of structuralism. Morris charts the continuity of ideas adumbrated in these early works through the later essays on literature: the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (the English translation *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* is an expanded later version of the 1929 essay), the great explorations of the novel from the 1930s and 40s (gathered together in the 1981 English translation by Emerson and Holquist under the title *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*), *Rabelais and his World* (1965) and the later work published in English in 1984 under the title *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. The problems of dating some of the texts and the complex relationship between the originals and their appearance in English translations is referred to briefly but not dwelt on to any extent; nor is there — reasonably enough — much reference to the different views adopted by Russian critics and the main opposed camps of Western scholars over issues of authorship in particular. Morris is concerned primarily to offer an introduction to Bakhtin's ideas rather than to the historical controversies.

The selections from the works are ordered thematically under four headings: Dialogic Discourse, The

Heteroglot Novel, Literature as Ideological Form and Carnival Ambivalence. The chosen passages represent all the major texts and each section and sub-heading has its own introduction. This is a valuable aid to reading especially as Bakhtin's terminology could be vague or ambiguous and the fact that his thought developed over many decades means that the terms he used developed new shades of meaning and applications. The first section on 'Dialogic Discourse' starts with the critiques of Saussurian linguistics and Freudianism, moving on through the early development of the notion of dialogic discourse by the analysis of the forms and effects of reported speech as the dialogic intersecting of two voices. There follows an extract from 'Discourse in the Novel' on social heteroglossia with its emphasis on the struggle and conflict produced by a 'contradictory and multi-language world' (p.275); though Bakhtin's purpose here is to explore the possibility of a poetics of the novel, he does this mainly through an analysis of speech representation and therefore roots his discussion of language firmly in the discourse of the "real world". This section ends with a passage from 'The Problems of Speech Genres' which deals with the relationship between speaking subjects and the formation of speech utterances, developing this in relation to the history of literary forms.

Section Two is entitled 'The Heteroglot Novel'. The extracts reflect the development of Bakhtin's thought from

the discussion of 'polyphony' in Dostoevsky's novels to the broader concerns of 'Discourse in the Novel' where he calls for a 'sociological stylistics' of the novel as a genre, reflecting a shift of emphasis from the individual voice to the language of real social groups. The term 'heteroglossia' implies both the variety of languages and the denial of absolute authority to any single language: the term is closely related to the oppositions between dialogism and monologism and the centrifugal and centripetal forces influencing language use.

Section Three deals with 'Literature as Ideological Form'. From the critique of Formalism expressed in the Medvedev/Bakhtin's text *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, it guides the reader through to the notion of a sociological poetics, and from there on to Bakhtin's aesthetic visualising of time and space in the chronotope, which is, he argues, a characteristic of the novel as opposed to the epic genre.

In Section Four, we are given an introduction to one of the most influential aspects of Bakhtin's thought, that of the 'carnival'. The historical circumstances surrounding the writing and defence of his doctoral thesis on Rabelais were, to say the least, unpropitious. Though completed in 1940, he was not called on to defend it until seven years later when the political climate was peculiarly hostile to such independent thought. His defence was so effective that the degree was awarded

but the work was not published and lay unregarded in the library at the Gorky Institute until in a late fifties, it was discovered by the group of graduate students who eventually sought him out in his obscurity. The English translation was published only in 1984 under the title *Rabelais and his World*. In the West, in particular, the notion of carnival has met extremes of enthusiasm and disagreement. Once again, he is concerned with the relation between social struggle and literary text, in this case the clash between the world of folk culture and the official dominant culture of the Middle Ages explored by Rabelais. However, he has been accused of idealising 'the folk' in his valorisation of popular humour and the liberating power of laughter and of failing to recognise the danger of victimisation of the marginalised in folk practices. Feminist critics, many of whom welcomed Bakhtin's work on dialogism, have been critical of his work on carnival as implying an unquestioning acceptance of certain patriarchal values. Morris refers briefly but helpfully to these areas of dissension, while pointing out that at the level of literary criticism 'the notion of carnival has offered productive new insights into many literary texts' (p.22).

Bakhtin's terminology frequently presents difficulties, characterised as it is by the use of neologisms and the exploitation of semantic ambiguities. The glossary by Graham Roberts is therefore very welcome. He provides a clear and concise explanation of key terms which

in its own way offers an introduction to Bakhtin's thought. Students to whom this is a new area should be encouraged to make full use of the glossary as a reading tool. The bibliography offers a representative selection of secondary reading.

When I first met *The Bakhtin Reader*, I felt this was exactly what was needed to introduce the neophyte to the rather intimidating mass and complexity of Bakhtin's thought. Within the limitations of copyright (and in particular the severe restrictions exercised by the University of Texas, which holds several of the key texts), Morris has achieved a very fair representation of Bakhtin's writings, while also providing a carefully signposted route by means of the introductions to each group of readings. This is a most useful book and should be included in the library of any department concerned with literary criticism, language or cultural studies.

McRae, John. *Literature with a Small 'l'*. MEP Monographs. London: Macmillan, 1991. 136pp.

by Vera Maria Drews Guimarães

Having come from a different background to that of Letters, interest in literature came to me through a history teacher whose work was truly educational in the sense of exploring various approaches and strategies for the formation of critical consciousness

among her students. Literature was a via of analysis of how meanings and values have been historically produced and used, of how structures of feelings — “thought as felt and feelings as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity” (Raymond Williams) — differed in past times and yet related to us in the present.

John McRae, passionate in his teaching, has produced *Literature with a Small ‘l’* to pass on his practical and theoretical findings that, similar to my past history teacher, help break the barrier between, if not literature and history, arts and science, literature and language and, most specifically, literature and second language teaching.

Bearing a humanistic pedagogical guideline, it is his contention that the objective of all teaching is “to help students become better readers of the world they live in” (11). ESL teaching, however, has to aim towards the subconscious and conscious acquisition of a language that has yet to become one’s own. In other words, ESL teaching has to aim towards the development of the ability to read the world in a SL.

Based on the natural first language learning technique of “wordplay” in which “children learn to use language through invention, experimentation and stories” (vii), McRae reasserts its validity and relevance for SL learning, extending his analysis through the study of Roman Jakobson’s functions of language. The notion of referential language is adopted

and counterpoised to the representational (conative, metalingual, and poetic functions in Jakobson) as all language which demands imaginative and emotional involvement to be decoded. As the author states, most ESL teaching materials are organised around models of referential language. The latter composes the core of communicative survival. It does not, however, contribute much towards the development of the *fifth* language skill which is essential for the acquisition of a shared means of expression: “thinking in English” (5).

Literary texts, as representational materials, become the contexts for learning and warrant the necessary input as emphasised by Krashen for the operation of the acquisition device. The underlying concept of McRae’s approach is expressed in the title, for a literary text is conceived as “any text whose imaginative content will stimulate reaction and response in the receiver” (vii) and which, different from referential material, greatly expands the environmental, contextual possibilities to which the learner can be motivated to respond to and interact with. If the ESL learner is as involved in construing meanings and linguistic meanings (Halliday) as an infant acquiring his/her first language, notwithstanding, he/she is fully aware of the cognitive component in learning. As such, this self-awareness “should be put to constructive use” (7).

Having expanded on the theoretical bases of his thesis in the first chapter,

McRae then embarks on the analysis of the various elements that come into play for teachers and students alike within the further ten chapters. Before delving into methodological models and examples, the author, however, assures both teachers and learners that although “Literature may be a minority interest [and, as an institution, inhibits its exploration], literature is not” (15). Enthusiastic but careful explorations of its potentials and of the multiplicity of discourses embedded within it can expand the educational experience beyond the limits of the classroom, for as the author sustains, literary texts are the means, not ends in themselves, for various educational endeavours.

McRae discusses such elements as motivation, accessibility, affective, linguistic, meta-linguistic, and cultural factors involved once using literature as a communicative stimulus and as a basis of language study. All discussions are exemplified through texts and activities which the author himself has found useful in his own teaching experience. Materials, genres, basic literary and semiotic concepts of various kinds are covered and possibilities for their utilisation are expanded in minutiae.

Teaching apparatuses, techniques, and procedural developments are assessed in accordance to possibly different and diverging contexts. The author stresses the necessity of taking cognitive, affective, and cultural factors in consideration both on the personal and social level. And although texts should

be carefully chosen — the reason one adopts one text and not another should always be clear — the author is sure to stress that it is more a matter of how the teacher guides the students through the text and after what such guidance seeks for that ultimately makes the difference.

The question of evaluation is broached and some possible systems are evaluated. Though answers are not provided, given the expectations and developments within the educational processes, McRae clearly states what he considers to be the best underlying rationales involved in testing: objectivity, flexibility, credibility, and sincerity.

Although the book is clearly addressed to the ESL teacher, its content as a whole may serve as a basis for the study of literature as a specialist subject. To this matter, the author dedicates the last chapter, passing through a brief analysis of the field of study and of underlying matters such as ideology and critical skills. The expansion of this discussion can be deepened through the resourceful bibliography both referred to in the text and further indicated. A list of relatively recent representational textbooks for L2 situations is included.

Because representational materials, particularly literary texts, by their substantial and general character, imitate the complexity and richness of social relations and express them through accompanying languages (“other Englishes” as well), they insure the necessary provision of the most

diverse intake for meaningful acquisition and learning. McRae courageously asserts: "Education should, at best, be subversive" (69). Although he does not profess an insurgent uprising against values and meanings, he does profess a constant insurgent probing and questioning of all values and meanings. In the particular context of ESL learning, the questions of why, what, and how language is produced and read can lead to the questioning of language as discourse.

Students may come to subconsciously acquire a language while consciously concentrating on various aspects embedded in language and, particularly, in the language being learned. The purpose of pedagogy is not to conceal reality. The purpose of pedagogy — and, in our case, of language — is to develop a heightened awareness of its limits and potentials, for as the author declares: "If we can convince students that there are structures of feeling in the world. . . we will have shown them that reading develops understanding, influences feelings, helps us see and experience our world better" (19-20).

Usher, Robin & Edwards, Richard.
Postmodernism and Education.
London and New York: Routledge,
1994. 246 pp.

by Vera Helena Gomes Wielewicki

How related are postmodernism and education? If we bear in mind the

traditional concept of education, with sacralized institutions, like universities, imposing rules to be followed, no easy connection can be made with the postmodern moment. Fragmentation and inconsistency, ideas associated with postmodernism, do not seem to match education. Usher and Edwards are aware of the troublesome task they have settled themselves to. In the Introduction, the authors enumerate three major problems of dealing with their subject: the complexity of the term "postmodernism", resisting reductive explanations; the difficulty of relating postmodernism to a fixed body of ideas; and the resistance of education to the postmodern "message", since the role of the educator is founded on the rational, modern subject rather than on the decentred postmodern subject. The authors, then, have chosen to examine four authors that are inscribed in the postmodern moment — Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard —, although they have not dedicated their writings to education specifically, apart from Lyotard. Usher and Edwards are also preoccupied with not being prescriptive, which would be inappropriate in a text that talks about the postmodern, and invite their readers to deconstruct it. *Postmodernism and Education*, then, is a worthwhile reading for those who are interested not in the Saint Education that will save people from ignorance through a safe path, but in the kaleidoscopic view of it: always moving and never grasped.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, plus the index. In the first one,

"Postmodernism, Postmodernity and the Postmodern Moment", the authors discuss the postmodern (the power of language and discourse; reflexivity) in contrast with the modern (the pursuit of the "true" knowledge and its "neutrality"). The "uneasy alliance" between postmodernism and feminism is briefly discussed. The last section is dedicated to locating education in the postmodern, where the points presented in the Introduction are expanded a little. Usher and Edwards leave the more complex discussions to the following chapters.

The construction of the human subject, according to the different varieties of psychology — behaviourism and humanistic psychology, for example —, is the subject of the second chapter, "Speaking 'Truthfully': Science, Psychology and Subjectivity". Following what has become a habit in texts on postmodernism, the authors discuss truth and the scientific method, more specifically regarded to psychology. The two last sections deal with education and the postmodern moment, an introduction to the third chapter, on Lacan.

"Knowing Oneself: Subjectivity and Mastery", the third chapter, begins with a discussion on Freud and the notion of unconsciousness. Moving to a postmodern perspective of the subject, the authors discuss the Lacanian conception of desire, stressing his critique of intentionality. The last section deals with education more specifically. The

authors review the Lacanian critique of knowledge discourses, commenting on the discourse of the University and the discourse of the Analyst and their relation to pedagogy. For Usher and Edwards, Lacan can be read as suggesting that teachers and students should be lifelong learners, teachers should "continually question the ground upon which they stand, to question their own ready implication in a discourse of mastery".

Foucault is the focus of chapters four and five, "Subject Disciplines and Disciplining Subjects: The Subject in Education", and "Examining the Case: Competence and Management", respectively. In chapter four, some of Foucault's texts are discussed in terms of power-knowledge relations. Discipline, confession, and resistance guide the critique of modernity in this part of the book. The next chapter turns to the question of how the governance of people happens. For Foucault, according to the authors, the aim of modern social formations is "to maximise the usefulness of that population", and that is the point Usher and Edwards develop in the rest of the chapter, concluding that the implications of Foucault's concepts for educational theory and practice, although yet unclear, are likely to make what, where, and how is learned, more contested and contestable.

Chapter six, "The 'End' of the Educational Project" and chapter seven, "Education and Textuality", are the ones dedicated to Derrida. The authors call

their reader's attention to the problem of writing about Derrida and education, since he seems to have nothing directly to say about it. Moreover, they continue, we cannot approach Derrida with our "normal", academic frames of interpretation, for they are part of the project he interrogates and challenges. So, Usher and Edwards discuss the logocentrism of the educational project and the notion of supplementarity according to Derrida's texts to question education. In the seventh chapter, the authors discuss writing and subjectivity, concluding with the notion of reflexivity. For them, being aware of reflexivity in education is important because "even we have some confidence that our research is useful or even emancipatory, we are still 'objectifying', still speaking for others in the name of doing good by them" (authors' italics).

Science as a form of language game, played alongside narrative knowledge, is the subject of chapter eight, "Telling Stories: The Legitimising of Knowledge", on Lyotard. The authors discuss grand narratives and the legitimisation of science and knowledge, and performativity, the technical game of efficiency and inefficiency, applied to language games by decision-makers. In the next chapter, "The End of the Story: Education, Efficiency and Resistance", Usher and Edwards go deeper in the concepts discussed before and their implications for education. Discussions on technology and performativity are the main point of this chapter, that ends with

some criticism on Lyotard by other authors and the remark that Lyotard, like the other authors discussed in the book, challenges us to rethink knowledge and education, "at a time when the grand narratives are under challenge by postmodern developments and the linked but not identical criterion of performativity".

The last two chapters bring the authors', let us say, final remarks on postmodernism and education. Usher and Edwards themselves call their readers' attention to the difficulties of writing a concluding chapter on the subject, since it would render their text "internally inconsistent". Chapter ten, "The Cultivation of Desire", deals with themes like experience, late capitalism, the new middle classes, feminism in the postmodern moment. Chapter eleven, "Catching the (Last) Post", offers "observations and resonances" on the subject, with the authors' recognition that, although they try to avoid conclusions, their text is not "innocent", and their conclusions, in a way or another, are there.