

Araştırma-İnceleme

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BAKHTIN'S CHRONOTOPE

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Abstract: Although Western academic circles have become familiar with intellectual work of Mikhail Bakhtin only a decade after his passing, its influence is impossible to underestimate. However, not only have his theories and concepts reached the Western academic thought indirectly via proxies of the likes of Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov, but they have also not been rigorously scrutinized for consistency and objectivity. Following postmodern nihilistic rebellion against the language itself by Jacques Derrida and the like, perceived as an instrument of hegemonic structures, it falls to current academicians to reevaluate modern thought, extract concise terms, concepts and categories to reconstitute contemporary unambiguous tools for research. It is in pursuit of such consistency that current research provides critical analysis of Bakhtin's concept of chronotope exposing several logical inconsistencies and contradictions in its definition, constituents, origins and application, while recognizing its strength as going far beyond the scope of literary analysis and retaining applicability to written, theatric and cinematic traditions. Besides addressing the concept of chronotope as such, the necessity of specific distinct types of idyll is also questioned, suggesting that such could have been broken down to their more basic and more universal elements not bound to the folkloristic culture, but to the very human nature and events experienced universally regardless of literary or oral tradition.

Keywords: Chronotope, Dialogic Culture, Polyphony, Semiotics.

BAKHTIN KRONOTOPU'NUN ELEŞTİREL ANALİZİ

Öz: Batı akademik çevreleri, ölümünden on sene sonra üretimlerinden haberdar olduysa da Mikhail Bakhtin'in etkisini yadsımak imkansızdır. Bununla beraber, Julia Kristeva ve Tzvetan Todorov gibi araçlar ile Bakhtin'in teorileri ve konseptleri Batı akademi dünyasına erişmiş, fakat tutarlılık ve objektiflik açısından değerlendirilmemiştir. Jacques Derrida'nın getirdiği, dile karşı olan postmodern nihilistik isyanı takip eden, hegemonik yapıların ürünü olarak görünen bu ürünleri tartışmak,

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modern düşünceyi yeniden değerlendirmek, mücmel terimleri, konseptleri ve kategorileri belirlemek; böylelikle çağdaş, anlam muallaklığından uzak araştırma yöntemleri icat etmek günümüz akademisyenlerine düşmektedir. Günümüz çalışmalarının Bakhtin'in öne sürdüğü kuramların gücünü ve edebi analizin ötesine geçtiğini, yazılı, teatral ve sinematik geleneklere uygulanabilirliğini göz önünde bulundurarak, Bakhtin'in zaman ve mekân ikiliği konsepti üzerinde bulunan birkaç mantıksal uyumsuzluk; tanımında, bileşenlerinde, kökenlerinde ve uygulanmasında tutarsızlıkların ve çelişkilerin çalışılması belirtilen tartışmanın ürünüdür. Böyle bir eleştirel yaklaşımın daha ileri düzeyde uygulanabilirliğini göstermek ve benzer şekilde Bakhtin'in çalışmasını incelemek amacıyla bu makale maske konseptine, ve Bakhtin'in başka sabit türleri koruduğu ve çok sesli zaman-mekan ilişkisine bağladığı daha saf ve katı kategorilere bağlı kalmanın imkansızlığına değinir. Zaman ve mekan ikiliğini bu şekilde ifade etmenin yanısıra belli özel, öne çıkan idilik temalara duyulan gerek de sorgulanmış; bu temaların folklörden bağımsız, daha basit ve daha evrensel öğelere indirgenebileceği bulgulanmış, yazılı ya da sözlü gelenekten bağımsız olarak insan doğasına dahil olduğu bulgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kronotop, Diyalojik Kültür, Çokseslilik, Göstergebilim.

Introduction

While literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin have been enjoying steady attention within the Western academic sphere since their introduction into Francophone circles in the 80ies by the likes of Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov, it was and is not always his original work, but rather the interpretations and influences that fell under scrutiny of contemporary gaze. Current research paper goes back to Bakhtin's original work and investigates one of the core concepts of his theory and philosophy. To begin with, it is necessary to comment on the overarching paradigm of Bakhtin's theories. Generalizing, one could say that Bakhtin's vision not only of literature, but of the very human history is chronotopic:

“even in segmentation of a modern literary work we sense the chronotope of the represented world as well as the chronotope of the readers and creators of the work. That is, we get a mutual interaction between the world represented in the work and the world outside the work” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 255).

One has to look into “Speech Genres and Other Late Essays” for a concise description of the role of chronotope in historical process:

“Time and space merge ... into an inseparable unity ... a definite and absolutely concrete locality serves at the starting point for the creative imagination... this is a piece of human history, historical time condensed into space. Therefore, the plot (sum of depicted events) and the characters ... are like those creative forces that formulated and humanized this landscape, they made it a speaking vestige of the movement of history (historical time), and, to a certain degree, predetermined its subsequent course as well, or like those creative forces a given locality needs

in order to organize and continue the historical process embodied in it" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 49).

This holistic vision is at the same time the greatest strength and weakness of Bakhtin's theory. When one is comparing to postmodern often disjoint and fragmented systems based on the principle of redefining, opposing and defying (language, structures, systems, concepts...) and, so it at times seems, purposefully focusing on confusion of the reader (like in case of Derrida's *différance* or the difference and repetition of Deleuze); Bakhtin's theories offer a complete, coherent and holistic system, capable of passing the test of time. However, in attempting to provide a kind of a universal framework, which would really get at the core of literary history, he falls into the trap of ideological (as opposed to what he calls "dialogical") system of his own creation. This becomes particularly clear when one is looking in a greater detail at his terminology and the elements which he derives from "folkloristic past" or the "ancient matrices" themselves.

This paper follows Bakhtin's own principle by engaging into a dialogue with his concepts and ideas, opening them up from a critical perspective, pointing out what appears to be weak or strong argument following along the lines of his "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel". While offering a sympathetic look at Bakhtin's approach on the level of chronotope, continuity, dialogic nature of literature, a number of problems with his specific applications, some cases of wording and definitions are exposed.

1. On the nature, roots and conflicts of chronotopic system

In developing his system, Bakhtin is referring to the early folkloristic dialogic culture of humanity. For him the main principles therefore become those of the reality of the early oral culture: interconnectedness (time and space, tradition, functionality of various life activities), cyclical continuity (of generations, space and time). He then defines the category of chronotope as the core, upon which literary texts have developed historically by either developing more specific elements of chronotope, opposing them or placing them on a more metaphorical level in discourse of their novel.

"We will give the name *chronotope* [literary, "time space"] to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature", - says Bakhtin, - "We understand the chronotope as the formally constructive category of literature" (Bakhtin, 1988, pp. 252-253).

However, later he includes into the chronotopic system both the reader, the writer and the context in which they are reading and writing the book, in a way having a textual dialogue. Furthermore,

"The text as such never appears as a dead thing - [...] we always arrive in the final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being. But the text is always imprisoned in dead material..." (Bakhtin, 1988, pp. 252-253)

Therefore, we can witness a slightly metaphysical attitude towards the text in Bakhtin's theoretical framework.

Comparing Bakhtin to Derrida, Esmail Yazdanpour points out the social and constructive nature of Bakhtin's vision:

“Derrida, like his counterpart in the world of physics, believes in the absolute freedom of affairs, of their unrelatedness, of their essential *différance*; for Bakhtin, in a different way, the affairs and things are related to each other, and the true object of knowledge is the relation that these things have with each other.” (Yazdanpour, 1998)

While for Derrida *différance* is this metaphysical obstacle in the way of communication, - for Bakhtin the obstacle is communication itself, since there is no core to rely upon, but everything is a dialogue and there is no static ground, no identity to base oneself upon.

“To Bakhtin an identity absolutely free from the others is a false one that is propagated by those who are in power in the society; and the novel is a privileged genre as it affirms the plurality and essential difference between the identities and ideas of the people. It is impossible for two persons, in a novelistic, Bakhtinian approach to have the same identical identity/ideology. They may have common ideas, but this, in itself, is not so great as to hide or blur the fact that they are different in some other features.” (Yazdanpour, 1998)

A curious and original point is in focusing on how the space of the novel is bound by time and vice versa, how indeed every action (inside the novel and outside of it through our act of reading) is what makes the time in the novel move, since the novel itself is a static text, where time does not flow unless we read it and we furthermore establish a temporal relation to the text by reading it within our own time frame. It furthermore allows developing a range of particular time-space capsules with different sets of properties common for specific genres or authors, distinct from diegesis by being transferable to new works, being a superstructure.

2. Visual and oral: strength yet weakness

Furthermore, Bakhtin reinforces the spatiotemporal link through reference to the necessity of the material sign for realization of artistic thought:

“in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible for us (a hieroglyph, a mathematical formula [...]). Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 256).

Although already in the specification part one can point out a subjective attribution of what this sign has to constitute: “audible and visible”, which Bakhtin chooses to strengthen relation to the oral culture, without a justification for the necessary presence of these two properties. While the point in respect to the necessity of an expression of an abstract thought in some form in order to communicate it is most valid (and here one can easily spot a place for the sign and signifier debate), - the necessity to bind this expression to these two senses

at the same time is not justified other than that it is a part of Bakhtin's oral culture-based vision or a metaphor.

This point, however, adds to the universality of his theory in terms of its applicability to various disciplines within the field of humanities, since one can clearly, and perhaps even more vividly spot this both complex and simple relationship for instance in cinematography, where Bakhtin's "audible and visible" constitute the very flesh of the medium and the spatiotemporal flow is self-evident.

3. Coherent theory with incoherent elements

From here on subjective theoretical points keep growing. One of the main ones is the multiplicity:

"chronotope can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes, in fact, as we have already said, any motif may have a special chronotope of its own. Any and every literary image is chronotopic. Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in even more complex interrelationships". (Bakhtin, 1988, pp. 251-252)

Whenever the term or a definition includes an unlimited diversity of uses and elements and permits for unlimited multiplication and mixing, - its usefulness is accordingly diminished. By analogy here one is left with studying the properties of a glass of water, where every drop of water is unique and requires a separate analysis and is interacting with other drops of water and within itself. Furthermore, Bakhtin's "we do not pretend to completeness or precision in our theoretical formulations and definitions" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 85) metaphorically hammers a heavy nail into the contingency coffin of the theory, leading to what can be seen as a destructive path taken by the generation of poststructuralist literary critics of the French school, challenging the language and terminologies while trying to explain themselves using it or twisting it into semi-familiar terms (once again *différance*).

4. Multitude of voices: dialogue of static definitions

In order to understand Bakhtin's line of thought, one has to realize that for him dialogic polyphonic nature of reality is factual, it is diverse and "alive" like the ongoing "dialogue of the open social spaces" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 161).

"Bakhtin introduced the idea of dialogic, which sees the working of many different forces in the movement of history. This is a plural view; therefore, it cannot be a system, and there is no need to *justify* any previous interpretation. [...] It seeks to *know* the events (and the relationship between them) not to *interpret* them according to one specific ideology, [...] every attempt to know brings some sort of relevance and even respect for the knowledge of the other people. [...] It shows all the attempts to knowledge with a sideward glance, a loophole, an inevitable relation to the knowledge of the other people. In contrast to Hegel's pure Idea, the Absolute, the Final Meaning, the Last Word, in Bakhtin's methodology there is no pure wisdom, no idea with capital 'I.' There are only wisdoms, ideas, which are dependent on each other; they are

interdependent, under direct and indirect influence of each other." (Yazdanpour, 1998)

However, what is this plurality? The best way to refute logic of Bakhtin's theory is to look at Bakhtin's practice: what are his chronotopes, but the defined self-enclosed units? Indeed, the dialogue is possible inside the chronotope and between chronotopes, as he states, yet the way they are formed is by analysis of static concepts, contrary to Bakhtin's determination to create a social kind of world system. When speaking of the folkloristic roots Bakhtin operates with a static concept of what this oral folk culture is (though he never precisely defines it, it shines through the chronotopes, which he defines by it) at least separating it from the contemporary dialogue and context (as seen in his stubborn tracing of idyllic chronotope). The "ancient matrices" again constitute static elements of people's lives: with or without plurality of voices death is still death and birth is still birth.

"In dialectic there are only two opposed forces, in dialogic many; dialectic, quite like the monologic world of the epic is utopian; it wants the two forces to lead to a unified whole, a synthesis; dialogics, leads to a study of the different forces: it leads to *epistemology*. (Yazdanpour, 1998) "When novel becomes the dominant genre, epistemology becomes the dominant discipline" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 15)

Yet when the author is deciding on the format of the voices and on their chronotopic borders, the indefinite plurality is already framed and restricted.

"The point however, is that according to M. M. Bakhtin, the concept of a novel is defined by a different, a far more radical understanding of the word "dialogue". Truly dialogical word for him is not just a word with "looking back at" opinions of others, but a word, striving for the principal "ununifiability" with all other points of view. At the base of such dialogue lies a feeling of each of its participants that not only foreign, but one's own position is in advance incomplete and limited. He joins the argument knowing in advance that it will not lead to any positive conclusion..." (Косиков, 1993)

5. Bakhtin as the demiurge of chronotopic idyll

Bakhtin is addressing the issue of potential excessive diversity with establishment of "the major chronotopes, those are most fundamental and wide-ranging" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 252), however, which ones are the major ones and where exactly their borders are, what they include is left to Bakhtin to decide. And here, like in any case with his theory, one can simply utter words "folkloristic", "ancient", "oral", "dialogic" without much thought. This is again his personal choice and one might as well argue that the whole folkloristic reference is a secondary layer to the more basic elements of human (as opposed to folkloristic) life, such as death, birth, love, food, labor, family, - neither the ancients, nor the folk have a monopoly over them. Bakhtin continues by making them into properties of idyllic chronotopes, which are "all determined by their general relationship to the immanent unity of folkloric time" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 225). Bakhtin then defines more specific pure types of chronotope: love idyll (pastoral), agricultural labor idyll, craft work idyll, family idyll. Although he

convincingly illustrates how they determined the development of the novel, one might as well question whether specific pure types ever existed as literary units to which authors responded even if implicitly. Or perhaps we are dealing with a more abstract space-time relationship in the broader sense and various forms that it takes, upon which the layers of contemporary ideas, traditions, value systems and literary techniques act.

Here once again chronotope performs well as a concept, but perhaps slightly less so when one lays claims as to which chronotopes were at the core of literary history. An easy way to illustrate the problem with idyllic chronotopes is that one is able to follow Bakhtin's line of argument without actually referring to them and instead alluding to the changes in the social systems of values, basic human experience (love, death, meal, family, work...), all interacting with each other in a polyphonic dialogue and encapsulated into various chronotopic containers of novels, following with the zeitgeist and human lives alone.

6. Double standards of continuity versus contemporarity

The same line of criticism applies to all of Bakhtin's work: while claiming inseparability of the time and space in relation to the social life of specific time, Bakhtin is determined to still hold on to the idyll types defined by the earlier oral folkloristic society and its value systems. He convincingly debates their [of idyll types] alterations and intermingling, forming a different line of historical development of the novel, however, such development theory suggests, that the authors first of all reacted to these idyllic chronotopes, rather than being continuous and expressive of their contemporary time in the first place. For Bakhtin evolution of novel therefore becomes internal, while if one chooses to see novel as an artistic reflection of contemporary time, one will have to admit that the authors were just as likely reacting to the changes in the life and values around them. In this respect Bakhtin's idea of continuity is in conflict with his own concept of idyllic chronotopes, since he prioritizes them comparing to the present-day reality of people (authors) and their living "dialogue" in the broadest sense.

G. K. Kosikov furthermore illustrates exactly the point why Bakhtin's theory might be failing at gaining trust among contemporary literary critic:

"Following Hegel, who defined the novelistic collision as "conflict between the poetry of heart and the counterpoising prose of the life's relationships", as counterpoising between "the endless subjectivity within itself", on the one hand and "the rational, ordered by one's own power world" – on the other, the majority of contemporary authors [...] assume that the core of the novel is in its orientation on the depiction of "autonomized", "emancipated", and quite often "self-dominating" *individuality*, living, as Hegel says "by the ideals and endless laws of the heart" and being in disharmony with the "surrounding environment with its norms and demands." (Косиков, 1993)

7. Bakhtin's struggle against ideologies and stylistics: the snake bites its tail?

Bakhtin is open about his intention "the principal idea of this essay is that the study of verbal art can and must overcome the diverse between an abstract "formal" approach and an equally abstract "ideological" approach" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 259). What suffers in this logic is that literature (as a possibility) has already detached itself from the oral base upon which it grew and entered the field of written, as opposed to oral. By defying the formal approach, Bakhtin is refusing attention to the structural elements, which are the flesh of the living textual body of novel, instead embracing them as a polyphonic (or should we say cacophonous due to the limitless diversity?) chaos of unique elements all in constant intermingling and dialogue with one another and the reader.

When criticizing stylistics, as ignorant "of social life of discourse outside the artists' study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 259), he can be just as well criticized of being ignorant of the "private craftsmanship". It of course boils down to a matter of critic's choice, which elements to prioritize when analyzing a novel: be it historical context, social context, author's personal reflection and circumstances; however, either choice is bound to impair or rule out attention to the other elements. It is furthermore debatable, whether the public discourse really is that important to every author (and consequently to every novel) and if every author really is being influenced thereby and not by intertextual discourse between the authors through their works, contemporary ideology or personal circumstances to a far more defining degree. While the author is of course suspended in the various "dialogues", it is his inner philosophy, his "private craftsmanship", which makes the novel possible in the first place. One can exclude the social context and still have a novel, but one cannot exclude the author (despite the postmodern fanciful attempts at staging "death of the author", he survives by the mere fact of being the text's creator).

8. Idyll as a forced presence

But let us focus at what Bakhtin claims to be distinctive features of the idyllic types: not only "continuity of life", "unity of place", but somehow also "love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, stages of growth – these are the basic realities of idyllic life" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 225). One may as well wonder if Bakhtin is not cramming too much into his category making it indeed very universal. One is furthermore left to wonder why the "realities of idyllic life" are simply present in the "human life" as its universal basic elements, which are deeply felt by every individual outside of the oral and the public discourse, just as much as they are being reflected in it. Is not the public discourse itself and the folkloristic oral culture itself simply a reflection of these basic reality elements?

“These values, unity of which can be named with a collective term Idea, are spread throughout life itself, piercing it from one end to the other and therefore are accessible to the hero, forming his “heart”, and providing his substantial unity with the world” (Косиков, 1993)

If so, then why refer to the zeitgeist of the folkloristic time of peasant idyll and not to these basic principles in the first place and how they are developed in literature through their dialogic relation as well as through evolution of their significance for contemporary society and individual? In his analysis Bakhtin refers to the increasing role of the individualism and the internalization of idyllic categories, however he refuses to abandon his self-enclosed idyllic chronotopes resorting to fragmenting them and saying that they only partially remained in the novel as a “philosophical sublimation” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 230) or “a man of the people” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 235). For Bakhtin the importance here is the holistic and continuous vision of literary process, validly so, but truly only one of the possibilities at exploring the complex issue of evolution of the novel.

9. Love idyll

Let us look more specifically at the theme of love, which Bakhtin somehow sees as the “love idyll” (once again, why do we need the term idyll in this formula?).

“The utterly conventional simplicity of life in the bosom of nature is opposed to social conventions, complexity and the disjunctions of everyday private life; life here is abstracted into a love that is completely sublimated. Beneath the conventional, metaphorical, stylized aspects of such a love one can still dimly perceive the immanent unity of time and the ancient matrices. For this reason the love idyll was able to serve as the foundation for various types of novels...” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 230)

What appears striking here is the ignorance of a much more simple explanation as to why the theme of love is ever-present in literature of all times to begin with: love is a part of (most often individual) human life and primarily of the interpersonal experience, which has little to do with “dimly perceivable ancient matrices” (although present in the past just as much as in the present simply by the fact of being a part of human nature) and oral folkloristic culture with its values (which is why love stays, while its role changes all the way). Bakhtin correctly points out one of the uses of the theme of love as a stylistic (which he earlier dismisses as a narrow approach) device to oppose social conventions. However, where do these conventions come from? Are they not born out of social and artistic discourse exactly (since for Bakhtin literature is born out of social discourse and it is in the various kinds of literature and social sphere that we exactly find various forms of social conventions and their reinforcement)?

10. Labour idyll

Let us furthermore look at the family and labor idyll chronotopes; - they are most often intertwined according to Bakhtin. Arguing along the lines of the socialist theoreticians, Bakhtin links the agricultural labor, its materiality, and

furthermore materiality of all events related to it (since they become truly functional and not metaphorical) to the "archaic matrices" (the core, the essence), however, his vocabulary at that is rather ideological:

"agricultural labor transforms all the events of everyday life, stripping them of that private petty character obtaining when man is nothing but consumer", "people consume the produce of their own labor" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 227).

Although it is straightforward, what way of life transposed into the literary world Bakhtin is arguing in favor of here (peasant one), it is not clear, why the private character is necessarily "petty" or anything outside the manual labor makes this private character a "consumer". In other words, he mixes the polemics of ancient idyll with that of industrial times and socialist debate on consumerism. During the "archaic" times where the roots of idyll lie for Bakhtin, the notion of consumerism has not been present, if only in the theme of greed, therefore, there is no justified reason for his phrasing lumping social theories of different times in one critical structure. Thus, he is contradicting his own principle of inseparability of time and space and counterpoising conflicts of different historical chronotopes: "The relationships themselves that exist among chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships contained within chronotopes." (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 252)

11. Utopia of idyllic history

Let us now look more specifically at Bakhtin's history of literature through the idyll.

Bakhtin refers to Rousseau and suggests that the idyllic elements of

"nature, love, childbearing – death are now treated at a higher philosophical level [...] as forms of the great, eternal, wise force of earthly love. [...] These elements provide material for constituting an isolated individual consciousness, [...] act as forces that can heal, purify and reassure" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 230).

What is curious here is that Bakhtin's chronotope is originally built upon the oral dialogic folkloristic past, it is in a way a socially defined category, however, in Rousseau it is exactly these elements which are removed, as, according to Bakhtin himself, the categories become philosophical and elements of an isolated individual (few pages ago "private petty character" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 227)) consciousness. "Love becomes an elemental, mysterious and – more often than not – fatal force for those who love, and all this is interiorized" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 231) – once again, is Bakhtin really talking about transformation of the love idyll type or is he rather ignoring an entirely different use of the category? Bakhtin justifies this with the kind of transformation of love and other categories by a philosophical sublimation. He acknowledges that this category is new and that the old one is preserved as well, however, one may see the contradiction here in that the only remaining element is the theme of love itself, while the application of this theme is what changes. This change is best explained again through the ideas and changes of society contemporary to

the author (in this sense the chronotope concept works well, but on a different meta-level).

Venturing further into the nineteenth century, Bakhtin establishes the new paradigm of literature as the one aimed at destruction of idyll. The natural idyllic life is portrayed as limited, isolated and small, something that is bound to perish in the face of the emerging new progressive, yet alien and abstract world. The mankind is growing out of the idyllic cradle conquering the new industrialized world, learning new ways of communication, while being "egoistically sealed-off from each other, greedily practical" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 234). "Here the process of man's reeducation is interwoven with the process of society's breakdown and reconstruction, that is, with historical process." (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 234) Once again one may question the significance of the destruction of idyll as opposed to the attempts to grasp and represent the new reality contemporary to the author. Why does Bakhtin not speak of chronotope of rebirth?

12. Masks of the Rogue, the Clown and the Fool

This brings the paper to a different set of artistic categories in Bakhtin's system: the rogue, clown and fool. Their functions are crucial to the novel and Bakhtin defines three key ones:

"first a vital connection with the theatrical trappings of the public square, with the mask of the public spectacle, [...] with that highly specific extremely important area of the square where the common people congregate; second – [...] the very meaning of these figures does not have a direct, but rather a metaphorical, significance; third – [...] their existence is a reflection of some other's mode of being – an even then, not a direct reflection. They are life's maskers..." (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 159)

By being outside the main chronotope, they possess a unique right - "the right to be the "other" in this world... The rogue, the clown and the fool create around themselves their own special little world, their own chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 159). This enables them to become the "voice" of the author, since it is his critical perspective on the more foul sides of reality that they help to carry into life. "And it is precisely here, of course, that the masks of the clown and the fool (transformed in various ways) come to the aid of the novelist." (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 161)

13. Ambiguity strikes again

This point in Bakhtin's system is, however, slightly ambiguous in the sense that just like there are no pure chronotopes present in the novels for him, there are also, by the same logic, no pure masks. If we take Bakhtin's example with Don Quixote, - the role of Sancho for example is not straightforward: while Quixote is clearly out of synch with reality, - he is a sad crank, while it is little fat pragmatic Sancho, who would better fit the conventional clown stereotype. Yet, according to Bakhtin, making Sancho into a clown would mean that he is the one, "outside" the chronotope of reality.

14. Protagonist external to the chronotope of the novel?

At this point it would be useful to recall Shakespeare's "Hamlet", where the main protagonist is clearly combining the role of the central tragic hero with that of the "madman" (a variation of a fool according to Bakhtin himself). Within Bakhtin's theoretical claim, Shakespeare's play is a contradiction to the mechanism of exploiting the madman's mask: unlike Don Quixote, Hamlet is not oblivious to reality of the novel, not outside of it, instead the novel is built around him. However, Hamlet is performing some of the functions clearly identified by Bakhtin as belonging to the clown's mask, like for example strong remarks on the "specifically nonpublic spheres of life – for example, the sexual sphere" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 161) in calling Polonius a "fishmonger" (slang for brothel keeper during Victorian age) and then developing this line further with Ophelia:

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Lying down at OPHELIA's feet

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs. (Shakespeare, 1993)

He is furthermore most in tune with the visiting actors illustrating exactly that link to the public square that Bakhtin is mentioning as pivotal point. The direct contradicting point here is the ambiguity of Hamlet's (in)sanity: we are at the same time made aware that he is merely wearing a mask. According to Bakhtin, however for the clown, rogue and fool "their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist." (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 159) Yet Hamlet does exist without the mask and if one indeed perceives him as a madman through and through, - the effect of the play is significantly downplayed.

Conclusion

To conclude the analysis, it would be sensible to once again reiterate the point of indisputable strength of Bakhtin's vision in its ability not only to transcend the time period when it was created, but perhaps to serve as a linking element

within modern multicultural context, as all societies. Since the debatable point of the folkloristic oral culture of the European past, which Bakhtin successfully detects in the novels might be the linking element in establishing a cross-cultural link to understanding of contemporary literature and oral literature of postcolonial spaces as well. In placing the folk, and the ancient matrices (or, as current paper argues, the core elements of every human life) at the core of literary texts and history, Bakhtin secures the future place for his method as long as mankind shares life, death and dialogue.

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