

# *Landmark Essays*

on  
Bakhtin, Rhetoric,  
and Writing

Edited by  
Frank Farmer



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Essays*

on

**Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing**

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**Hermagoras Press**  
**An Imprint of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers**

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## *Landmark Essays Volume Thirteen*

Cover design by Kathi Zamminer

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Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers  
10 Industrial Avenue  
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication-Data

Landmark essays on Bakhtin, rhetoric, and writing / edited by Frank Farmer.  
p. cm. — (Landmark essays : v. 13)  
ISBN 1-880393-31-X (pbk.: alk. paper)  
1. English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching. 2. Bakhtin, M. I. (Mikhail Ivanovich)—Views on rhetoric. 3. Report writing—Study and teaching. I. Farmer, Frank. II. Title: Bakhtin, rhetoric, and writing III. Series.  
PE1404.L274 1997  
808'.042'07-DC21 97-38587  
CIP

Books published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates are printed on acid-free paper, and their bindings are chosen for strength and durability.

Printed in the United States of America  
1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*for Linda*  
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### ***About the Editor***

Frank Farmer is an Associate Professor of English at East Carolina University where he teaches writing and graduate courses in rhetorical theory and history. His work has previously appeared in *Rhetoric Review*, *Focuses*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Freshman English News*, and he has articles forthcoming in *College Composition and Communication* and *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. His present research interests explore Bakhtinian intersections with American pragmatist thought.

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## *Acknowledgments*

I am grateful to the many colleagues who supported this project, and whose advice and encouragement had much to do with its completion. I would like to extend special thanks to James J. Murphy, Kathleen O'Malley, Linda Bathgate, and Jennifer Zinn. I am especially grateful for support received from the English Department, College of Arts & Sciences, and Graduate School of East Carolina University.



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## Introduction

It is not the unambiguity of a word but its ambiguity that constitutes living language. The ambiguity creates the problematic of speech, and it creates its overcoming in an understanding that is not an assimilation but a fruitfulness. The ambiguity of a word, which we may call its aura, must to some measure already have existed whenever men in their multiplicity meet each other, expressing this multiplicity in order not to succumb to it. It is the nature of the logos as at once 'word' and 'meaning' which makes man man. (104-5)

—Martin Buber

In one of the first essays on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to appear in the West, Julia Kristeva explains Bakhtin's concept of "double-voiced" discourse in terms of semiotic ambivalence. Kristeva observes that when a writer uses "another's word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had," what results "is a word with two significations," an "ambivalent word." Kristeva understands the double-voiced or ambivalent word in structuralist terms, that is, as the "joining of two sign systems," the result of which "relativizes the text" (43-44).

I open this introduction with two profoundly different thinkers who, despite the expanse between their respective ideas and moments, are able to represent important "links in the chain of speech communion" that demarcate Bakhtin's intellectually productive years (*SG* 76). Buber, whose work Bakhtin knew, shares with Bakhtin a common motif, *dialogue*, and offers to him one of several voices at large in a neo-Kantian milieu to which Bakhtin's writings may be partially understood as an answer. Kristeva, writing at the end of Bakhtin's life, responds to his ideas in the context of French structuralism and, in the process, offers one of the first introductions of Bakhtin's thought to a Western audience. Together, Buber and Kristeva may be said to comprise one tandem (among many) for situating Bakhtin dialogically, for interpreting his utterances in the context of those utterances he chose to answer, as well as those he invited or provoked.

To situate him thus, of course, precludes our making Bakhtin a thinker so original that his own work somehow managed to escape the dialogic contexts within which it emerged. To put this another way, dialogue is not especially amenable to

hagiography, since any dialogic understanding requires us to historicize our efforts to grasp a particular thinker's idea as responses to those other voices which that thinker sought to answer. This is historicism, to be sure, but historicism of a particular sort, for while it insists on understanding a given thinker within dialogic contexts, it likewise insists that no thinker's ideas are wholly immanent to, or consummated by, historical explanation. Dialogue, Bakhtin would remind us, resists the very thing that introductions like this one are sometimes tempted to provide: a settled accounting of a thinker's historical significance, "once and for all," as it were. And thus, so long as we allow that *our* dialogue with Bakhtin remains a dialogue, we are obliged to grant his work a measure of potential meaning, a "surplus" that lies beyond our efforts to utter the final say on his significance to our inquiries.

And so, just as Bakhtin's ideas cannot be fully understood apart from those utterances he himself saw fit to answer—utterances heard within the varied intellectual contexts of neo-Kantianism, Russian Formalism, Saussurean linguistics, Freudian psychology—we are likewise positioned, still composing our many-tongued responses to the dialogues that shaped his works, that provoked the utterances we ascribe to his authorship. Kristeva's structuralist reading of Bakhtin, for example, is a typical appropriation of a major theme for purposes which Bakhtin might not have anticipated. This is hardly remarkable, considering that over the course of the last three decades, Bakhtin has been claimed not only by structuralists but also by marxists, deconstructionists, feminists, social constructionists, neo-formalists, cultural critics, traditional humanists, and so on. Bakhtin has somehow managed to accommodate a plethora of competing ideological schools and agendas, some of which have little in common, some of which outwardly dispute with one another, and some of which are seemingly incompatible with Bakhtin's views.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, various reasons for the rush to squatter's rights on Bakhtinian territory: his overwhelmingly popular reception in the West, and the resulting cachet of what some have referred to as the Bakhtin "industry"; the ever perplexing debates regarding Bakhtin's whole or partial authorship of works attributed to two members of his circle, V. N. Volosinov and Pavel Medvedev; and, certainly not in the least, the several challenges to be found in Bakhtin's writings themselves—the tantalizing contradictions, digressions, and extensions at play in the ideas which embody his *oeuvre*. Those readers already familiar with Bakhtin's writings accept as a given that old ideas are often reprised unexpectedly in later works, and that tinkering with global concepts are frequent and sometimes baffling. Such features lend an uncommon pliability to his work, a pliability that entices and frustrates, true, but a pliability that also makes his ideas remarkably susceptible to a range of appropriations. It is hardly surprising, then, that there seem to be enough Bakhtins for everybody—a fact that renders Bakhtinian scholarship somewhat vulnerable to a charge of faddishness, and yet, at the same time, lends force to his claims for the radical incompleteness of all dialogue.

Apart from the quixotic difficulties involved in assessing whose Bakhtin is most "right" or "correct," as well as the probably unresolvable (and thus enduring) questions of authorship, the pivotal concerns addressed in Bakhtin's work are, to quote Buber, the "fruitful ambiguities" which emerge when we abandon reductive

and formal approaches to understanding language and, instead, embrace the living word in dialogue. It is these ambiguities which Bakhtin explores, and which find consistent expression in his work. For example, not only in double-voiced discourse do we find, say, the “ambivalences” of Kristeva’s multiply-inhabited word, but also within Bakhtin’s own peculiar lexicon: words, for Bakhtin, possess “sideward glances” and “loopholes.” Selves, hardly the seamless unities we imagine, are “noncoincident” with themselves and occupy “borderlines” with respect to the other, who, in turn, enjoys a “surplus” of vision with respect to her other. Every one of us is susceptible to “pretendship” and “alibis for being,” and yet all of us have an infinite capacity for “horizons,” “surprise,” and “thresholds.” For Bakhtin, the ambiguity of the word, the fugitive character of meaning, derives not merely from the fact that a single word may very well be occupied by two or more voices, but also from the fact that all words respond and seek response simultaneously, and thus remain forever “unfinished” in their potential to mean. There is, Bakhtin reminds, “neither a first nor a last word,” for the contexts in which words appear “extend into the boundless past and the boundless future” (SG 170).<sup>2</sup> And it is precisely this unfinished quality which characterizes dialogue, since the “openness” needed to cultivate and sustain dialogue stands in contradiction to the “finished” quality common to much of what passes for authentic exchange. Bakhtin understood that “living language,” or dialogue, is always and thoroughly suffused in a manifold ambiguity, and cannot help but be so long as human existence is, at once, given *and* posited, experiential *and* historical, personal *and* social.

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Though Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogue includes our ordinary usage of terms like “conversation” or “social interaction,” it extends far beyond these conventional meanings, and yet never entirely abandons the qualities associated with interpersonal expression. Of course, what might be called the conversational trope has acquired a great deal of intellectual prestige of late, especially as we have come to know it through Richard Rorty’s borrowing of Michael Oakeshott’s “conversation of mankind.” Here the term “conversation” is used to describe the ways we effect the kinds of agreements now believed to replace supposedly antiquated notions of referential or foundational truth. But seldom in these contexts is actual conversation given much thought beyond its figural suggestiveness. In contrast, Bakhtin never abandons dialogue to a strictly metaphoric function. Dialogue, for Bakhtin, is a real, concrete quality of social life, heard in the tones and accents of the human voice, embodied in the complicated relationships between characters and authors, in the heteroglossia of contending perspectives, in the travesty discourses of carnival and parody. Obviously, Bakhtin will ask the large questions regarding how dialogue might help us understand the relations between cultures, across histories, within consciousness. But just as obvious, he will ask us to examine dialogue in its “concrete, living” forms. He will ask us to consider, among other things, how conversation “itself” might be *anti-dialogic*.

Indeed, part of the difficulty in grasping Bakhtin derives from the various contexts in which he employs his central term. Dialogue, in Bakhtin’s lexicon, is

apt at any time to be used as a metalinguistic, philosophical, aesthetic, ethical, political, axiological, and possibly even a theological term. Sorting through these myriad senses is a problem too complex to attempt here, but it may be useful to sketch out the broad outlines of what Bakhtin has in mind when he deploys his overarching theme.

In a global sense, there is nothing but dialogue—or rather, nothing that means which can exist apart from dialogue. Because human existence is inseparable from the desire to make meaning, and because meaning is only made in and through dialogue with others, Bakhtin is able to make the claim that “where consciousness began, there dialogue began,” (*DI* 40) tagged by a corollary assertion: “when dialogue ends, everything ends” (*DI* 252).

The first sense of the term dialogue, then, might best be referred to as *ontological*. Being, for Bakhtin, means *being in dialogue*, since nothing outside of dialogue can exist—at least not for human beings. Since it is impossible to “separate existence from the ongoing process of communication,” it is also “inaccurate to speak of entering into dialogue, as if the components that do so could exist in any other way.” True, particular “dialogues may break off (they never truly end), but dialogue itself is always going on” (Morson and Emerson 50). Only a fabled progenitor, Bakhtin says, “only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation” (*DI* 279). For the rest of us, though, dialogue is a condition of our existence:

Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (*PDP* 293)

What Stanley Fish says of interpretation—that we are first located in interpretive communities that generate the interpretations we are later said to “have” (331–32)—may likewise be assigned to Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogue: it is not only the case that we dialogue, or that we may be said to “have” a dialogue. Rather, dialogue precedes us and, hence, is a condition we are born into—swaddling us, as it were, long before we utter our individual first word and long after we utter our individual last. Dialogue has us, at least as much as we have it.

A second understanding of dialogue may be termed *epistemological*. According to Bakhtin, a dialogic understanding of knowledge rejects formulations which tend to posit a singular mode of knowing derived from a singular perspective. Thus, truth is never found exclusively in its traditional whereabouts, not above us, outside us, inside us, or behind us. What these normative conceptions of knowledge aspire to—whether they derive from theological imagery or empiricism, Romanticism or the wisdom of received discourses—what all these approaches vie for are the spoils of indisputability, the booty which accrues to those who win the prized last word on our common inquiries. Each posits, in other words, a finalized version of what

the truth is, and thus each aims ultimately to preclude authentic exchange. The problem, of course, is that finalized truths render dialogue unnecessary.

That being the case, where does Bakhtin locate a dialogic conception of truth? Bakhtin situates it in the territory *between us*, thereby making our knowledge of the true both a function and product of social relations. To put it in the most basic of terms, one needs an other for truth to be. One of the first expressions of a dialogic conception of truth can be found in the Socratic dialogues. This genre, in particular, exemplifies

the dialogic nature of truth and the dialogic nature of thinking about truth. The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to *official* monologism, which pretends to *possess a ready-made truth*, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think they know something, that is, who think they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (*PDP* 110)

The kind of truth modeled by Socrates (the Socrates of the early dialogues, at least) is a truth “born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses,” a truth whose unity is to be found in its differences, a truth that “requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness” (*PDP* 81).<sup>3</sup>

The best literary representation of this kind of truth, Bakhtin says, may be found in the novels of Dostoevsky. Despite the centuries that separate them, Socrates and Dostoevsky share at least this much in Bakhtin’s view: a common opposition to that pervasive brand of idealist thinking that Bakhtin calls “philosophical monologism,” a category of thought that denies the need for a plurality of consciousnesses. In this realm, truth is believed to exist independent of any consciousness, not because truth wisely resists locating itself within the “bounds of a single consciousness,” but rather because it stands apart from all human consciousness whatsoever. Bakhtin thus writes, “from the point of view of [monologic] truth, there are no individual consciousnesses.” It follows that “in an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well” (*PDP* 81). A dialogic truth, because it eschews any pretensions to last words, can never be the truth of a didact, an absolutist, a spokesperson. Rather, it is always a truth of possibility and relationship, a truth of mutual illumination, a truth that belongs to people.

A final sense of dialogue—and one that has been of particular interest to scholars in rhetoric and composition—is what is most often referred to as Bakhtin’s *metalinguistics* or sometimes *translinguistics*, terms used to distinguish Bakhtin’s dialogic theories of language from the strict formality of abstract, linguistic approaches that followed from Saussurean advances early in this century. Bakhtin identifies the proper “object” for metalinguistic study to be “language, in its concrete living totality,” especially those “aspects in the life of the word . . . that exceed— and completely legitimately (sic)— the boundaries of linguistics” (*PDP* 181). Bakhtin does not totally reject the validity of linguistic study, but rather asserts

its inadequacy for dealing with problems of the dialogic relationships which form the essence of “concrete, living” discourse, and hence, the true subject matter of metalinguistics. Pointing out that dialogic relationships are, by definition, “extralinguistic” ones, Bakhtin further clarifies the distinction between linguistic and metalinguistic studies in his observation that the former studies “‘language’” itself and the logic specific to it in its capacity as a common ground, as that which makes possible dialogic interaction; consequently, linguistics distances itself from the actual dialogic relationships themselves. These relationships lie in the realm of . . . metalinguistics” (*PDP* 183).

The differences between linguistic and metalinguistic study are best seen in those units which constitute the two disciplines, namely, the sentence and the utterance, respectively. Whereas the sentence is “a *unit of language*,” the utterance is better considered “a unit of speech communication.” Whereas the sentence is “the speech of one speaking subject” (and therefore has no need for any determining, extraverbal context), the utterance is marked by a “change of speaking subjects,” and thus presupposes “*other* . . . participants in speech communication” (*SG* 72). Whereas the sentence is simply not capable of evoking a response, the utterance is thoroughly responsive, at once answering and addressing other utterances within a dialogic context. And, finally, whereas the sentence, because of its decontextualized status, can be repeated *ad infinitum*, the utterance can never be repeated because a repeatable context is a dead context—which is to say, a code. The starting point of Bakhtin’s understanding of the utterance, then, derives from the fact that “every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates” (*DI* 280). Every utterance bears within its voicing, an awareness of that which it answers and an expectation of how it might be answered itself. As is often pointed out, in Bakhtin’s scheme of things the traditional distinction between speaker and listener—or sender and receiver—begins to collapse. Such a dichotomy cannot hold for long because, in its efforts to abstract communicative roles, it cannot account for the fact that we speak and listen “all at once,” together, simultaneously.

But metalinguistics has other implications as well. In his thinking about genre, for example, Bakhtin addresses genre not merely in its conventional, literary sense, but also genre as the immeasurably varied, outwardly stable, and nearly impossible to catalogue forms into which all of our utterances are cast. This latter sense Bakhtin refers to as *speech genres*, and he devotes a good deal of attention to understanding how these genres are deployed in everyday, living discourse. Bakhtin observes that acquiring and mastering one’s native language is, in large part, a matter of acquiring the generic forms which that particular language assumes. Not that one need be conscious of these many forms, nor that they must be learned formally, since, as Bakhtin points out, “we speak in diverse genres without suspecting they exist.” Still, Bakhtin continues, “if speech genres did not exist, and we had not mastered them . . . speech communication would be almost impossible.” Bakhtin suggests that we learn such forms by assimilating the practical, concrete utterances that constitute social life, but he recognizes that all too often we may possess exquisite command of some speech genres and yet be woefully lacking in others. The important point, however, is that without *some* mastery of *some* genres of



speech, we would all come quite unmoored, adrift, uncompassed on seas of babble. We would have no bearings by which to navigate “the everyday genres of greetings, farewells, congratulations,” not to mention the more formal genres such as scholarly articles, treatises, novels, etc. (*SG* 78-79).

For Bakhtin, the most important distinction in considerations of genre is not the usual one between literary and non-literary genres (or, for that matter, between oral and written genres), though both of these are addressed in his work. Rather, Bakhtin’s key distinction can be found to reside between what he calls “primary” and “secondary” genres. The difference between the two derives from the fact that primary genres are conceived to be the “building blocks” of the far more complex, formalized, and rhetorically distant secondary genres. That is, secondary genres are marked by their ability to “absorb and digest” primary genres in such a way that the former might best be defined by their ability to mediate the latter. Bakhtin explains that “primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex [secondary] ones” (*SG* 62). And the most important secondary genre, for Bakhtin, is, of course, the novel, a genre uniquely capable of playing host to other primary and secondary genres.

Arguably, Bakhtin’s most extensive treatment of the novel as genre is found in his collection of essays entitled *The Dialogic Imagination*. Here Bakhtin reviews the history and characteristic features of the novel, identifying the fundamental differences between it and other genres. In contrasting the novel with the epic, for example, Bakhtin notes that epic genres are by nature hermetic, finished, “sacrosanct,” existing in an “absolute past” that is wholly “inaccessible to personal experience” and that excludes any competing points of view (*DI* 16). The epic is, in other words, a monologic genre, one that has no need to entertain authentic dialogue within its own rigid boundaries, nor any inclination to enter into dialogue with other genres. The novel, in contrast, is a genre “that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review” (*DI* 39). One way that it pursues this openness toward itself is by initiating relationships “with extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres,” which it is capable of representing (*DI* 33). Since the novel is able to represent other genres, it is likewise able to bring these genres into dialogic contact with each other, after which, according to Bakhtin, “all other genres [except the novel] somehow have a different resonance.” From its very inception, Bakhtin says, the novel “could never be merely one genre among others,” since its power to relativize other genres affords it a unique position in the history of literary discourse (*DI* 39). And one way that the novel relativizes other genres is by travesty their pretensions to monologue.

Thus, parodic discourse is extremely important to the emergence and development of the novel. Bakhtin observes that parody, as a form of sociolinguistic laughter, effects those conditions necessary for the appearance of novelistic discourse. Originating in the forms of popular laughter, parody familiarizes the distant, the valorized past, the inaccessibly sacred (*DI* 21). Parody is not important because it makes us laugh, but rather, because in the laughter of recognition which parody creates, we discover new familiarities which allow “clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation” of the world, without which novelistic discourse

would be impossible (*DI* 23). Bakhtin's extensive remarks on parody also reflect his abiding interest in *carnival*, especially carnival in the Middle Ages, and the immense influence carnival forms had on the development of the novel.

But parody is important to Bakhtin for another reason. The parodied word cannot escape being the "doubled" word, a word inhabited by two voices which "come together and to a certain extent are crossed with each other" (*DI* 75). The language parodied and the parodying language exist, as it were, side by side, juxtaposed simultaneously and in dialogic relation with each other. Bakhtin warns that dialogue within a double-voiced word is not to be thought of as dialogue in its narrative or compositional sense, but rather as "dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other" (*DI* 76). Parody, then, is the most obvious example of double-voicing, a key concept first elaborated through an exploration of narrative relationships in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

Bakhtin also broaches double-voicing in his discussion on *heteroglossia*, the term he gives to the "internal differentiation" common to all languages (*DI* 67). As a metalinguistic phenomenon, heteroglossia resists description strictly in terms of its linguistic features. Rather, heteroglossia is best characterized by qualities which are decidedly extralinguistic—qualities such as perspective, evaluation, ideological positioning, and so forth. Bakhtin explains that

All languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views each characterized by its own meaning, objects, and values . . . . As such, they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people . . . . these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia. (*DI* 292)

The many languages which compose heteroglossia, Bakhtin continues, are incapable of neutrality: all words are "shot through with intentions and accents" and every word "tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (*DI* 293). The languages of heteroglossia are contextual, social, historical "slants on the world."

And yet, language both resists and cultivates its own heteroglossic stratification. According to Bakhtin, there exists a never-ending "struggle between two tendencies in the languages of European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other, a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages)" (*DI* 67). Those forces that "serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world," Bakhtin calls *centripetal* (*DI* 270) and aspire to a condition of verbal unity, a monoglossic universe that brooks no speech diversity. Opposed to centripetal forces, however, are those *centrifugal* forces, "the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification" operating "alongside" the centripetal forces of unification (*DI* 272). The struggle between these two forces, moreover, is related to another struggle, not between tendencies but categories of discourse. And because it is a struggle that bears so profoundly upon the development of individual consciousness, Bakhtin couches his explanation of it in markedly pedagogical

terms. “Reciting by heart,” that mainstay of rote-learning, is representative of what Bakhtin calls *authoritative discourse*—that is, discourse “located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse” (*DI* 342). By contrast, “retelling in one’s own words,” the depleted sense of which we call “paraphrase” but which Bakhtin understands as creative revoicing, is representative of what he refers to as “internally persuasive” discourse—that is, discourse that ranges freely among other discourses, that may be imaginatively recontextualized, and that is capable of engaging other discourses in dialogue. Its importance, Bakhtin emphasizes, should not be underestimated:

Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness; consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse . . . . (*DI* 345)

Additionally, as Bakhtin points out, internally persuasive discourse is “tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’” It is, so to speak, “half-ours and half someone else’s” (*DI* 345). Because the internally persuasive word presupposes a measure of dialogue with one’s own words, as well as other internally persuasive words, it “does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us,” Bakhtin says, “as it is further, that is, freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts” (*DI* 345-6).

Such an idea seems especially germane to this (or any other) collection of scholarship devoted to Bakhtinian thought. For just as surely as Bakhtin’s own “internally persuasive words” have entered into new contexts that he could not have foreseen, one of the most productive of these contexts is constituted by scholars and teachers working in the field of rhetoric and composition.

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Over a decade ago, David Richter voiced a reservation shared by many commentators on Bakhtin’s work. “Summarizing Bakhtin’s ideas,” Richter wrote, “is a fairly dangerous task—there are so many of them and he formulated them so often that no presentation could possibly be definitive” (411). The brief overview offered here does nothing to dispute Richter’s claim. Among concepts receiving only passing mention here would be carnival, answerability, voice, and alterity. Among concepts receiving no mention here would be chronotope, signature, architectonics, outsidedness, and the superaddressee. Neither has this introduction explored the political struggles over whose Bakhtin is to prevail in the direction of future

scholarship, nor the present interest in the early ethical texts as the most recent site for these contentions to be played out. What I have tried to do, though, is present an overview of those ideas that have shaped Bakhtinian scholarship in rhetoric and composition. The essays in this collection, I hope, give voice to the plurality of approaches that scholars in our field have when they set forth to assimilate Bakhtin for their differing purposes.

The collection is arranged in two major sections. The first, “Theory, Language, Rhetoric,” attempts to capture the most important theoretical extensions of Bakhtin’s ideas, and does so with an emphasis on what Bakhtin might contribute to our present understanding of language and rhetoric. The latter section, “Composition Studies, Pedagogy, Research” explores the importance of Bakhtin’s work upon such varied concerns as disciplinary identity, writing in non-academic settings, and, most important, the emergence of dialogic pedagogies.

Appropriately, this volume is inaugurated with an essay that introduced Bakhtin to many in our field. In his “Mikhail Bakhtin as Rhetorical Theorist,” Charles Schuster points out that Bakhtin’s theory of language has profound implications for how we think about style. Schuster claims that Bakhtin’s ideas necessitate a revision of traditional rhetorical ideas, a revision that takes into account what Bakhtin would call the “hero” of discourse, but what in traditional contexts is known as the subject category of the rhetorical triangle. Schuster argues that in Bakhtin’s understanding of language, the rhetorical triangle is better thought of as a rhetorical circle and provides three Bakhtinian “readings” to show why this is so. Following Schuster’s lead, perhaps, R. Allen Harris offers a Bakhtinian reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* to demonstrate the immense problems in trying to model the complexities of dialogue within the geometric figure of a triangle. Like Schuster, Harris concludes that the circle is a truer representation of what actually occurs in dialogue, since, at the very least, identifying speaker, listener, and subject is tantamount to identifying the multiple voices orchestrated by all three.

In “Bakhtin’s Rhetoric,” Jon Klancher moves toward the ideological implications of Bakhtin’s ideas for writing instruction, suggesting that Bakhtin’s brand of ideological critique does not move in the usual direction, from surface to depth, but instead “laterally across texts to identify the ‘social languages’ that weave among them.” Klancher argues that two staples of traditional writing pedagogy, paraphrase and parody, are capable of being reaccented in such a way to allow for a Bakhtinian “pedagogy whose aim is to disengage student writers from crippling subservience to the received languages they grapple with.” A much different emphasis is offered by Thomas Kent who calls our attention to the generic aspects of everyday communication through an interpretation of Bakhtin’s theory of the utterance. In his externalist reading of Bakhtin, Kent shows why genres are not fixed, determined forms, but rather “hermeneutical strategies that propel the guessing games we employ in order to produce utterances and to understand the utterances of others.”

Kay Halasek recounts her personal struggle as a feminist to come to terms with Bakhtin and his apparent indifference to women’s voices and to gender as an ideological category. Calling upon Bakhtin’s distinction between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, and focusing on the latter, Halasek charts the paths by which she realized that, “as a woman reading Bakhtin, I am free to recast his

words in terms of my own, not bound to accept and repeat the resonance of his words. I make new meaning by reading this way, for I have engaged Bakhtin in a new conversation.”

In what is the most historically-minded of these essays, Michael Bernard-Donals continues an ideological exploration of Bakhtinian thought by showing how the two most profound influences on his ideas, marxism and phenomenology, exist in an unresolved tension that simply will not abide any facile attempts at reconciliation. Bernard-Donals sees this same ambiguous tension at play in the present-day writing classroom, and more broadly, in the contemporary academy. Marilyn Cooper, in fact, chooses to focus on the academy in order to broach the thorny problems that attend relationships between and among disciplines. Cooper finds in dialogic literacy some useful ways to approach the “partial truths” of interdisciplinary discourses. Using transcripts from an electronic discussion group, she looks at how participants establish and modify their own discourse conventions, how they intone academic genres with the genres of “everyday life,” and how the prosaic knowledges they bring to bear upon the specialized knowledges of the academy might have wide implications for a revived public discourse.

The last article in this introductory grouping is a symposium that confronts Bakhtin’s vexed relationship to rhetoric, an art that he will often disparage, especially in contexts where rhetoric is (if only implicitly) contrasted with dialogue. Kay Halasek, Michael Bernard-Donals, Don Bialostosky and James Zebroski respond to Bakhtin—and each other—in a lively exploration of the problems raised by what Bakhtin does and does not say about rhetoric.

The final section, “Composition Studies, Pedagogy, Research,” includes scholarship that addresses itself primarily to the writing classroom, but also to disciplinary concerns as well as writing in non-academic contexts.

The importance of Bakhtin’s ideas to the problem of written voice finds expression in Joy Ritchie’s essay, “Beginning Writers: Diverse Voices and Individual Identity.” Ritchie explores the writing workshop as a particularly rich environment for investigating the processes by which beginning writers “struggle to construct a voice of their own from the counterpoint of voices in the various cultures surrounding them.” Ritchie follows the development of two students, Brad and Becky, as they struggle to negotiate their own languages for their own purposes. No less concerned about the likely pedagogical uses of Bakhtin’s ideas, Joseph J. Comprone shifts our attention to how the modern science essay, a remarkably “novelized” genre, represents a new “textual space” that is particularly useful to collaborative learning in the writing classroom. Comprone offers a number of concrete suggestions for how we can incorporate an intertextual, dialogic approach to our efforts at collaborative learning, and the role the modern science essay might play in helping us do so. Sharing this emphasis on collaboration but moving outside the academy, Geoffrey Cross reports on an ethnographic study of how writing occurs in one non-academic setting. Drawing upon Bakhtin’s idea of centripetal and centrifugal forces, Cross examines the composing of an executive letter for a corporation annual report, using these forces to explain why efforts to produce this document were largely unsuccessful.

Don Bialostosky returns us to the question of voice, this time with an emphasis on how a dialogic understanding of voice might contribute to a reinvigorated liberal arts. Bialostosky suggests that the writing classroom may be the most likely site for a dialogic interanimation of the languages of the academy, the one place where those languages can escape the institutional pressures to keep them departmentally insulated in the consciousnesses of our students. Reiterating a value traditionally associated with the liberal arts, Bialostosky sees the writing classroom as a forum for voices that might not otherwise hear each other, or be heard by those whose language development we are most intimately concerned, our students. A very different kind of Bakhtinian reading is offered by Thomas Recchio who, in the process of exploring one student paper, tries to show how the need to uncover *other* languages in students' texts is prior to our students realizing their own voices in those same texts. Recchio speaks to the need for a critique of competing discourses in our responses to student writing.

In what is likely the most pedagogically specific of the essays in this collection, Marilyn Middendorf poses the familiar question of "What makes writing good?" as a starting point for elaborating a dialogic, writing pedagogy. Middendorf emphasizes, in particular, the importance of a number of key Bakhtinian ideas to the writing classroom, especially the possibility of how carnival might engender an "intriguing playfulness" in student writing. Nancy Welch, on the other hand, discovers in Bakhtin a way to overcome the usual dichotomies that typically plague writing teachers when responding to student essays: the false oppositions between form and content, between personal and public discourses. Welch asks us to recognize the value in allowing these complexities free play without wishing, in the name of an abstract value like "coherence," to resolve them into a monologic, single-voice.

This section closes with a recent essay that is both polemic and bibliographic review. Helen Rothschild Ewald looks at the ways Bakhtin has been appropriated in composition studies and concludes that writing scholars have largely overlooked Bakhtin's early concerns with ethical responsibility in favor of approaches that are generally referred to as social constructionist. Ewald offers pointers for the ways an ethical "answerability" might appear in the writing classroom.

Together, the essays gathered here demonstrate the imaginative ways that Bakhtin's ideas have been appropriated by scholars, teachers, and researchers in the field of rhetoric and composition. Whether in our enduring questions about the relationship between rhetoric and composing, in our ongoing inquiries concerning what makes for a distinctive, written voice, in our efforts to help students in their struggles with authoritative discourses, both in and out of the academy—in all of these respects, and in others as well, the essays here serve as an invitation to sustain our dialogue with Bakhtin so that we may yet come to realize the unanticipated ways that he will continue to mean more than he said. For us and for others.

## *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>This situation promises to be complicated even further for Western scholars. In a forthcoming manuscript, Caryl Emerson reports on how Bakhtin has been received by his Russian public, noting, in particular, their powerful rereadings of three concepts: polyphony/dialogue, carnival, and outsideness.

<sup>2</sup>The following abbreviations for Bakhtinian texts are used throughout this introduction: *SG* for *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, *DI* for *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, and *PDP* for *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed examination of how Bakhtin appropriates Socrates, see Zappen.

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