

*The Cambridge Introduction to
Mikhail Bakhtin*

In this introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin, Ken Hirschkop presents a compact, readable, detailed, and sophisticated exposition of all of Bakhtin's important works. Using the most up-to-date sources and the new, scholarly editions of Bakhtin's texts, Hirschkop explains Bakhtin's influential ideas, demonstrates their relevance and usefulness for literary and cultural analysis, and sets them in their historical context. In clear and concise language, Hirschkop shows how Bakhtin's ideas have changed the way we understand language and literary texts. Authoritative and accessible, this Cambridge Introduction is the most comprehensive and reliable account of Bakhtin and his work yet available.

Ken Hirschkop is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Waterloo. A recognised international authority on Bakhtin's work, he has co-edited *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (1989, 2005) with David Shepherd, written *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (1999), and contributed articles on Bakhtin to many leading journals.

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KEN HIRSCHKOP



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Acknowledgements

This may be the last book I write on Bakhtin; part of me certainly hopes so. That being the case, it's worth looking back on the circumstances and people that led me to this point. Two of those people could not possibly have known the seeds they were sowing. There was the popular high school teacher of Russian, whose possible sacking led me to sign up for instruction in a language I had no interest in at the time (I was persuaded to do so by my friends, who *were* interested in Russian, and, being me, I never got round to switching out). There was my high school friend, Klemens Meyer, who lent me his copy of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* when I was taking an evening course on the Novel and the City and needed some help with *Crime and Punishment*. That such small gestures could shape a career is evidence of the role that serendipity may play in our lives.

Once I got going, however, the help was explicit and generous. There was a master's thesis on Bakhtin in London under Jane Grayson's selfless and careful supervision and a doctoral one supervised by the tireless, and always interested Terry Eagleton. There was, importantly, a world of Bakhtin scholars, who met periodically to talk and share, and who created a scholarly community that was varied, open, stimulating, and quite a lot of fun to belong to. Among those who should get credit for this community – because communities, even enjoyable ones, take work – are Clive Thomson, who organised the first International Bakhtin Colloquium and edited the six still invaluable issues of the *Bakhtin Newsletter*, and David Shepherd, who – once the dam broke in the Soviet Union – organised numerous visits of Russian Bakhtin scholars to the UK and established the Bakhtin Centre at the University of Sheffield.

The generosity and open-mindedness that distinguish the community of Bakhtin scholarship have been a joy to behold. Readers of this book may know that literary studies in North America and Europe are often the scene of passionate and somewhat acrimonious dispute, despite the relatively low stakes: the rise of politically orientated and motivated criticism and theory has led to some strikingly heated arguments in the detailed work of literary

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scholarship. In Russia and the Soviet Union, the stakes were, in the immediate sense, much, much higher: after all, in the past people had been murdered by the Soviet state for having the ‘wrong’ view on literary matters (Bakhtin’s friend Pavel Medvedev was one such victim). Bakhtin scholars, in Russia and elsewhere, are a heterogeneous group, straddling the various divides that structure twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary scholarship. They not only follow different methods and have divergent literary interests, but they are devoted, in their larger intellectual lives, to very different causes, some political, some religious, some philosophical. They have, however, not let these differences get in the way of their scholarly endeavours: I have shared ideas with, been supported by, and had important conversations with Bakhtin scholars whose general worldview could not have been more different from my own, at home and in Russia. While I have my own strong political views and a deep sense of the intersection between political life and literary scholarship, this is complemented by an abiding conviction in the importance of open, critical, and independent scholarship, led by the facts and the most compelling arguments. I’ve been privileged to be part of a scholarly community organised around the same convictions. This book, which stands on the foundation of the work of many scholars, of all different sorts, is a testament to that community.

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Brandist has done more to elucidate the intellectual history of Bakhtin's work than any other writer, and his detailed, sophisticated studies have illuminated the entire landscape of Bakhtin's work. Galin Tihanov has produced a series of brilliant and original analyses of Bakhtin, which have changed the way we understand and appreciate his work.

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A Note on the Translations

In references to Bakhtin's works, the first page reference will be to the English translation of the text and the second reference to the Russian original, in almost every case drawn from the version published in Bakhtin's *Collected Works* rather than the version first published in Russian (the exceptions are the books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais, where I refer to the original published editions). Where no English translation is available, the single page reference is to the Russian text. I have often modified the English translation, sometimes substantially. More disturbing for the reader, I have sometimes had to modify the title of the work as well, in cases where the *Collected Works* have given a familiar text a new title (which is, in almost every case, actually the text's old, original title). Where that is the case, I indicate it below and give the reader a heads-up when I first mention the particular work. Full bibliographical details are found in the list at the beginning of the Works chapter.

Transliteration is according to the Library of Congress system, but without diacritical marks. I have made exceptions for names with well-known transliterations. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphases are from the original text (even where they have not been reproduced in the existing English translation).

Chronology

Date	Event	Texts
16 November 1895	Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is born in Orel, Russia.	
1905	The Bakhtin family moves to Vilnius (Lithuania) and Bakhtin enters gymnasium there.	
1911	The Bakhtin family (except Nikolai) moves to Odessa (Ukraine).	
1913	Bakhtin may have begun attending classes at Novorossisk University in Odessa, without having registered.	
1916	Bakhtin moves to Petrograd, where he may have attended classes at the University, again without having registered.	
1918	Bakhtin moves to Nevel', where he meets M. I. Kagan, M. V. Iudina, L. V. Pumpianskii, and V. N. Voloshinov, among others.	
1919		'Art and Answerability' published
1920	Bakhtin moves to Vitebsk, where Voloshinov and Pumpianskii have moved and where he meets P. N. Medvedev.	
February 1921	Bakhtin contracts osteomyelitis, from which he will suffer his whole life.	

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Date	Event	Texts
16 July 1921	Bakhtin marries Elena Alexandrovna Bersh-Okolovich.	
1920–24		Work on early philosophical essays
May 1924	The Bakhtins move to Leningrad.	
1924		‘The Problem of Form, Content and Material’
1924–25	Bakhtin delivers cycles of lectures on Neo-Kantian philosophy and ‘Hero and Author in Aesthetic Activity’ in Leningrad. Continues meeting with Pumpianskii, Iudina, Voloshinov, and Medvedev.	
24 December 1928	Bakhtin is arrested.	
June 1929		<i>Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art</i> is published
22 July 1929	Bakhtin is sentenced to five years in Solovki labour camp. Bakhtin spends July to December in hospital (for recurring osteomyelitis).	
23 February 1930	In response to lobbying by Bakhtin’s friends and contacts, his sentence is changed to five years’ exile in Kustanai (Kazakhstan).	
29 March 1930	The Bakhtins move to Kustanai.	‘Problems in the Stylistics of the Novel’ (outline)
April 1931	Bakhtin is hired as an accountant for the local Consumers Union	
1930–36		‘Discourse in the Novel’ composed
July 1934	Bakhtin’s sentence is complete, although he will remain in Kustanai for another two years.	
Summer 1936	The Bakhtins travel to Leningrad and Moscow; Mikhail sees Kagan, Iudina, Medvedev, and Zaleskii.	Bakhtin seeks to publish ‘Discourse in the Novel’ as a book; agreed by publisher but MS never submitted.

Date	Event	Texts
26 September 1936	The Bakhtins move to Saransk, so that Mikhail can take up a post teaching literature at the Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute.	
March 1937	Bakhtin is denounced by the Institute’s Party Committee.	
July 1937	The Bakhtins move (without a permit) to Moscow, stay with Zaleskis. Bakhtin meets several times with Kagan in August.	
September 1937		Bakhtin proposes to publisher that he substitute a manuscript on the <i>Bildungsroman</i> for ‘Discourse in the Novel’ (it is agreed).
Winter 1937–38	After failed attempts to settle in Moscow, the Bakhtins relocate to Savelevo, where they will stay until the end of the war in 1945. Bakhtin will teach at local schools, but he will visit Moscow for his research.	
1937–39		Work on <i>Bildungsroman</i> project, ‘Forms of Time’, Rabelais research
17 February 1938	Bakhtin’s right leg is amputated to the knee.	
Fall 1940	Bakhtin dictates Rabelais dissertation at his sister’s flat in Moscow.	Initial typescript of Rabelais dissertation is completed
14 October 1940	Bakhtin delivers lecture ‘Discourse in the Novel’ at the Gorky Institute. The work is published under the title ‘Towards the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’.	
24 March 1941	Bakhtin delivers lecture ‘The Novel as a Literary Genre’ at the Gorky Institute. The work is published under the title ‘Epic and Novel’.	

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Date	Event	Texts
1940–46		Various texts on the novel, continuing revision of Rabelais typescript
September 1945	The Bakhtins move to Saransk, so that Bakhtin can take up post as head of Department of General Literature at the Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute.	
15 November 1946	Oral defence of Bakhtin’s dissertation on Rabelais at the Gorky Institute.	
19 April 1950	Revised version of dissertation submitted to the Higher Attestation Commission.	
9 June 1951	Authorities refuse to award Bakhtin the degree of Doctor of Philological Sciences. In June 1952 he will receive the degree of Candidate of Philological Sciences.	
March 1958	Bakhtin is made head of Department of Russian and Foreign Literature at what is now the Mordovian State University.	
November 1960	Bakhtin receives first letter from Bocharov, Kozhinov, Gachev, et al.	
February 1961	Bakhtin receives invitation from publisher Einaudi to revise <i>Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art</i> for publication in Italy.	
June 1961	Visit of Bocharov, Kozhinov and Gachev to Bakhtin.	
August 1961	Bakhtin retires from post at Saransk.	
September 1963		<i>Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics</i> published
1965		<i>The Work of François Rabelais</i> [...] published
30 May 1967	Bakhtin is formally rehabilitated.	

Date	Event	Texts
October 1969	The Bakhtins move to the Kremlin hospital near Moscow, where they will stay through the winter.	
May 1970	The Bakhtins move to home for the elderly in Klimovsk.	
14 December 1971	Elena Alexandrovna Bakhtina dies in Podolsk hospital.	
30 December 1971	Mikhail Bakhtin is moved to the home for writers in Peredelkino.	
September 1972	Bakhtin moves to flat in Moscow.	
February–March 1973	Interviews with Duvakin are recorded.	
7 March 1975	Bakhtin dies at home.	

Abbreviations

- 61N. '1961. Notes'. The first half of these notes constitutes the second half of 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 118–31; the second half of the notes has been translated as 'Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book', Appendix II to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 283–302; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 329–60.
- AARab. 'Additions and Amendments to "Rabelais"'. Translated as 'Bakhtin on Shakespeare: Excerpt from "Additions and Changes to *Rabelais*"', *PMLA* 129, 3 (2014), 524–37; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 (1), 681–731.
- AH. 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. *Art and Answerability*, 4–256; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, 69–263.
- Conv. Conversations with V. D. Duvakin. 1973. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Duvakin Interviews, 1973*; Russian, *Besedy c V. D. Duvakinym*.
- DN. 'Discourse in the Novel: On Issues in the Stylistics of the Novel'. *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259–422; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 9–179.
- FTC. 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel'. *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–258; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 341–511.
- Lect. 'Lectures and Comments of 1924–25 by M. M. Bakhtin'. Translated in Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (eds.), *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, 205–37; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, 326–42.
- NLG. 'The Novel as a Literary Genre'. Translated as 'Epic and Novel'. *The Dialogic Imagination*, 3–40; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 608–43.
- NRab. 'Notebooks for "Rabelais"'. No English translation; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 (1), 605–75.

List of Abbreviations xvii

- OBild. 'On the *Bildungsroman*'. Parts of it appeared in English translation as the final two sections of 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 19–59; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 218–335.
- OQThN. 'On Questions in the Theory of the Novel'. No English translation; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 557–607.
- PDA. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. There is no complete English translation, but much of it can be found in the translation of the later, substantially revised *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*; Russian, *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*.
- PDP. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Same title in English translation; Russian, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*.
- PFCM. 'On Issues in the Methodology of the Aesthetics of the Verbal Artwork. I. The Problem of Form, Content, and Material in Verbal Art'. Note the essay is generally known by its subtitle alone, which is the title (slightly altered) of the English translation in *Art and Answerability*, 257–325; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, 265–325.
- PSG. 'The Problem of Speech Genres'. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 60–102; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 159–206.
- Rab. *The Work of François Rabelais and the Popular Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. In English the book is titled *Rabelais and His World*; Russian, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i renesansa*.
- Sat. 'Satire'. Translated in Ilya Kliger and Boris Maslov (eds.), *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 369–91; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 11–38.
- TPA. 'Towards a Philosophy of the Act'. *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, 7–68.
- TPhFHS. 'Towards Philosophical Foundations for the Human Sciences'. No English translation; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 7–10.
- WN. 'Working Notes from the 1960s and Early 1970s'. Parts translated in 'From Notes Made in 1970–71' and 'Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences' in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 132–72; Russian, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, 371–439.