

BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Teoria do romance I: a estilística* [Theory of the Novel I: Stylistics]. Translation, afterword, notes and glossary by Paulo Bezerra; Russian edition organizers Serguei Botcharov and Vadim Kójinov. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2015. 256p.

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Mikhail Bakhtin

Teoria do romance I
A estilística

Tradução, prefácio, notas e glossário
Paulo Bezerra

Organização da edição russa
Serguei Botcharov e Vadim Kójinov

editora  34

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Serguei Botcharov (1929-) and Vadim Kójinov (1930-2001) are the inheritors of the copyright to Bakhtin's work. As young students in Moscow in the early 1960s they were responsible, with another colleague, Georgui Gachev, for the phenomenon of the rediscovery of Bakhtin. This was due to the commitment of those young people to edit the author's works, which they had met in graduate seminars.

Somehow this rediscovery continues today. Committed to retrieving Bakhtin's originals, Botcharov was one of the protagonists of the new Russian edition of the *Collected Works*.¹ Among the outcomes of this project, there is a new edition of *Theory of the Novel*, written by Bakhtin in the 1930s. This edition corresponds to the third volume of the *Collected Works* and was only published in Russia in 2012, but both Kójinov and Botcharov worked on its organization.

In relation to the 1975 edition titled *Vopróssi literaturi and estétiki*, translated in Brazil as *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*],² first edited in 1988, there are significant differences in the volume published in Russian in 2012.

A notable change, in a comparison of the tables of contents, is the suppression of the essay which is the opening chapter of *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*], namely The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Literary Creation, of 1924. The essay, from the Russian *Collected Works*, is in Volume 1, 2003, which features works on philosophy and aesthetics published mainly in the 1920s.³

The most significant difference, however, lies at the source of the new volume, which consists of Bakhtin's typewritten version recovered by the aforementioned organizers. The new Russian edition incorporates, as footnotes, all handwritten notes by

¹ See the review of this edition by Sheila Grillo, in *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, v. 1, no. 1, p.170-174, 2009. The author kindly gave us the information that the initial project included the publication of the seven volumes cited in the review; however, the seventh, which would bring the works of disputed authorship, will not be published. The remaining volumes have been published, and the project is now completed.

² BAKHTIN, M. *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance*. Trad. Aurora Fornoni Bernadini et al. 5. ed. São Paulo: Editora UNESP; Hucitec, 1993. In English, the translation of *Vopróssi literaturi i estetiki* resulted in the following publication: Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M.M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986.

³ In English, this essay can be found in the following publication: BAKHTIN, M.M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; notes translated by Vadim Liapunov; supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990.

the Russian thinker besides bringing, with clear indications of the nature of each insertion, the notes of the original text that were already known to readers of the previous publication.

Brazilian readers are also granted the privilege of another translation of Bakhtin's *Theory of the Novel*, directly from Russian. *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*] also came directly from Russian and was conducted by a team of translators led by the researcher Aurora Fornoni Bernardini. It is a work of indisputable quality, which in 2015 was allowed to enter a new dialogue with the translation by Paulo Bezerra, a prominent name at the forefront of Bakhtin's works in Brazil.

Paulo Bezerra is indeed one of the exponents of Bakhtin scholarship in Brazil. His teaching career has extended from Universidade de São Paulo [University of São Paulo], where he achieved tenure, to Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro [State University of Rio de Janeiro] and then Universidade Federal Fluminense [Federal Fluminense University], where, now retired, he continues to serve as professor of literary criticism. On page 253 of *Teoria do romance I: a estilística* [*Theory of the Novel I: Stylistics*], the section titled Sobre o tradutor [About the Translator] brings more details about his career and lists some of the more than forty works he has translated from Russian, which include Dostoevsky's works.

Paulo Bezerra is also responsible for the editions translated directly from Russian of important works by Bakhtin, such as *Estética da criação verbal* [*Aesthetics of the Verbal Creation*]^{4 5} and *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski* [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*].⁶ His deep knowledge of Russia's cultural horizon and his commitment to promoting it have been acknowledged by the government of that country, which granted him the Pushkin Medal in 2012. He is, therefore, the ideal mediator in order for the Brazilian reader to establish a dialogue with Bakhtin's voice in *Teoria do romance I: a estilística* [*Theory of the Novel I: Stylistics*].

⁴ Bakhtin, M. M. *Estética da criação verbal*. Trad. Paulo Bezerra. 4. ed. Sao Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003.

⁵ TN. Some of the essays in *Estética da criação verbal* are found in *Speech Genre & Other Late Essays* [BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986].

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski*. 5. ed. revista. Trad. Paulo Bezerra. Rio de Janeiro, Forense Universitária, 2010. The reference of the English edition: BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

The book flaps bring a presentation by Cristóvão Tezza, who, as a passionate reader, highlights the importance of the work of Bakhtin that the reader has at hand.

In the preface, Bezerra contextualizes the new translation, explains some of the organizers' decisions, and tells of the gestation of Bakhtin's *Theory of the Novel*. He also announces the decision, which he owes to the publisher and himself, to publish the new and definitive version of *Theory of the Novel* in three volumes in Brazil. In the last section, titled Esta tradução [This Translation], Bezerra elegantly points out gaps or inconsistencies affecting some Portuguese editions of Bakhtin's work and questions the consequences they may have had in the reception of the author's thought. A highlight in this discussion is the justification of his choice of the term *heterodiscourse* for the concept previously translated as heteroglossia.

The body of the text, in this first volume as compared to the previous translation, features only the essay Discourse in the Novel. Absent, therefore, are the essays from *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*] titled Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel (Essays on Historical Poetics); From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse; Epic and Novel (On the Methodology of the Study of the Novel); and Rabelais and Gogol (The Art of Discourse and Comic Popular Culture).⁷

The reader familiar with *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*]⁸ will notice, however, the addition of a subtitle to the introduction of the single essay in this new translation: Questões de estilística no romance [Questions of Stylistics in the Novel]. In the previous edition, only two paragraphs taking up a single page (p.71, in the 1993 edition)⁹ constituted this introduction. In the new edition, besides receiving a subtitle, the three-and-a-half-page, nine-paragraph introduction contains the important addition of Bakhtin's account of the challenges of preparing a study on the discourse of the novel "in the light of socialist realism ideas" (BAKHTIN, 2015, p.19).¹⁰

⁷ In *The Dialogic Imagination* (see note 2), the table of contents brings the following items, without the subdivisions of the essays, in this order: Acknowledgments; A note on Translation; Introduction; Epic and Novel; From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse; Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel; Discourse in the Novel; Glossary; Index.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁹ For reference, see footnote 2.

¹⁰ In Portuguese: "à luz das ideias do realismo socialista".

In the other sections of the essay *Discourse in the Novel*, there are important changes, since Bakhtin's handwritten notes had been suppressed in the previous edition and are now included not as footnotes, but in the body of the text.

Take, for example, a note on page 42 of *Teoria do romance I: a estilística* [*Theory of the Novel I: Stylistics*] referencing a handwritten note by Bakhtin: "Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' [...] and at the same time partakes of social and historical heterodiscourse (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)."¹¹ In *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance* [*Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of the Novel*], this note was incorporated into the text, closing the second paragraph that begins on page 82 (1993 edition).¹²

The same is observed in several other passages, such as the note corresponding to a manuscript section on page 137 of the new translation. It is about the authoritarian word: "The zone of the framing context must likewise be distanced – no familiar context is possible here either. The one perceiving and understanding this discourse is a distant descendent; there can be no arguing with him."¹³ Such a note, in the previous edition, was incorporated into the text, featuring in the third paragraph on page 144 (1993 edition).¹⁴

Realizing what was on the sidelines, as a reflection not yet incorporated into the text, leads the reader to understand that sometimes what may seem like a truncated or circular idea was actually not inserted by Bakhtin in the thread of his speech. This is one of the great contributions of the new Russian edition and of the new Bezerra translation.

Returning to the differences in the Contents, the subsections of the essay *Discourse in the Novel*, in the previous translation, were as follows: I. A estilística contemporânea e o romance [*Contemporary Stylistics and the Novel*]; II. O discurso na poesia e o discurso no romance [*Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel*]; III. O plurilinguismo no romance [*Plurilingualism in the Novel*]; IV. A pessoa que fala no romance [*The Person Speaking in the Novel*]; and V. Duas linhas estilísticas do romance europeu [*Two Stylistic Lines in the European Novel*]. In the new translation,

¹¹ In Portuguese: "A comunhão de cada enunciado com um 'língua única' [...] e, ao mesmo tempo, com o heterodiscorso social e histórico (forças centrífugas, estratificadoras)".

¹² For reference, see footnote 2.

¹³ In Portuguese: "A zona do contexto moldurador também deve ser distante, aí, o contato familiar é impossível O descendente distante percebe e interpreta; a discussão é impossível".

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 2.

we find: 1. A estilística atual e o romance [Current Stylistics and the Novel]; 2. O discurso na poesia e o discurso no romance [Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel]; 3. O heterodiscurso no romance [Heterodiscourse in the Novel]; 4. O falante no romance [The Speaker in the Novel]; and 5. As duas linhas estilísticas do romance europeu [The Two Stylistic Lines in the European Novel].¹⁵

The translator's notes account for most of the choices that led to the most significant changes in lexical terms. At the end of the book, readers also have at their disposal a brief glossary of some key concepts, in which Bezerra includes the terms originally in Russian, in Cyrillic alphabet; their transliteration into the Latin alphabet; a brief explanation of the concepts, and his justification for the translation choices.

Teoria do romance I: a estilística [*Theory of the Novel I: Stylistics*] is the onset of a new dialogue with one of Bakhtin's best-known texts by Brazilian researchers. Getting to know a form that is closer to the manuscript cannot be, for Bakhtinian scholars, anything other than entering a new world of meaning and content generated by such form.

There will perhaps be a debate arising from the different translations to the same terms. It is difficult to predict whether the term *heterodiscourse*, perhaps contaminated by the way it refers to gender issues in confrontation with heteronorm, will replace the widely used term *heteroglossia* in the work of Brazilian researchers who focus on Bakhtin's thought, or whether the expression "the person speaking in the novel" will naturally be replaced by "the speaker in the novel." These terms have been available to us for twenty-two years and populate a multitude of publications on various research topics drawing on Bakhtinian studies.

However, the contribution of this new translation cannot in any way be reduced to a greater terminological precision. It is a text that brings us closer to its author's voice, to the very aesthetic touch that Bakhtin gave to his work. And contemplating this work in Paulo Bezerra's company is undoubtedly a great privilege.

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Received August 30, 2015

Accepted October 30, 2015

¹⁵ In the English edition (see footnote 2), the subsections, which are not listed in the Contents, are in the body of the text, as follows: Modern Stylistics and the Novel (p.260); Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel (p.275); Heteroglossia in the Novel (p.301); The Speaking Person in the Novel (p.331); The Two Stylistic Lines of Development in the European Novel (p.366).