

RIBEIRO, Ana Paula Goulart e SACRAMENTO, Igor (orgs.). *Mikhail Bakhtin: linguagem, cultura e mídia*. São Carlos: Pedro & João, 2010, 429p.

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It is hard to react other than positively to a publication, presented in Portuguese, conceived with the idea of introducing Bakhtin as re-invented in the Anglo-Saxon world to a Brazilian audience. Two Brazilian editors from Rio de Janeiro have put together a (sometimes) surprising mix containing some of the best-known English-writing critics working in the field of Bakhtin Studies (Michael Holquist, Ken Hirschkop, David Shepherd, Caryl Emerson) and several other relatively unknown ones. Such a choice of authors has the advantage of putting side-by-side writers hailing from various disciplines and oftentimes divergent academic horizons. It corresponds quite sharply with an important part of the editors' stated goal, i.e. to present a picture of Bakhtin that is starkly different from the one most Brazilian academics already know, that is to say, from the way the Russian philosopher came to be known in Western Europe, and then in the Americas, via French structuralism (a line of thinking initiated mainly by Julia Kristeva in the late sixties and early seventies, and later reignited by Tzvetan Todorov in the early 1980s).

The "Anglo-Saxon" Bakhtin presented in this book should be seen, or so it is claimed, as part of the "second wave" of Bakhtin Studies, both growing out of, and critical to, the first one, i.e. the French-structuralist Bakhtin. This other Bakhtin is divided into three parts (the philosopher of language, the theorist of culture and the thinker of media studies), a relatively unexplained choice of headings that is nevertheless claimed to be appropriated for presenting Bakhtin's particular breed of theory as seen in the English-speaking world. One can only applaud the enterprise of making better known what were

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some of the most productive and provocative texts of the heady 1980s, articles that no doubt remain relatively unknown today to most Brazilian scholars. In this category we can certainly place the ground-breaking chapter published in 1983 by Dominick LaCapra, here translated with visible elegance. LaCapra's articulate contribution was published exactly at the time when Bakhtin was quickly becoming the single most-quoted theorist in the context of literary studies (written in English) and also when his ideas were beginning to spread from the humanities into social science disciplines. In particular, LaCapra's text provided a powerful antidote to the tendencies, present at that time, to see carnival almost everywhere and anywhere and to study it as a contemporary phenomenon devoid of any historical context. One might also wish to place in this same category the well-researched article on Bakhtin and Vygotsky written by Caryl Emerson at the early stages of her academic career (i.e. 1983), a piece which, in many ways, is quite different from much of the important work we would later read from her in the 1990s and into the new century.

One cannot help but notice the "average" publication date of the twelve articles presented in this volume: 1989. It should be recognized that this was a time, in Anglo-Saxon universities, when Bakhtin was read not exactly *in opposition* to French theory, but rather in the explicit context of other types of French thinking that were anything but rehashed structuralism: Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Ricoeur. In this context, it is somewhat difficult to understand exactly what is meant by the editors when they say that the second "Anglo-Saxon" Bakhtin is essentially different from the original French-structuralist one. Does this mean anything other than to say that the way we used to read Bakhtin in the late 1980s, i.e. in the heyday of post-modernist thinking, was different from the ways we read him in the early days when, really, all that we knew in the English-speaking world of Bakhtin was to be found in his study of Dostoevsky and his work on carnival? Considering the average age of the articles presented in this volume, it appears that a precious opportunity was missed to explore significant aspects of the cultural-historical context within which the articles chosen for translation were actually written. For example, if it is indeed advisable to include an article written by one of the early directors of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (even though this exciting article by Stuart Hall is only peripherally about Bakhtin),

then it becomes puzzling why narry a word was written in the introduction about the place in history that the Birmingham School played, particularly in Great Britain, within Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines, nor about the school's eventual demise and its subsequent legacy. One might have also hoped for a further text in the volume, more specifically dedicated to Bakhtin, that grew out of the thinking of the Birmingham School, for example a chapter from Allon White and Peter Stallybrass.

Further, the editorial choice of concentrating on texts published some twenty years ago means that the particular panorama of thinking presented in this volume cuts itself off from later developments in the Social Science and the Humanities that were very much a part (and still are) of Bakhtin Studies in the English-speaking world. It is unfortunate that the Lusophone reader will not get a feel for the exciting work that has been done with Bakhtin in the fields of post-colonial studies, education, philosophical aesthetics, phenomenology, textual exegesis, psychology, and religious studies. Perhaps a better tack for presenting this volume, based as it is on three loosely-connected themes, might have been to present a history of the thinking on Bakhtin in the English-speaking world. This way of conceiving the volume would have allowed the editors to give the Brazilian reader a stronger basis of why things about Bakhtin were said the way they were in the 1980s and the 1990s, and why only certain aspects of his thinking were considered. At the very least, the complicated history of the translations of Bakhtin into English needed to be broached in the volume's introduction. At the very most, a much more complete explanation of some of the major ideological underpinnings separating the different schools of thought on Bakhtin in the English-speaking world should have been provided. As a further desideratum, one could have hoped for a more explicit justification for the choice of "media studies" among the three headings chosen for inclusion in the volume. Indeed, most observers would probably agree that this type of academic study has not been at the forefront on English-speaking Bakhtin Studies up until now.

As presented, the (false and uncontextualized) opposition between a first-wave "French" Bakhtin and a second-wave "Anglo-Saxon" Bakhtin does much disservice to the laudable goal of bringing some hitherto worthy, but undeservedly forgotten, texts to the attention of a Lusophone audience. First, it deprives the selected texts of some of their

hidden polemics because, for the greater part of these writers working in the 1980s, they were indeed, at least implicitly, written with authors in mind who were contemporaries of Kristeva. An over-simplified vision of French theory in the 1960s and 1970s seems to compel the editors to portray Roland Barthes as an important thinker in the development of French thinking on Bakhtin (pp. 9-10) even though nothing could be further from the truth. In addition, a writer such as Linda Hutcheon, in her innovative but rather unknown piece from 1983 on carnival, another such as Michael Gardiner in his seminal work on utopia in 1992, and a third such as Craig Brandist in an important article on Bakhtin and Gramsci published in 1996 write in linguistic styles that are so utterly different from one another, both in tone and in flavour, that it would have behoved the editors to have recourse to different translators when dealing with works couched in English syntax and vocabulary that are almost foreign to one another.

Finally, since it is impossible within a single volume containing just twelve short texts to present a complete picture of the Bakhtin that emerged in English-speaking countries, it would have certainly been useful for the editors to present a supplementary bibliography designed to include some of the more important authors who were not part of their final editorial choice (Graham Pechey, Galin Tihanov, Emily Schultz, Clive Thomson, Peter Hitchcock, Donald Wesling, Robert Barsky, Michael Bernard-Donals, Rachel Pollard, Gary Saul Morson, Susan Felch, Brian Poole, Dale Bauer, Tim Herrick, to name but a few).

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