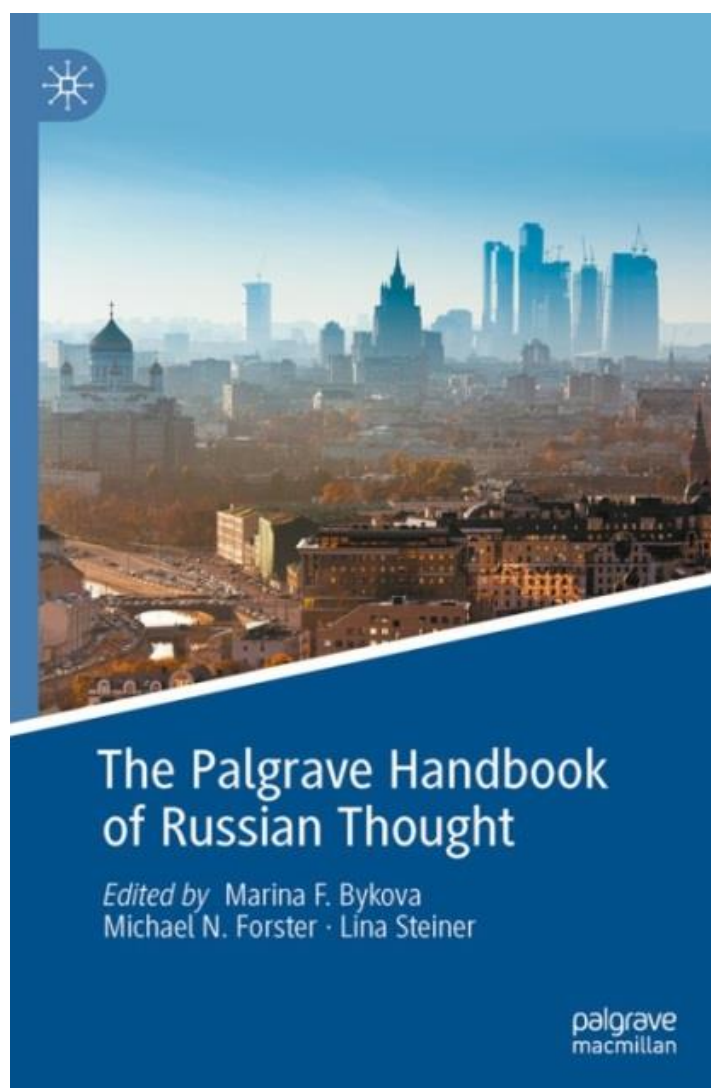


**Bykova, M. F.; Forster, M. N. & Steiner, L. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*. Springer Verlag, 2021. XXVII, 814 p.**

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A review is always subjective, which, however, does not abolish the natural requirement for objectivity in the evaluation of the book being reviewed. In our particular case, subjectivity is synonymous with selectivity; by subjective view, we mean the choice of the angle from which we will analyze and evaluate a given publication. There is no doubt that for the audience of *Bakhtiniana*, as for all researchers of Mikhail Bakhtin's legacy, the first thing of interest is how one of the greatest Russian thinkers is placed in the context of the evolution of Russian thought, in the context of the intellectual history of Russia. In his recent book *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin*, Ken Hirshkop (2021) devoted a separate section to what he called contexts, attempting to identify how and where the range of Bakhtinian ideas emerges, on what basis Bakhtinian thought has formed, which has been nurturing Russian and world humanities science and culture for the past six decades. We cannot say that the book under review gives us an exhaustive answer to this question, but there is no doubt that Mikhail Bakhtin is one of its protagonists. At least two chapters were dedicated to him and Leo Tolstoy individually.

Despite the clear interest of the English-speaking audience in Russian literature and culture, and the unaccountable number of publications on Russian writers, composers, artists, directors, and philosophers<sup>1</sup>, very few large, full-scale reviews of the history of Russian intellectual thought have been written for the English-speaking reader over the past eighty years. Here, of course, we can also think of Nikolai Lossky's *History of Russian Philosophy* (1952) and Vasily Zenkovsky (2003), books that are rightly considered classics, but are addressed primarily to a narrow circle of professional philosophers or researchers in social thought.

One could also add here a disciple of Sergei Gessen, the Polish and then American philosopher Andrzej Walicki (1979; 1987), with his works on Russian liberalism and its influence on public thought and Russian political history. But that is probably where the list will end.

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular: Emerson (2019); Mikhail Epstein and Alyssa DeBlasio. Available at: <https://filosofia.dickinson.edu/encyclopedia/bakhtin-mikhail/>; Morson (2013).

The main reference point, as the authors of the book under review point out, is Sir Isaiah Berlin's book "Russian Thinkers. The book deals with the intellectual and social history of Russia in the 1840s and 1860s, an important, but limited in time period of Russian history. The approach proposed by the acknowledged master of political philosophy proved to be valid and functional even 40 years after its publication. Showing each of the characters of Russian intellectual history in the context of their relationships to their predecessors and contemporaries, with the full range of philosophical and social influences in ideological, political, social, and cultural contexts, is a task that the authors of the book under review have generally coped with no worse than Berlin. Today it is obvious that a broad English-speaking readership needs new approaches to understanding what Russian thought is and what its real contribution to world intellectual culture is. A separate question is how the Russian intellectual history of the 19th and 20th centuries, with all the changes that Russia went through together with the rest of the world, sometimes influencing it very noticeably, should be presented to today's reader. The authors have tried to give answers to these questions. It is no coincidence that Marina Bykova and Lina Steiner note in the preface:

It covers Russia's intellectual history from the late eighteenth century to the dissolution of the Soviet Union—from the first inception of a distinctly Russian philosophical and literary tradition through its astonishingly rich development in the nineteenth century to the orthodox Marxism and dissident thought of the Soviet era and beyond. The most lively and influential period in Russia's long intellectual history, this remarkable time produced philosophical, literary, and religious ideas that had a powerful impact on the country's cultural, political, and socioeconomic development, as well as on the intellectual, cultural, and political development of the whole world (p.V).

A group of authors included scholars not only from the United States and Russia, but also from Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Italy. They were united by a common desire to rethink the canon of Russian intellectual history that has already taken shape in Western consciousness, to expand the traditional circle of thinkers, supplementing it with new names, and to show new trends. In this sense, the proposed interpretation of the concept of Russian thought is noteworthy. It is not only the very intellectual thinking of the late eighteenth and twentieth centuries, represented primarily in the works of philosophers, but also Russian literature as a result, although

specific, but without a doubt, of intellectual forms of activity. Such a combination of philosophy and literature has its reasons: it is centuries of overcoming the order of the old feudal world by Russia, the arrival of the ideas of the European Enlightenment and openness to the changes taking place in European culture, European politics and economy, and European consciousness.

This peculiarity of Russian thought is very clearly reflected in the book, and reflections on Russian writers as spokesmen for public thought occupy a considerable part of this impressive volume. Another task is this one of shattering established stereotypes and sometimes myths. The editors and authors of the book insist that the idea of 19th- and early 20th-century Russian intellectual culture as a kind of repetition of what is happening in Europe, a reproduction of European experience, very often without regard for Russian realities, is, to put it mildly, exaggerated. This is discussed quite convincingly in the pages of the book. And another, perhaps, no less important point is that despite its genre definition - Handbook - published by the authoritative publisher Palgrave Macmillan, the book is primarily a professional, deep, fundamental work, which allows a full picture of the evolution of Russian thought on the background of the ideological, social and political history of the country in the past centuries.

It is extremely important for the student just beginning the study of Russian philosophy, Russian literature, and Russian culture, but it will be no less interesting to professionals as well.

The most important point to note in analyzing the book is that such a large-scale project required a special effort to coordinate a fairly large number of authors and to select subjects that were really important for a full-scale presentation of how Russian thought was shaped and developed over more than two centuries. This is what the introduction written by Marina Bykova and Lina Steiner focuses on.

The combination of social and literary philosophizing and the work of professional philosophical thought constitutes the central nerve and largely determines the face of Russian thought as a social, cultural, and social phenomenon. The authors consistently trace the stages of the formation of the Russian understanding of the dialogue between Russian philosophers (largely amateur and self-taught) and European philosophy in its various versions. In this way, we can identify the main directions along which individual essays on the most brilliant representatives of Russian thought from the pre-

Soviet, Soviet, and, to a certain extent, post-Soviet periods, or on certain general trends in Russian thought, and later, in professional philosophical thought, especially in the twentieth century, are moving forward.

Indeed, the reinterpretation of the usual historical schemes and models affects the change in approaches to the phenomenon of the Russian Enlightenment. For G. Hamburg there is an obvious need to abandon the narrow, purely European, interpretation of the phenomenon of Russian intellectual history, offering its wider version, where the need for education and re-education of the backward masses, acutely felt in the era of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, and particularly strongly embodied in the policy of Peter the Great or Catherine II, leads to the changes that have a significant impact on the intellectual shape of the Russian state in the early nineteenth century.

As a result, not only the traditionally mentioned associates of Catherine the Great or democratic essayists opposing her, such as Nikolai Novikov and Alexander Radishchev, but Semeon Polotsky and Stefan Yavorsky, who appeared on the Russian intellectual scene in the late 17th century, are among the enlighteners.

The utmost scope of the material is another characteristic feature of this guidebook. The authors try to present the reader as clearly as possible the process of formation of Russian thought, especially philosophical thought, hence the extensive sketches of Russian Kantianism and neo-Kantianism, Russian Hegelianism, Marxism, social criticism.

Philosophical schools are represented in a wide variety of forms, from multipolar Marxism to its antipodes. Lenin and Marxist-Leninist philosophy and Marxist-Leninist aesthetics are given considerable attention. Whereas Marina Bykova reflects on Lenin's treatment of contemporary philosophy in his book *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and its subsequent impact on Soviet philosophy during the Communist era, Edward Svidersky examines the early development of Soviet aesthetics through the 1950s Marxists' reference to the work of the young Marx.

Choosing between the details of historical factography and broad generalizations in the tradition of philosophical essayism, many authors give preference to the latter. For example, Sergei Horuzhij, fairly calling religious philosophy the most important achievement of Russian thought at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, explains his approach in the following way:

The tasks of this text are not historical, at least in the sense of describing historical facts or sources. Today in the factual history of Russian philosophy, there are no great lacunae or enigmas, and in any case, such history is not the focus of my studies. My principal goal is conceptual: it is the comprehension of the phenomenon of Russian religious philosophy both in its diachrony and in its synchrony. A methodological remark: these two aspects will be considered not *nacheinander*, but *nebeneinander*, that is, not in succession, but in parallel to each other. This means that I shall trace the course of (philosophical) events trying not so much to describe factual details as to expose logics and structures of this course, the concepts and ideas involved in it (p.51).

Accordingly, for him Russian religious philosophy does not end with the early 1920s, but continues, sometimes quite openly, sometimes veiledly, throughout the twentieth century.

Such attempts at a general overview of these or other trends can best be complemented by chapters devoted to specific figures. This combination of the general and the individual in the gradually emerging picture of the evolution of Russian thought can be called the optimal.

Examples of individual practices sometimes provide the most incredible combinations. Thus, according to Vladimir Kantor, the social decay of mid-nineteenth-century Russia is opposed side by side with such antipodes as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Nikolai Chernyshevsky. In his desire to combine the traditionally incongruent, Kantor is not alone. In his article on how Russian literature views the events of the Civil War and Stalinist Russia Sergei Nikolsky places Mikhail Sholokhov, one of the official protagonists of Soviet ideology, alongside his obvious opponents: Varlam Shalamov, who fought in the Stalinist camps and devoted much of his prose to them, and the author of the well-known dystopias, Andrei Platonov.

Russian thought at the turn of the social and public tradition is represented in essays devoted to Osip Mandelstam, Alexei Losev, Gustav Speth, Ewald Ilyenkov, and many others, particularly the Soviet Sixties. It was the literary work and philosophical journalism of these men that largely redefined the new Soviet reality and attempted to affirm not the sum of party and class values, but of universal human values. These chapters largely echo the chapters devoted to reflections on the fate of Russia in the

writings of Ilya Fominskiy and Semyon Portogais, and the political utopias of Ivan Ilyin.

The book also covers the problem of the professionalization of Soviet philosophy, which has been changing markedly during the last decades of the USSR: along with its traditional political, ideological, and propagandistic tasks, it has begun to solve problems in the field of humanitarian thinking by suggesting new humanitarian practices. Examples include the *actiSvity* approach, described in detail by Vladislav Lectorsky; the epistemological discourse of Soviet and post-Soviet philosophy and its relationship to the traditions of Russian philosophical and cultural thinking are presented very clearly in the essay by Boris Pruzhinin and Tatiana Shchedrina.

A special focus in the book is placed on Russian literature, which, as already was mentioned, is not only in constant dialogue with Russian philosophy, but in the conditions of totalitarian Russia it very often substituted the latter. Writers who claim to be masters of thought and philosophers who put their thoughts into literary texts are a characteristic feature of Russian intellectual life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this sense, Gogol and Belinsky, fascinated by modern philosophy, turn out to be channels not only into the world of literary experience. Their reflections on human existence are quite consonant with the philosophical quests of the Russian Schellingians and Hegelians, and their participation in the activities of St. Petersburg and Moscow philosophical circles determine their rightful place not only in the history of Russian literature and culture, but also in the history of Russian philosophy. The experience of Leo Tolstoy, whose grandiose philosophy of life and life aesthetics are the subject of Lina Steiner's and Henry Pickford's chapters, speaks to this as well.

No less remarkable is the dialogue that Michael Forster maintains with the already mentioned Isaiah Berlin. He attempts to undertake a new evaluation of the entire nineteenth-century circle of the Sixties, which includes Herzen, Bakunin, and many other thinkers who opposed the Nikolai regime but did not agree with the version of socialism proposed by the enlightened West of that time.

This is the context, the thinking background against which the reader perceives the two chapters on Mikhail Bakhtin. Written by two well-known experts on the thinker's legacy - the historian of philosophy Vitaly Makhlin and the historian and theorist of

literature Galin Tihanov - they embody the two poles of Bakhtin's interpretation, which can be conventionally called Russian and European.

What Vitaly Mahlin offers in his essay on Bakhtin can be conventionally defined as Bakhtin's search for the multidimensional space of Russian and Western thought in the twentieth century. The metaphor of the “abyss” separating Bakhtin and the circle of traditional values of the former world in the social and ideological conditions of post-revolutionary Russia becomes a quite effective tool for explaining the reasons for Bakhtin's “otherness” in relation to what happened around him in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist era. And, let us add, the bridge across this abyss is Bakhtin's thought, his intellectual creativity, which helps him to survive all the blows of fate and the hardships that fall upon him. Vitaly Makhlin notes very accurately:

In Bakhtin's own case, I argue, the “abyss” has turned out to be much wider and deeper than in the case of any other important Russian thinker of his age. Right now, it should be sufficient to say that we do not know even today “where Bakhtin came from” and how to “locate” his thought and work in Russian, as well as in Western, intellectual history. Critical literature on Bakhtin had become extensive already by the end of the previous century, and it continues to grow nowadays, so one cannot avoid referring to it (see, e.g., Iurchenko 1995; Adlam and Shepherd 2000). However, it seems that the reception still lacks a methodologically adequate approach to a specific dimension of Bakhtin's “own” time and thought, its “historicity” (in contrast to so-called historicism). Bakhtin himself called such a dimension, in his 1921/1922 programmatic text, “the whole concrete historicalness,” or “being-as-event” as an “ontologically eventful” pre-condition of any individual act or thought (Bakhtin 1993, 3, 57, 10-11, 15-19, etc.). What is meant by these terms seems to be a historically common or communal experience which Bakhtin is known to have always opposed to any “official” consciousness and ideology, as well as to any “rhetoric to the extent of its mendacity” (p.644).

In fact, the researcher offers a kind of Bakhtin chronotope of Russian culture and Russian philosophy, emphasizing the intricate intricacy of the way in which Bakhtin and his ideas come to the reader during the last century. He identifies two starting points. The first is the presence of the thinker in the intellectual space of the 1960s and 1970s, when works on Dostoevsky and Rabelais after a long break, experiencing their “feast of rebirth,” come to his compatriots. The second is the reception of Bakhtin's ideas in Russia and in the West, largely determined precisely by which texts and in what sequence the



scholarly community receives them. Much has already been written about this mismatch between the chronological history of the creation of Bakhtin's works and their publication and reading history, but it is probably Vitaly Mahlin who articulates this problem most clearly by inviting the reader to apply the Bakhtin situation to the history of other philosophers:

First and foremost: in contrast to his famous European contemporaries, Bakhtin, like so many in his Russian generation, was unable to develop and publish his ideas normally, that is, institutionally and timely, he therefore did not have an authentic “biography” (a public form of self-accounting). Just imagine, for a moment, that Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (1927), or Buber’s *Ich und Du* (1923), was to have been published and discussed fifty or eighty years later; but that was, in fact, Bakhtin’s case (p. 646).

The key concept for Mahlin in his interpretation of Bakhtin's heritage and the process of gradual appropriation of this heritage by humanitarian thought in recent decades is that of historicity. In the case of Bakhtin, it acquires a very precise formula, borrowed by Bakhtin from English grammar, which acquires an almost metaphorical content - Future-in-the-Past. In this, however, Bakhtin does not become, as one might suspect, a philosopher expressing the ideology of radical conservatism. Bakhtin's search for the future in the past, as Mahlin suggests, is largely a re-accumulation of old meanings and filling them with new actual content. And in this context, the ideas and concepts proposed by Bakhtin turn out to be much larger than their time, passing into what Bakhtin frames as a great time of culture and human thought. This is how the most famous of Bakhtin's ideas, such as polyphony, dialogue, carnival, chronotope, and those that emerged in connection with the rather late discovery of early Bakhtin's own philosophical texts and still require reflection and rethinking in the philosophical paradigms of the 20th and 21st centuries: the act, participatory thinking, non-materiality, incompleteness, and others should be perceived.

Remarkably, for all his loneliness in postwar Soviet culture and the humanities, Bakhtin does not feel isolated at all. As Mahlin points out, he is in the same intellectual space as leading European philosophers, from the late neo-Kantians to Sartre and Camus. This feeling can easily be detected in his later writings. This is also confirmed by Bakhtin's assessment of “all philosophy,” which is given in the outline of the failed

preface to the collection Questions of Literature and Aesthetics. This collection, it should be recalled, opened to the world a new Bakhtin - a theorist of literature and philosopher of the novel.

As Mahlin explains,

By “all philosophy” <...> the Russian thinker implies, in this context, a particular movement or trend in European philosophy initiated, in his view, mostly by Kierkegaard and Husserl, Dilthey and Scheier, not to mention Nietzsche and the others who constituted the historical constellation of problems that spurred Bakhtin’s thought. That is why, I believe, Bakhtin could develop his early existential phenomenology and social ontology without “reading” similar projects of his contemporaries who represented the same line of thought, which combined the idea of “strict science” with the idea of “experience” (German *Erleben*) in a concrete historical world. To put it differently: during the “decade of one hundred years” Bakhtin developed, quite originally, a new paradigm of thinking similar to that represented by his European contemporaries (Jaspers and Heidegger, Buber and Rosenzweig, Marcel and Rosenstock-Huussy, Ferdinand Ebner and Romano Guardini, as well as many others more or less well known today), without even knowing most of them. For, the historical condition, the constellation of problems, and the “sources” were more or less common or communal at that time, in-between Russia and the West (p.649-650).

If the goal set by Vitaly Makhlin is achieved by creating the broadest possible picture of intellectual activity, with Bakhtin at its center, Galin Tihanov has a somewhat different goal. It is related to his conviction that in philological (formally) texts Bakhtin remains above all a philosopher, and that this philosophical foundation of his theory constitutes the main contribution of Bakhtin to world intellectual thought. As Tihanov explains:

I want to examine the principal trajectories of appropriating Bakhtin in the West since the 1960s; this will allow me to revisit the question of Bakhtin’s longevity, and the potential of his work to gain traction in current debates on world literature. Bakhtin’s work can serve as a litmus test of appropriation that involves constant meta-reflexion on what constitutes translation in different cultural zones. My approach to Bakhtin’s legacy is sustained by a wider theory of translation which comprehends translation both more globally and more historically... (p.659).

Addressing the phenomena of translation and world literature, and constructing a complex configuration of their relationships, Tihanov does not touch upon private questions that are not fundamental to Bakhtin Studies. First of all, he answers the question of how Bakhtin's great time, which shapes his canon of “great authors” and “great literature,” and the historical process of translation in Europe, through which that series of “most important writers” who embody the achievements of European literature - from antiquity to the 19th century - is formed and defined, are correlated.

In this context, translation, understood by the researcher as broadly as possible, plays a crucial role in the process of mastering by the European audience of the achievements of writers who created in languages not accessible to readers. Long dead, these authors reappeared only through the efforts of translators, and very often their texts began to sound completely different in new cultural and social contexts. As proof of Tihanov's thought, let us recall Bakhtin's favorite joke of Russian grammar school students, which he reproduced in his response to *Novyi Mir Journal*: “There used to be a school joke: the ancient Greeks did not know the main thing about themselves, that they were ancient Greeks, and they never called themselves that” (Bakhtin, 1987, p.6)

Similarly, Shakespeare and Calderon appear in the great literature of Europe, which seem to Tihanov to be the clearest examples of such a return. But translation is also an interesting case in the context of Bakhtin's theory: how is a foreign word transmitted and how is it transformed from a foreign word into one's own, and what are the settings, principles and points of application of the translator who makes the word of a foreign author accessible to a foreign-speaking reader? And Bakhtin answers these questions not only from the point of view of the history of linguistics and translation, but first of all within the framework of the philosophy of culture. The most important book for Tihanov remains the book on Rabelais, where Bakhtin the philosopher of culture is presented as visibly as possible.

Tihanov thinks that the inclusion of the Bakhtin layer into the contemporary literary theory allows us to evaluate Bakhtin's heritage from the perspective of “modes of relevance” (J. Derrida), which is actually the subject of his recently published book about the fate of Russian literary theory<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See TIHANOV (2019).

He singles out three periods in Bakhtin's work, and emphasizes the special importance of the latter:

The last stage in Bakhtin's intellectual career begins already in the early 1940s; this is the time when his attention is gradually claimed by the methodology of the humanities. The late appearance of the Rabelais book and the republication of the reworked Dostoevsky book have skewed our perspective on what is the longest period in Bakhtin's work, from the 1940s through to the early 1970s. What genuinely interests him here is a range of new questions that have a metadimension: what is an utterance; what is meaning and how is it produced and communicated; what is the role of dialogue in how we understand the world we are immersed in? (p.663).

Answering these fundamental questions for Bakhtin Studies, Tihanov inevitably arrives at the idea of the internal unity of the various aspects of Bakhtin's thought, which still seems to some of Bakhtin's opponents to be, at the very least, contradictory and insufficiently structured. In this position Tihanov is quite consistent with the arguments and conclusions of recent publications by V. Makhlin (2021) and N. Nikolayev (2021), which allows us to assume the formation of a common view of the problem among the researchers. And he justifiably states:

Yet different as these three periods might arguably be, they have something very important in common: the way in which Bakhtin handles language in his own writing. Whether preoccupied with philosophy of culture, or with the nexus of moral philosophy and aesthetics (which he seeks to resolve in the fit version of the Dostoevsky book by putting forward and valorizing a non-finalizing and non-objectifying *polyphonic* writing), Bakhtin's proper realm as thinker was the in-between territory that is confined to no particular discipline and that he inhabited with such non-negotiable sovereignty. It is in this space between the disciplines that he crafted his own metaphors that enabled him to move freely between different levels of argumentation and address issues located above and beyond particular fields of knowledge. Often elusively, but always extremely stimulatingly, Bakhtin lifts the categories he employs above the conceptual constraints of their home disciplines and instils in them new life by obliterating their previous conceptual identity (p.663).

The current interest of Western literary theory in the phenomenon of world literature in general correlates best of all with the understanding of world literature which Bakhtin presents not only in his book on Rabelais, but also in his sketches and notes of

the 1960s and 1970s. But even here Bakhtin appears not as a philologist, but as a representative of the philosophical and cultural tradition which, to a considerable extent, determines the nature of his thought and research aspirations. In this way, he is an heir and continuer of both the European philosophical and cultural thought of the preceding decades and the Russian one.

In conclusion, we should point out that a reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's legacy exactly in the context of the history of Russian thought in the 19th/20th centuries against the background of European achievements gives the reader a great many insights. As he enters the period of his intellectual creative work during the “Silver Age” (as the early twentieth century in the history of Russian literature and culture is traditionally called), he simultaneously finds himself witnessing and participating in the events of the “Golden Age” of Russian philosophy. This intellectual background, as evidenced not only by Bakhtin's texts, but also by his famous conversations with Viktor Duvakin, accompanied the thinker throughout his life. There is no doubt that without taking into account Bakhtin's dialogue with Russian-European intellectual thought of his time, it is impossible to speak of an adequate reading of his texts and an understanding of his ideas. And an insight into *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought* will be of invaluable assistance to the reader in this endeavor.

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### **Statement of Authors' Contribution**

All authors made substantial contributions to the elaboration of the review “Bykova, M. F.; Forster, M. N. & Steiner, L. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*. Springer Verlag, 2021. XXVII, 814 p.”, fully covering the following aspects: 1) conception, analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting and revising the review critically for important intellectual content; 3) final approval of the version to be published, 4) accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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### **Reviews**

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

### **Research Data and Other Materials Availability**

The contents are already available.