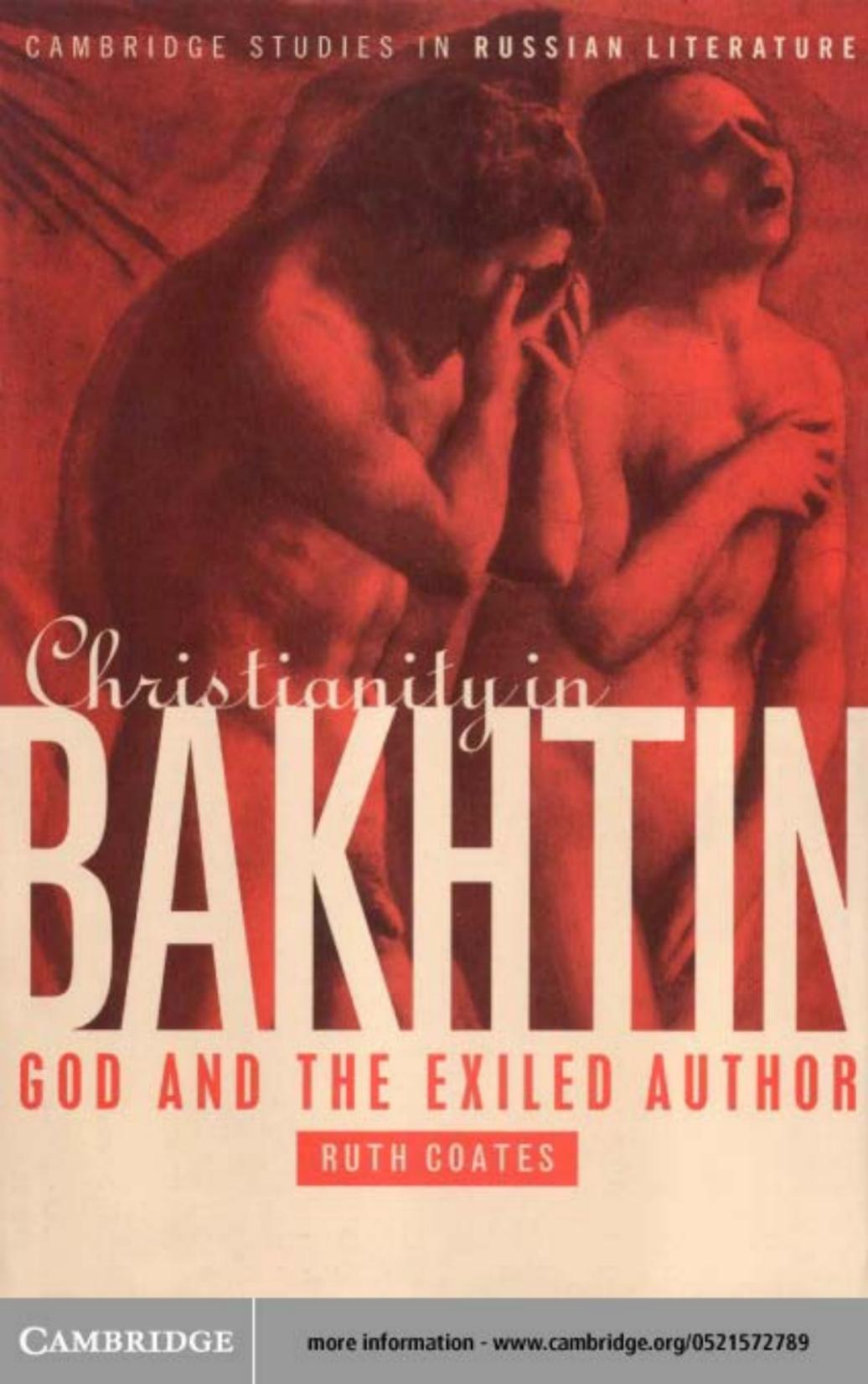


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Christianity in
BAKHTIN
GOD AND THE EXILED AUTHOR

RUTH COATES

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The work of the great Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has been examined from a wide variety of literary and theoretical perspectives. None of the many studies of Bakhtin begins to do justice, however, to the Christian dimension of his work. *Christianity in Bakhtin* for the first time fills this important gap. Having established the strong presence of a Christian framework in his early philosophical essays, Ruth Coates explores the way in which Christian motifs, though suppressed, continue to find expression in the work of Bakhtin's period of exile, and re-emerge in texts written during the time of his rehabilitation. Particular attention is paid to the themes of Creation, Fall, Incarnation and Christian love as they operate within metaphors of silence and exile, concepts which inform Bakhtin's world-view as profoundly as they influence his biography.

RUTH COATES lectures at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. She is editor of *The Emancipation of Russian Christianity* (1995).

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CHRISTIANITY IN BAKHTIN

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CHRISTIANITY IN BAKHTIN

God and the exiled author

RUTH COATES



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For my mother and father

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Abbreviations

WORKS BY M. M. BAKHTIN

'Author and Hero'	'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' (c. 1920–4)
'Changes to <i>Rabelais</i> '	'Additions and Changes to <i>Rabelais</i> ' (1944)
'Chronotope'	'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' (1937–8)
'Content, Material and Form'	'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Creative Literature' (1924)
<i>Dostoevsky's Creative Work</i>	<i>Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work</i> (1929)
<i>Dostoevsky's Poetics</i>	<i>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics</i> (1963)
'Epic and Novel'	'Epic and Novel (towards a methodology for the study of the novel)' (1941)
'Exercise Books'	'From Draft Exercise Books' (1943–61)
'Methodology of the Human Sciences'	'Towards a Methodology of the Human Sciences' (1974)
'Notes of 1970–71'	'From Notes of 1970–71'
'Philosophy of the Act'	'Towards a Philosophy of the Act' (c. 1920–4)
'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse'	'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' (1940)
'Problem of the Text'	'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and other Human Sciences (an attempt at a philosophical analysis)' (1959–61)
<i>Rabelais</i>	<i>The Work of François Rabelais and Popular Culture of the Middle Ages</i> (1965)
'Reworking of Dostoevsky'	'Towards a Reworking of the Book on Dostoevsky' (1961)
'Speech Genres'	'The Problem of Speech Genres' (1952–3)

WORKS BY P. N. MEDVEDEV

Formal Method *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A
Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1928)

WORKS BY V. N. VOLOSHINOV

*Marxism and the
Philosophy of Language* *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language: Basic
Problems of the Sociological Method in the Science
of Language* (1929)

Note on translation and citation

In deciding to render quotations from primary sources in translation, I have been faced with the dilemma of whether to use available translations or to do my own. As a result I have adopted a hybrid system: I use official translations where these exist except for 'Philosophy of the Act', 'Author and Hero', and 'Content, Material and Form' (because the chapters which deal with these essays were complete before the appearance of Vadim Liapunov's translations), and also the late texts 'Problem of the Text', 'Notes of 1970–71', and 'Methodology of the Human Sciences' (because I have reservations about Vern McGee's translation of them). This practice is reflected in the form of my references. Where two figures are given, it indicates that I have used an official translation. In such cases the first figure refers to the page in the Russian original, whilst the second figure, given in square brackets, refers to the page in the translation, thus: ('Discourse in the Novel', 112 [299]). Details of translations may be found in the Bibliography after their Russian originals. Where only one figure, that of the original, is given, it indicates that I have translated the text myself. Primary texts are referred to using the abbreviations listed on the previous two pages; secondary literature is referred to by the author–date system.

I have used the British system of Cyrillic transliteration, but rendered -iy as -y, as do *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, at the end of personal names. Quotations from the Bible are from the New International Version.

Finally, when translating from Bakhtin and when commenting on his texts, I frequently encountered the problem of masculine gender bias in his use of personal and possessive pronouns. Occasionally, in the absence of a stylistically appropriate alternative, I have found it necessary to reflect this bias in my own syntax.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This book is about Christian motifs in the writings of the philosopher Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975). As such it is already contentious if one is to judge by the way in which this writer's work has been received, especially in the West. For although Bakhtin has been appropriated for a wide variety of critical and literary theoretical positions, ranging from Marxism to post-structuralism, it has been generally assumed that he is a secular thinker even where it has been accepted that he was a religious man. I believe that this assumption stands in need of some correction. If at first critical neglect of Christian motifs in Bakhtin was due to pardonable ignorance – certain crucial, early and late, texts being made available only by the mid 1980s (in Russia) and the early 1990s (in the West) – it now seems attributable to a certain, uncanny 'blindness', at least among Slavists, who have had time enough to respond to this particular voice among the many that contend for attention in Bakhtin's work. By focusing on the Christian voice in Bakhtin to the exclusion of all others, I hope to provide what I believe to be a necessary counterbalance to extant readings, and something of an 'eye-opener' for those who would dismiss the idea of a religious dimension in his work as unfounded, irrelevant or naive. I do not, however, take on opposing views within the bounds of the book; my task is to demonstrate the presence and development of Christian influences in Bakhtin's work. Although there is biographical evidence to support the view that Bakhtin was acquainted with and sympathetic to Christianity, I do not appeal to this in the body of my text, as I hope that my reading will be found justified on purely textual grounds. However, for background and general information with a tangential relevance to my topic I have devoted the first part of the Introduction to a review of Bakhtin's 'religious biography'. The second part aims to situate the book with respect to

critical literature on Bakhtin; since a total orientation is unfeasible, I have restricted my overview to full-length works on Bakhtin and articles in English and Russian which touch on my subject. Finally, I give some attention to the title, content and structure of the book.

BAKHTIN'S RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHY

L. E. Pinsky is reported to have said, in a lecture at a conference held in Bakhtin's honour shortly after his death, that Bakhtin was a *filosof-molchun*, a philosopher and a man who kept silence (Kagan 1991, 87). In particular, his friends and helpers of the sixties and seventies agree that he rarely and with great reluctance talked about himself (for example, Kozhinov 1992, 111; Gachev 1993, 106–7). This, taken together with the fact that he was one of the last survivors among the intelligentsia of the early decades of the twentieth century (both time and the Stalinist purges having taken their toll), means that almost nothing is known of his life, still less of his inner life. Even the taped interviews with V. D. Duvakin, recorded in the last years of Bakhtin's life and later transcribed serially in the journal *Chelovek* (Duvakin 1993a–1994d), yield next to nothing about Bakhtin's personal convictions. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus among those who knew him that Bakhtin was a religious man. And indeed, it is possible to piece together the little reliable data available to us and construct a fragile framework that might be called Bakhtin's 'religious biography'.

In doing so, it is first necessary to say something about the only full-length biography of Bakhtin that has been written to date: Clark and Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984a). Clark and Holquist also construct a framework from firm documentary evidence and mostly reliable anecdotal evidence (interviews with Bakhtin's young and old acquaintances), padding it out with information about the social, intellectual and political conditions of the time drawn from a wide range of sources unconnected with Bakhtin. The result is an apparently seamless narrative which creates an image of Bakhtin as an integral personality with a well-documented personal history. This image is, however, deceptive. Whilst both methodologies are valid in their own right, Clark and Holquist's combination of the two can result in a misleading impression of substantiality. Bakhtin is placed into his historical context in such a way as to suggest he had definite connections with trends of thought, even specific organisa-

tions, when in fact there is no hard evidence that he did. Or if there is hard evidence, Clark and Holquist do not attest it: there tends to be scanty or non-existent footnoting at precisely those points in their narrative where the attested historical Bakhtin is blended so seamlessly with the attested historical Vilnius, or Odessa, or Vitebsk, or Petrograd. If one is acquainted with the primary biographical material on Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist's sources are sometimes detectable, leading one to suppose their lack of attestation to be the result only of negligence, but such an acquaintance can also leave one wondering how they came to certain conclusions. In general, a more scholarly approach to Bakhtin's biography is needed in order to inspire trust in the narrative, which seems in places to border on fiction.

One of the weakest chapters of the biography in this respect is, unfortunately, Chapter 5, 'Religious Activities and the Arrest' (1984a, 120–45), the chapter which deals with Bakhtin's religious orientation. It opens in this way:

Bakhtin was a religious man. In his childhood he had had a conventional upbringing as a Russian Orthodox. By the 1920s, religious thought had become one of Bakhtin's central interests. He was known in intellectual circles of those days as a *cerkovnik*, a 'churchman' or 'adherent of the church'. This term does not mean that he was a churchgoer but implies simply that he was ideologically committed to the church. Although he later became less involved with religion, he remained a believer in the Orthodox tradition all his life.

The only attested statement in this paragraph is that which refers to Bakhtin's reputation as a 'churchman', taken from an interview with V. Shklovsky in 1978, yet in their footnote Clark and Holquist qualify even this by admitting that 'Shklovsky may have exaggerated Bakhtin's involvement in the church, since he himself was far from those circles' (1984a, 370). Chapter 5 continues with a description of the nature of Bakhtin's religious convictions:

Bakhtin was never a conventional Russian Orthodox in the sense of conforming to an organized religion. Rather, he was a religious intellectual from the Orthodox tradition. His religious views came not so much from traditional Orthodox thinking within the church as from the religious revival in the early twentieth century among Russian intellectuals who sought to break new ground in theological thought. Bakhtin's Orthodox theology was not of the run-of-the-mill seminary but of the highbrow

intelligentsia. Indeed, he was not interested so much in religion as in the philosophy of religion. (1984a, 120)

However plausible this account may be, and however attractive to a late-twentieth-century readership, it is pure speculation, based, one must hazard (since the reader is not informed), on the tenor of Bakhtin's writing.

Clark and Holquist proceed to give an informative and lively overview of religious–intellectual life in Leningrad in the 1920s as it went on in the form of various societies, periodically giving the reader to understand that Bakhtin took an active part in them. However, on close examination it becomes clear that there is almost no proof of any connection, and many of Clark and Holquist's bridging statements are qualified with a 'probably', 'possibly' or 'almost certainly'. To cite some examples, in reference to the Free Philosophical Association it is said 'it is possible that Bakhtin attended occasional meetings of the association on his visits to Petrograd' (1984a, 125); of Voskresenie they write 'Bakhtin was not definitely a member of Voskresenie, though Yudina and Pumpyansky attended meetings from the fall of 1920' (1984a, 126). (Yudina and Pumpyansky were members of the so-called Bakhtin Circle. Frequently the religious activity of Bakhtin's friends is adduced to enforce speculation about Bakhtin's own leanings, a practice which seems not entirely satisfactory. Often, even these 'facts' are not attested.) With respect to the Brotherhood of Saint Seraphim, 'there is no conclusive evidence that Bakhtin was a member' (1984a, 133), further, 'Bakhtin is not known to have been a member' of the True Orthodox Catacomb Church (1984a, 140). Bakhtin is associated with some of these groups by alleged friendship with their leading members. Specifically, he is said to have known A. A. Meier of Voskresenie, A. V. Kartashev of the Brotherhood of Saint Sophia, and Archpriest F. K. Andreev of the Josephite schism, although no proof is offered. Another way of linking him with religious intellectuals is by way of intellectual affiliation, Clark and Holquist providing brief surveys, for example, of his alleged affinities with Fr P. A. Florensky, S. A. Askoldov and G. P. Fedotov. But these approaches, I suggest, do not in the end tell us anything substantial about what Bakhtin really believed during the 1920s, let alone, of course, during the rest of his life.

What, then, can be said about Bakhtin's religiousness from the

biographical evidence available? Bocharov testifies that in 1916, while he was studying at Petrograd University, Bakhtin was introduced to the Religious–Philosophical Society by Kartashev, where he made the acquaintance of D. S. Merezhkovsky (Bocharov 1993, 81; see also Clark and Holquist 1984a, 29–30, where the influence of Fr Florensky and Meier is also claimed, but not substantiated). In the Duvakin interviews, Bakhtin confirms that he attended meetings of this society (Duvakin 1993b, 141; 1993c, 147–51). It is known that on 27 November 1918 Bakhtin took part in a debate entitled ‘God and Socialism’ in Nevel’, where he lived between 1918 and 1920, because a review of the debate in the local newspaper, *Molot*, has been preserved. Nevel’skaya (1981) quotes extensively from the not unbiased reviewer, who writes:

After comrade Deikhman comrade Bakhtin took the floor. In his speech, in which he defended religion, that muzzle [*namordnik*] of darkness, he hovered somewhere in the region of the heavens and higher. There were no living examples from the life and history of humankind in his speech. At certain points of his discourse he showed recognition and appreciation of socialism, but could only wail and was disturbed that this same socialism showed no concern at all for the dead (what, it doesn’t celebrate requiems?) and that, as he put it, with time the people would not forgive it for this. When, I wonder, ‘won’t it forgive’? In 100 years from now or more? – when the people will be 100 times more enlightened than the present generation! ‘That won’t happen,’ someone answered Bakhtin. Generally speaking, listening to his words you might think that any minute now all the hosts lying decayed in their graves will be resurrected, rise up and sweep all communists, and the socialism they are carrying out, from the face of the earth. (Nevel’skaya 1981, 274, quoted from *Molot*, 3 December 1918, No. 47)

From the same newspaper we know that there were other public meetings devoted to topics including ‘On the Meaning of Life’, ‘On the Meaning of Love’, ‘Christianity and Criticism’ and ‘Nietzsche and Christianity’ (Bocharov 1993, 84; see also Clark and Holquist 1984a, 42–3).

The next set of documentary evidence provides glimpses of the religious Bakhtin in Leningrad, to which he returned in 1924 and where he lived until he was sent into exile in 1929. Recently, a set of lecture notes made in 1924–5 by Pumpyansky, one of the original members of the Bakhtin Circle, has been published, and provides an invaluable insight into the circle’s activities during that period (Nikolaev 1992). The notes include a paper on ‘The Problem of Well-

founded Peace' read by Bakhtin, in which he outlines what he considers to be the proper task of the philosophy of religion, analyses the position of the tax collector of the gospel parable as one who finds justification not in himself, like the Pharisee, but in an 'incarnated Third Person' (Nikolaev 1992, 235), and posits well-founded peace as that which is reached when one abandons self-assurance and passes through a period of restlessness and penitence to arrive at a condition of trust in God (Nikolaev 1992, 236). Pumpyansky also notes Bakhtin's responses to papers given by M. I. Tubyansky on Schell's theology at the end of 1925; these include an especially interesting analysis of the self-revelation of God as personal in character, and of the relationship with God as a relationship of two consciousnesses: 'A personal relationship with a personal God: this is the sign of religion, but it is also the special difficulty of religion, thanks to which a peculiar fear of religion and Revelation may arise, a fear of its personal orientation' (Nikolaev 1992, 246). That theology was one of the main preoccupations of the circle in 1925–6 is attested further by Pumpyansky's reading list of the period (Nikolaev 1992, 251), and by a letter of 1926 from Pumpyansky to another founding member of the circle, M. I. Kagan, then resident in Moscow:

We have been missing you . . . all this year – all these years – but especially this year, because we have been doggedly studying theology. The circle of our closest friends remains the same: M. B. Yudina, Mikh. Mikh. Bakhtin, Mikh. Izr. Tubyansky and I. Believe me, we often exclaim: what a shame that M. I. isn't here, he could have helped disentangle that question! (Nevel'skaya 1981, 265–6)

In the night of 24/25 December 1928, Bakhtin was taken into custody as part of a wave of arrests connected with the liquidation of Leningrad's religious society Voskresenie. The documentation of the affair, held to date in the KGB archives, runs to five volumes (Savkin, 1991, 108–9). Savkin relates that he and other scholars were allowed access to the material, but that they were unable to complete work on it for reasons outside their control (1991, 108). However, they were able to collect and publish transcripts of Bakhtin's interrogations under Stromin (on 26 December) and Petrov (on 28 December). It appears that Bakhtin was accused of participation in the 'counter-revolutionary' organisation Voskresenie, but that nothing Bakhtin said during his interrogations supported the claim (1991, 109). It is

known, however, that Bakhtin was well acquainted with the leader of the society, A. A. Meier; Bakhtin's literary executor, S. G. Bocharov, testifies that Bakhtin made Meier's acquaintance while still a student and spoke of him as one of those closest to him during the 1920s (Savkin 1991, 109–10; see also Bocharov 1993, 82). In the Duvakin interviews, Bakhtin confirms that he knew Meier and found him very impressive, but did not sympathise with his views and did not attend his meetings; rather, it was Meier who occasionally visited Bakhtin (Duvakin 1993c, 151). During his first interrogation Stromin wrote down from Bakhtin's words, 'Political convictions: Marxist-revolutionary, loyal to Soviet power, religious' (Savkin 1991, 110). Strangely, Yu. P. Medvedev's citation of the same interrogation differs somewhat: 'no party affiliation. Marxist-revisionist . . . religious' (1992, 97). Which of these is the more accurate cannot as yet be verified, but Bakhtin clearly admitted faith in God.

During his interrogations Bakhtin was asked to give information about his lecturing activities in Leningrad, where they had taken place, who had attended, and what they were about. To this end he outlined the content of two papers given on M. Scheler, in which his treatment of the concepts of confession and resurrection were examined:

According to Scheler, confession is the laying bare of oneself to others, making social ('discourse') what used to strive towards its extra-verbal limit ('sin') and was an isolated, unconquered, alien body in the inner life of a person. The second paper was about resurrection. The gist: life will rise from the dead not for its own sake but for the sake of that value which only love can disclose in it. (Savkin 1991, 111)

Meier had taken part in the discussions following one of these papers (Savkin 1991, 111). Bakhtin was released on 5 January 1929, but interrogated again on 13 March. This time he admitted to meetings held at his flat for former students of the Petrograd Theological Institute, which had been closed down in 1923 (Clark and Holquist 1984a, 138) but had continued to operate in private homes under the organisation of one of the teaching staff, Shcherboi (Savkin 1991, 113; Clark and Holquist call him Sherbov, 1984a, 138). In the end Bakhtin was sentenced to five years in prison camp on the Solovetsky Islands (Savkin 1991, 114), commuted after a great effort on the part of his friends to a period of internal exile in Kustanai, Kazakhstan.

For about thirty years after Bakhtin's departure into exile there is next to no documentary evidence about his life, let alone his religious

life, whose public dimension naturally vanished in the wake of his conviction and under the pressure of a militant ideological atheism. In the early 1960s, however, three graduate students at the Institute of World Literature in Moscow (S. G. Bocharov, V. V. Kozhinov and G. D. Gachev) discovered that Bakhtin was still alive and began to visit him in exile, eventually rehabilitating him, seeing through the publication of his works and resettling him and his wife in Moscow. The first visit took place in June 1961 (Bocharov 1993, 76). Both Kozhinov and Bocharov recall that on their very first meeting Bakhtin went out of his way to assure them that he was not a Marxist (Bocharov 1993, 76–7; Kozhinov 1992, 113). Before long, other scholars also began visiting the philosopher; two of these, V. N. Turbin and L. S. Melikhova, became intensively involved in the physical care of the Bakhtins. As a result of these working relationships with Bakhtin, which extended until his death in 1975, we have sporadic but highly trustworthy anecdotal evidence that he had not abandoned his faith during his long period of obscurity but had continued to meditate on religious themes. Kozhinov, for example, relates the following in an interview with the editor of a new journal on Bakhtin:

What Bakhtin often used to call the ‘philosophy of dialogue’ lay at the basis of all his literary-critical works: all of life is a dialogue, a dialogue between person and person, person and nature, person and God . . . Even simply the very existence of a person, if you like, is also a ‘dialogue’, the exchange of substances between the person and the surrounding environment. And in this regard Bakhtin several times repeated the phrase that, as it were, objective idealism maintains that the kingdom of God is outside us, and Tolstoy, for example, insists that it is ‘within us’, but I think that the kingdom of God is between us, between me and you, between me and God, between me and nature: that’s where the kingdom of God is. (Kozhinov 1992, 114–15)

If God is related to Bakhtin’s dialogic concept, his other famous conceptual tool, carnival, appears also to have been associated with religion in Bakhtin’s mind, judging by Turbin’s testimony that Bakhtin once reflected in his presence that ‘the gospel, too, is carnival’ (1990, 25). Melikhova, for her part, likes to show visitors the icon of St Seraphim of Sarov which the Bakhtins held in their flat in the 1920s and which accompanied them (albeit hidden away) into exile. She relates that Bakhtin considered the saint to be his ‘heavenly protector’ (Bocharov 1993, 87; Clark and Holquist 1984a, 133).

Bocharov’s recent publication, ‘Ob odnom razgovore i vokrug

nego' ('On and around a certain conversation') (1993), sheds highly interesting light on Bakhtin's attitude to his own silence on religious matters in his work, indicating that the fear of repression was influencing him even in the 1920s. Bocharov relates a conversation that took place on 9 June 1970, from which I quote the relevant passage in full (the two books referred to are Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and Bakhtin's first monograph, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work*):

BAKHTIN: Everything that was created over the course of this half-century on this graceless [*bezblagodatnoi*] soil under this unfree sky, it is all depraved to some degree or other.

BOCHAROV: Mikhail Mikhailovich, leaving [Voloshinov's] book aside for a moment, that's a complicated matter, but what is depraved about your book on Dostoevsky?

BAKHTIN: Oh come now, could I really have written like that? I tore the form away from the most important thing, you know. I couldn't talk directly about the main questions.

BOCHAROV: Which questions, M. M.?

BAKHTIN: Philosophical questions, what Dostoevsky tormented himself with all his life: the existence of God. I had to prevaricate all the time, to and fro. I had to take a firm hold of myself. As soon as a thought got going it was necessary to stop it. To and fro (Bakhtin repeated this several times during the conversation). I even qualified what I said about the Church. (1993, 71–2)

A little later on in the conversation Bakhtin implicitly accused himself of treachery. Referring to the literary-critical work of Bocharov and his colleagues he said: 'You, at least, do not betray. If you don't assert, it's because you're not sure. But I prevaricated – to and fro' (1993, 73). What did Bakhtin feel he had betrayed? Gachev's recent reminiscences give the answer: whilst consulting with Bakhtin about a book he was planning to write on the history of conscience, Bakhtin asked him: 'But what point of support will you adopt for conscience? For me that point of support is God' (1993, 107).

CRITICAL LITERATURE ON BAKHTIN AND THE QUESTION OF A CHRISTIAN READING

Full-length works

There are many possible ways of dividing up the list of full-length works on Bakhtin that are currently on the market: those written by

Slavists and those by non-Slavists, by Russians and non-Russians, by Europeans and non-Europeans, and so on. A discussion of the secondary literature under these headings would yield interesting results, not least from a culturological point of view. What does it say about the West and the East, for example, that to date only one slim monograph has been produced on Bakhtin in his native Russia,¹ where there is no language barrier to prevent access to Bakhtin's entire *oeuvre* and where the texts have been available for a long time, whereas upwards of twelve books devoted to him have appeared in the West over the past thirteen years, despite cultural and linguistic barriers to understanding Bakhtin and with some key texts unavailable in translation until very recently. Russian scholars have tended to comment on this phenomenon in a self-critical spirit; Volkova, for example, laments the slowness of native scholars to respond to Bakhtin, pointing out the discrepancy between the quantity of articles and books published in Russia and the West (a ratio, she claims, of 285 to 412 as of the end of 1990) (Volkova 1990, 5), whilst Averintsev (1988b) finds the feet-dragging attitude of the Soviet/Russian academic establishment to its national heritage scandalous. However, a Western 'other' might point out, to the Russians' credit, a certain modesty in their measured appropriation of Bakhtin from which our rather brasher, more hasty Western academics might learn. The broad thrust of Russian literature on Bakhtin has comprised meditative conceptual studies and contributions towards his historical contextualisation, in particular his position in the history of Russian thought, whereas Western literature has tended to concentrate on 'extensions and challenges' (as Morson and Emerson's 1989 collection of articles is succinctly headed), the application of Bakhtinian concepts or their refutation, perhaps before they have been adequately understood. These two, intensive and extensive, approaches are, of course, complementary: what is needed, perhaps, is more communication between them.

Most of the full-length studies of Bakhtin discuss his writings as a whole, although their methodologies differ widely. Of the three comprehensive introductory works available, Todorov's pioneering monograph (1981, translated into English in 1984) comprises a systematic, synchronic exposition of Bakhtin's thought; Clark and Holquist (1984a), as we have seen, take a chronological and a biographical approach; whilst Morson and Emerson (1990) opt to combine the two in their long book, which presents thematically a

view of Bakhtin's thought as developing over time. In general, the publications of the nineties build on these general surveys by offering an interpretation of Bakhtin within more specific comparative frameworks. Thus Holquist's study (1990) offers an interpretation of Bakhtin's 'dialogism' as one of the great paradigm shifts of the twentieth century, Gardiner (1992) compares Bakhtin to the hermeneutic giants Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur as a cultural theoretician of the left, and Bernard-Donals (1994) considers his relationship to Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, on the one hand, and materialism (including Marxist materialism), on the other.

With the single exception of Clark and Holquist's biography, however, none of the above-mentioned books even begin to do justice to the religious dimension to Bakhtin's work. Todorov merely notes Bakhtin's 'interest in religious subjects' in his first chapter's biographical sketch (1984, 4); Gardiner, apart from a faintly patronising remark in his Introduction to the effect that Bakhtin has 'even' been portrayed as a religious thinker (1992, 2), relegates the matter to a single footnote (1992, note 6, 215)²; Holquist frankly concedes that as a non-believer he only concerned himself with Bakhtin's own faith when collaborating on the 1984 biography out of a sense of responsibility before the facts (1990, xii), and proposes now to concentrate on aspects of Bakhtin in which he has a personal interest; Bernard-Donals does not mention the matter at all. Morson and Emerson devote fewer than 5 pages of text, put together, to an examination of Christian themes and allusions in Bakhtin, out of a total of 530. Where possible their treatment of this area is confined to the categories of analogy (1990, 239–40, God and the Dostoevskian author) and allegory (403, Christ's metamorphosis of God into slave). They acknowledge Christian figures in Bakhtin only where it would be impossible honestly to pass them by, but do make some succinct comments, such as 'Bakhtin's theology, to the extent he had one, is not of resurrection but of incarnation' (1990, 61).

Whatever the shortcomings of their book, Clark and Holquist (1984a) deserve great credit for their conscientious documentation and discussion of this aspect of Bakhtin's life and work. They record what is known of his beliefs, and they incorporate a discussion of certain religious elements of his thought into their survey of his early essays and of his monograph *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984a, 82–7, 248–52). If their coverage of this aspect of Bakhtin is limited, it is due in part to the limitations of the book as a whole: firstly, the

very comprehensiveness of Clark and Holquist's project means that no one theme is given the full attention it deserves, thus the passages on Christian motifs in texts written before Bakhtin's exile raise the reader's interest but are not followed through by any investigation of what happens to these motifs in later texts. Likewise, after the fifth chapter (on Bakhtin's religious activities in Leningrad) no more is said about Bakhtin's Christian practice or beliefs until he is on his death-bed and waves away the priest (1984a, 343). The book also suffers, however, from a lack of scholarliness and an alarming degree of speculation (see my discussion above), which undermines the real value of the religious theme. Nevertheless, to give it its due, *Mikhail Bakhtin* can be said to perform a useful function in raising awareness of this topic (as of many others), and is best viewed as an introductory stimulus to further research. Indeed, my own project was in part prompted by undeveloped ideas in Clark and Holquist's book.

There is one monograph, Patterson's *Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemporaries* (1988), which, as its title suggests, takes Bakhtin's spiritual dimension consistently seriously. But the book is a comparative, not an expository, study; thus Bakhtin's spirituality is assumed rather than laid bare, irritating the reader (such as David Shepherd (1992, 66)) who is not sympathetic to a religious reading of Bakhtin. Patterson proceeds from the, regrettably, unexamined assumption that 'operating from a generally religious and distinctively Christian viewpoint, Bakhtin embraces the Johannine concept of the word and regards the dialogical dimensions of literature as a revelation of spirit' (1988, 3). He goes on to draw Bakhtin's ideas into a 'dialogue' with those of Foucault, Berdyaev, Gide, Lacan, Levinas and Heidegger. Various concepts from these thinkers come together in Patterson's imagination to suggest rich possibilities for interaction. His book is more a meditation than a scholarly work, as the flyleaf suggests, but even as a meditation it is imperilled by Patterson's difficult, one feels bound to say contorted, style, which is unfortunate, since the comparisons he undertakes surely bear much promise and because, it seems to me, there really is a spiritual core to Bakhtin which deserves to be taken seriously and to gain wider recognition among his readership. At least in the West this ground has not been broken, but a different kind of study to Patterson's is needed before his book can even begin to be, if not accepted, then at least meaningfully criticised.

There are of course a great many monographs which use Bakhtin

to illuminate another author or discipline, rather than analyse Bakhtin himself. Particularly relevant to this book is Jones' *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism* (1990), which, although it takes Dostoevsky as its object of investigation, finds itself in intense dialogue with Bakhtin insofar as Dostoevsky is read in the light of the new paradigm, as Jones puts it (1990, viii), which has been brought about in Dostoevsky studies by Bakhtin's authoritative reading of him in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Yet in a second sense the book is about Bakhtin in that Jones, in his own reading of Dostoevsky, subjects Bakhtin's work to a certain respectful critique, partly extending the latter's concept, partly pointing out its inadequacies. Jones' main criticism of Bakhtin is that he failed to take account of the destructive, violent nature of much Dostoevskian verbal interaction, for which the author is famous, and of dialogic breakdown and failure: polyphony, after all, is a harmonious concept. In this Jones is palpably correct, and his examination of this aspect of Dostoevsky's texts persuasively develops his point. Jones' extension of Bakhtin, however, goes some way to redressing the latter's oversight, and in a direction which bears indirectly (sometimes directly) on my own thesis. For Jones attempts to extend Bakhtin 'in the direction of a Christian poetics' (1990, 199): first, by showing, in his chapter '*The Brothers Karamazov: The Whisper of God*', how crucial elements of the Christian kerygma are suppressed, both in the text of the novel, and in the minds of certain of its characters; second, by suggesting that a Christian reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* might productively employ a concept of language as 'fallen' in the interpretation of this suppression. Jones appears to be unaware that Bakhtin, as I hope to show, developed a keen awareness of the fallenness of discourse which is reflected in his mature writings. In his Preface Jones writes (in the context of a discussion of how Bakhtin's work might be assimilated to a number of theoretical approaches to literature):

In my own view . . . he could just as easily be assimilated to a Christian literary theory of a new kind and, despite the neglect in his writings of the Christian tradition – he was after all writing in Soviet Russia – his personal adherence to Orthodoxy makes one think that he would not have been altogether surprised or dismayed by such a suggestion. (1990, xi)

I endorse this comment without hesitation, and hope that my study goes some way to providing the groundwork for such a literary theory.

Finally, the work of theologians influenced by Bakhtin should be mentioned. In his article of 1984 Polzin uses the concepts of 'authoritative' and 'inwardly persuasive' discourse in a Bakhtinian analysis of the book of Deuteronomy, referring the reader to his monograph of 1980 (but see also its sequel of 1989) for a more thorough treatment of certain key questions raised by his essay. These monographs analyse the narrative of Deuteronomy in an attempt to elucidate the question as to its ultimate semantic authority. H. C. White (1991) investigates Genesis in terms of author-character relationships, and Reed (1993) enlists Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to work out a poetics of the Scriptures centred on the three generic paradigms of law, prophecy and wisdom.³ Of course, the application of Bakhtin's discourse theory to biblical texts is no indication of Bakhtin's own attitude to the Bible, although with Prickett (1986) I agree that the textual evidence shows Bakhtin's apparent consignment of Holy Writ to the realm of epic not to be as straightforward as it might at first appear: this is another area which I do not touch on here, but which could be profitably investigated.⁴

Related articles

Although it is true that a full account of the reflection of Bakhtin's religious beliefs in his work has not been written,⁵ there is a small body of articles devoted to this and related subjects. Most of these articles have come out in Russia, where they constitute a growing trend and make up a not insignificant proportion of Russian secondary literature on Bakhtin taken as a whole; in the West, by contrast, the interest shown in this aspect of Bakhtin has been minimal and barren in the sense that it has not given rise to further interest or a multiplication in the number of publications. Apart from an uncanny unwillingness to face the evidence, one might point by way of explanation for this phenomenon to the literary orientation of most Western Bakhtin scholarship over and against the philosophical orientation of its Russian counterpart, combined with the lack of availability, until very recently, of an English version of the texts in which Christian motifs are most apparent. Thus most of the few works on this subject that have come out in the West have been written by Slavists.

Ann Shukman's articles were a voice in the wilderness during the 1980s. In two articles about Bakhtin's treatment of Tolstoy (1984b;

1989), and in a review article of Clark and Holquist's biography and Emerson's translation of the book on Dostoevsky (1986), she approaches Bakhtin's Christianity tangentially. But in the one article devoted solely to the subject (1984a) she addresses the issue through what she terms Bakhtin's personalist 'philosophy of man', after a discussion of his relationship with his Neo-Kantian influences – Dilthey, Rickert and Cohen. Shukman appeals to rarely quoted passages in Bakhtin's early essay 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' and from his late essays to support her argument that Bakhtin is primarily concerned with personality in relation, including relation with God (1984a, 245–7). In the Tolstoy articles she uses much the same passages to provide a background against which the crudely Marxist Tolstoy Prefaces of 1929 and 1930 must, in her view, be understood, namely as examples of double-voiced discourse, in which Bakhtin responds to the times by producing an ideologically acceptable critique of Tolstoy's religious views whilst highlighting those same views through various devices, and ironising his critique by exaggeration. Although Shukman's studies serve as necessary reminders of an unpopular aspect of Bakhtin, they are, however, in themselves too short and insufficiently systematic to do full justice to the subject; rather they are pointers to a potentially rich area of enquiry.

Apart from Shukman's work, there appear to be no more than a few isolated essays in print in the English-speaking world which focus on Christianity and related themes in Bakhtin. Nina Perlina's article on Bakhtin and Buber (1984), to my knowledge, still stands alone, although there are signs that Western interest in Bakhtin's affinities with the other (religious) 'dialogic' thinkers of the twentieth century (Buber, Rosenzweig, Rosenstock-Huessy) is on the increase.⁶ Perlina claims that 'Bakhtin's discourse-utterance theory provides the linguistic basis for the existentialist and Judaeo-Christian philosophy of Martin Buber' (1984, 25), but she does not develop her claim into a comparative analysis of the specifically religious in Bakhtin and Buber, and does no more than mention Bakhtin's 'dialogue between man and God' (25). Her article outlines common intellectual influences and affinities in their respective understanding of dialogue, and common ideal authoritative–dialogic figures (including Christ), but the existence of spiritual affinities between Bakhtin and Buber, although implied throughout, is not made explicit. Barbara Thaden's untypical essay (1987) challenges Kriste-

va's appropriation of Bakhtin for deconstruction by asserting that Bakhtin 'does not deny the authorial voice in Dostoevsky, does not claim that Dostoevsky has lost control over his characters, and does not completely deconstruct the "I"' (1987, 200). For Thaden, the incomplete Bakhtinian 'I' is rather to be understood within the Judaeo-Christian tradition as that which is in need of the other, of communion, for completion; that is, as a refutation of egoism (1987, 205), indicating grounds for comparison of Bakhtin with religious existentialist thinkers like Buber and Jaspers. This needs to be investigated in much more detail. Other Western scholars who have produced article-length comparative studies of Bakhtin with religious philosophers include the Italians Augusto Ponzio (writing on Levinas, 1987) and Donatella Ferrari-Bravo (on Florensky, 1990).

Russian Federation Bakhtin scholarship was slow in starting up but has recently taken off at enormous speed judging by the amount of publication that has been going on in the area since the early nineties. Broadly speaking, one may divide Russian-language philosophical articles on Bakhtin into those which explicate concepts or works, those which discuss Bakhtin in his Russian intellectual context, and those which compare his work to Western philosophical trends. Within the last two categories there are subdivisions according to whether his intellectual predecessors, contemporaries or descendants form the object of comparative analysis. The categories are subject to overlap, as a great many publications attempt in a small amount of space to cover an enormous range. A small proportion of these articles focus on topics related to a Christian reading of Bakhtin.

Turbin's maverick article (1990) cannot be consigned to any of the above outlined categories, however. It is not a scholarly analysis of Bakhtinian texts so much as a deeply personal, and reverential, meditation on the themes of hunger and pain in Bakhtin's life as an experience in microcosm of hunger and pain in post-revolutionary Russia, on one level, and, on another, as a reflection of the hunger and pain undergone by Christ during His Passion. This, Bakhtin's, experience of universal suffering, is said to have given rise to his writings on carnival, which Turbin asserts to be 'the interpretation of the material world from the point of view of the spiritual, non-material world' (1990, 22), a 'witness by contrast' to the existence of another realm (1990, 23). Throughout, Bakhtin is portrayed as a saintly and wise spiritual figure, with unmistakable inferences as to

a common bond with Christ. Despite this, and although the essay is purely speculative, it is a rare example of an attempt to reconcile the anticlericalism of *Rabelais* with a spiritual interpretation of it, and, as such, shares a common bond with my own chapter on Bakhtinian carnival.

Perhaps the earliest chiefly 'conceptual' article on the subject of Bakhtin's religious thought is that of Il'insky (1985), whose stated goal is to 'attract the attention of the reader to Bakhtin's personality and work in their religious aspect' (1985, 61). Il'insky sees the roots of Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy in the man/God relation of 'Author and Hero', and of his aesthetics generally in Christian concepts. He further attempts to show, albeit briefly, how his later, apparently unspiritually oriented work, does not contradict Bakhtin's early views (for example, *Rabelais*, discussed on pp. 68–9). In these two aspects my thesis entirely corresponds with his, although it departs from it in that Il'insky does not indicate any development within the function of Christian motifs in Bakhtin's work. They also have in common the view that his Christian foundation is not specifically Orthodox (65).

Il'insky is unusual in that he does not contextualise 'Author and Hero' by 'situating' Bakhtin within his own native religious-philosophical tradition. A scholar who frequently publishes in this area is K. G. Isupov, who produces careful, text-based and well-documented comparative studies. His article of 1990 discusses Bakhtin's work of the early 1920s as part of a Russian philosophical tradition exploring the interrelationship of art and life. He draws in a very wide range of Russian thinkers, both Bakhtin's predecessors and his contemporaries, for comparison, with special attention given to Florensky and Meier, but not neglecting Herzen, Karsavin, S. Bulgakov, Fyodorov, Rozanov and Dostoevsky, among others. The article includes a condensed survey of Christian motifs in 'Author and Hero' (which I deal with at greater length, but on essentially the same basis, in Chapter 3) (1990, 33–4, 39, 40). A scarcely revised version of this article was published in 1992 under a different title (1992a). Isupov has devoted whole articles to the intellectual relationship of Bakhtin with Meier and Florensky. His article on Bakhtin and Meier (1991b) compares and contrasts their respective views on the 'other', at the same time placing them in the Russian early-twentieth-century context of literary and philosophical debate. Isupov maintains that Bakhtin's early work 'quotes' Meier's writings

of the twenties and thirties (1991b, 61). Their differences are said to lie in Bakhtin's aesthetic as opposed to Meier's ontological approach to the I/other relation, his positive attitude to culture over against Meier's suspicion of it, and the absence in Bakhtin of 'gothic transcendence' (1991b, 69). The thrust of the article suggests that Christianity as it is traditionally understood could hardly be said to be an ultimate authority for Bakhtin: 'For Bakhtin neither Marxism nor Christianity were authorities at the level of final questions' (1991b, 65). In his article on Bakhtin and Florensky (1992b) Isupov locates both writers in a trend of the Russian religious renaissance towards recasting traditional philosophical problems into the language of aesthetics, describing Bakhtin's world-view as 'aesthetic Christianity' (1992b, 161). He goes on to explore the aesthetic functions of grace and self-sacrifice, sin and repentance in 'Author and Hero', and the functions of guilt and responsibility in 'Philosophy of the Act'. According to Isupov, the main difference between Florensky and Bakhtin is that Florensky stands for saving the other at the cost of your own life as a work of art, whereas Bakhtin emphasises the salvation of oneself in the other, and life as a work of art (Isupov 1992b, 167). Unlike Il'insky, Isupov does make use of such Orthodox concepts as *sobornost'* and the guilt of each before all. Finally, in another article (1991c) Isupov looks at *Rabelais* in the light of Russian philosophical criticism of Renaissance humanism from a Christian perspective, asking the question 'why did Bakhtin erase his early Christian anthropology and anthropodicy in his treatment of the Renaissance?' (1991c, 139).

Bonetskaya's articles on Florensky stress the differences between him and Bakhtin far more than the points of comparison, indeed her comparative essay of 1991 opens on a forthright statement to this effect: 'In their work Bakhtin and Florensky reveal the two opposite poles in Russian philosophy of the 1910s and twenties' (1991, 52; see also 1988, 10). Whereas Bakhtin is oriented towards the West and towards culture, Florensky is a conceptual descendant of the Slavophiles; Florensky's Platonic metaphysic is anathema to Bakhtin, whereas Florensky had no greater philosophical enemy than Kant, Bakhtin's greatest source of inspiration. The only thing they have in common is said to be their 'thirst for communication' (1991, 53). So this lively article goes on, comparing in the main the two thinkers' respective concepts of communion; Florensky's vision of the merging of lover and beloved, Bakhtin's insistence on separateness as a

fundamental precondition of communication. Interestingly, Bonetskaya is disinclined to align Bakhtin with the ethos of Orthodoxy, finding him to draw much more on the 'Judaean-Protestant' tradition (1991, 54). She does not, however, broach the subject of Bakhtin's religious beliefs, and in her denial of the influence on Bakhtin of the image of the church as the body of Christ (1991, 57) indicates she might have reservations about such an investigation.

Bonetskaya's excellent, long and detailed article on the problem of the author in Bakhtin (1985) anticipates my study in significant ways. She follows a single concept, that of the author, chronologically through Bakhtin's entire *oeuvre* as it was then available (that is, without 'Philosophy of the Act'); this is the only Russian-language study I know of to do so in any detail. I, also, trace various motifs in a basically chronological study, chief among which is the figure of the author, whose fate I believe to be inseparable from the fate of God in Bakhtin's thought. Moreover, Bonetskaya identifies certain periods of Bakhtin's work with the diminishment of the author as the creative origin, and even touches upon authorial silence at the very end of her essay. Had she couched her discussion in terms of Christian motifs, centred on the figure of the author, her views would for the most part likely have coincided with my own. However, she does not do this, with the exception of a rather ambiguous passage on *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in which Dostoevsky's faith is asserted to provide the foundation for his poetics and Christ is declared to be Dostoevsky's ideal human being and author, whereby it is unclear whose view Bonetskaya is representing at this point (1985, 97–8). She does not develop the concept of incarnation and its role in Bakhtin's work any further than this, nor does she extend her initial discussion of aesthetic love (1985, 66–7), and indeed manages to outline concepts of salvation and eternal life in 'Author and Hero' without once making the, it seems to me, natural inferences as to their Christian basis.

In a complex article Grois (1989) seeks to resolve certain ambiguities in Bakhtin's work (the confusion of art and life, and the ambivalent status of the author) by aligning him with similar ambiguities in the Russian philosophical tradition, with particular reference to Soloviev. However, he does not discuss any putative links on the level of the philosophy of religion; rather he considers Bakhtin's theory to represent a secularisation of Soloviev's religious philosophy (1989, 125).

Finally, Babkina (1992) discusses Bakhtin's early work (up until 1929) in its relation to Orthodox mysticism and dogma, isolating three Bakhtinian concepts as securely rooted in the Orthodox dogmas of immortality and incarnation ('outsidedness'), Trinity (dialogue) and the creation of man in God's image and likeness (the author/hero relation). Hers is the most direct appeal for a consideration of the Christian dimension to Bakhtin since Il'insky's, and contains much that is interesting. She draws her definition of what constitutes Orthodox doctrine from the writings of V. N. Lossky, although much of what she attributes to Orthodoxy may just as well be said of, for example, Protestantism (such as the emphasis on a living communion with God, 319; the relation of the Persons in the Trinity, 320; and the balance of determinism and free will in the relation of the creation to the Creator, 323). There are, however, exceptions, as for example the notion of divine Energies (1992, 322), and the apophatic bent of Orthodox theology (1992, 319–20), which Babkina sees as informing Bakhtin's practice of employing a variety of terms to signify the same, elusive, thing. Babkina introduces her paper by maintaining that 'the search for a religious meaning to Bakhtin's ideas is not a tribute to 'Christianising' fashion, but one of the potential means of 'unsealing' his works, which have not yet been conceptually examined' (1992, 317). This reference to 'fashion' highlights one of the reasons why the idea of Bakhtin as a religious thinker, initially spread by his literary executors and acquaintances from the sixties, who themselves belong to the religious, 'right' wing of the Russian intelligentsia, should hold wide currency in the Federation. It also confirms my general point that the topic has received too little serious, analytical attention.

CHRISTIANITY IN BAKHTIN: GOD AND THE EXILED AUTHOR

With the exception of a couple of articles on the subject of carnival, all of the literature on religious concepts in Bakhtin has been confined to an examination of texts from the early period of Bakhtin's intellectual career. Whilst agreeing with much of what has been written, I have aimed to treat these insights into Bakhtin's early work at greater length, without the distraction of bringing in comparable thinkers, and to extend the subject to embrace his career as a whole.

This book does not, in contrast to those of Todorov, Clark and

Holquist, and Morson and Emerson, attempt a comprehensive explication of Bakhtin's central concepts, nor does it provide an initial brief survey of them, as does, for example, Gardiner; rather it assumes a working knowledge of Bakhtin. With the exception of the chapter on Voloshinov and Medvedev's relationship with Bakhtin, it does not incorporate a comparative component, and in this respect differs from all the monographs 'about' Bakhtin that I have been reviewing. I do not polemicise with Bakhtin, but seek to understand him better, that is, more fully, because in looking at Christian motifs in his work I am addressing an aspect of Bakhtin which to date has received no treatment in a full-length study either in Russia or the West, despite the acknowledgement, however cursory or reluctant in some places, of its existence by most of the authors discussed above.⁷ This does not mean that my treatment of Bakhtin is intended to be exhaustive; I focus on one aspect of his work to the exclusion of all others because I believe it to have been neglected, even suppressed (perhaps in the same way that Jones understands suppression to work in Dostoevsky), and in need of the focused treatment that Clark and Holquist were unable to give it. For this same reason I do not enter into debate with the many other current assimilations of Bakhtin, which would not have left room for a satisfactory treatment of my topic, although it would doubtless be interesting to consider how (or whether), to name one example, Gardiner's appropriation of Bakhtin can be reconciled with a religious reading of him. But the book is not conceived as a meditative, personal reflection on Bakhtin in the spirit of Holquist or Patterson; perhaps rather unfashionably, I consider certain Christian elements to be 'there' in Bakhtin's text and endeavour to make the reader aware of them in what is essentially an exercise in close reading, an 'immanent' exploration of Bakhtin, although of course using the advantages of my 'outsiderness' to construct a rather dramatic story of revelation, development, crisis and recovery.

I believe it is more proper to speak of 'Christian motifs' than of 'Christianity' or 'Christian theology' in Bakhtin's work. This is because certain elements of the Christian kerygma (the fundamental points emphasised in the proclamation of the gospels) are highlighted by him to the almost total neglect of certain others. Highlighted elements include, for example, Creation, Fall and Incarnation; neglected elements include Resurrection and Judgement. Thus it cannot be said that Bakhtin's Christianity as it is

manifested in his texts conforms fully to any of its traditional systematic-theological renderings. Bakhtin is not a theologian; he is not even a Christian philosopher or literary theoretician; he is rather a philosopher whose work is fed by certain aspects of the Christian vision of and for the world. Personally, I am not convinced that Bakhtin's unorthodox Christianity is of an Orthodox persuasion, which is why I have not considered specifically Orthodox motifs here. From his background in the Western Judaeo-Christian philosophical tradition, but more importantly from specific preoccupations in his work (its international orientation, its opposition to authoritarian structures, the anticlericalism of his book on Rabelais), it seems impossible that he could have embraced Orthodoxy unequivocally. Some of the motifs claimed for Orthodoxy by Russian commentators like Isupov and Babkina appear to me to be equally appropriate to, say, a Protestant world-view. However, since the Orthodox voice is alien (*chuzhoi*) to my own, I concede ignorance as an outsider, and look to further studies of Bakhtin from a strictly Orthodox point of view to supplement and deepen my own where necessary. Quite possibly I do not hear the Orthodox voice in Bakhtin, not being sufficiently familiar with its dialect.

In developing my argument I will have recourse to the metaphors of silence and exile. These are intended to work on several levels. Firstly, they may be applied to Bakhtin himself, who was forced into silence at a young age by political circumstances over which he had no control. On one level, the most obvious, he fell silent by ceasing to publish almost immediately after he started. Following the Tolstoy Prefaces of 1929 and 1930 there followed a period of thirty-three years during which Bakhtin literally 'wrote into his desk', as the Russians say; his voice was not heard in the scholarly dialogue. This period of silence almost exactly coincides with his years of exile, for five years understood in the literal sense of banishment from cultural centres by law, and thereafter as enforced life in the provinces pending rehabilitation. Thus, for Bakhtin, to be silent was also to be absent, hidden from public view. On a second level, Bakhtin fell silent, again for reasons beyond his control, in that he ceased to write in his chosen way about his chosen topics. This process started even before his exile: one recalls his remark to Bocharov about how he neglected the most important questions in preparing *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work* for publication. He became unable to write philosophy and was forced to channel his ideas through literary

criticism.⁸ And of course he became unable explicitly to write about theological matters, which, starting with the Dostoevsky book and continuing into his writings of the thirties and forties, went into exile, as it were, along with their author. Thus between *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* (1929) and 'Reworking of Dostoevsky' (1961) the Christian themes of Bakhtin's early essays disappear from his major writings, revealing themselves only in notes not intended for the public eye. However, as I hope to show, they continue to make themselves felt even in the exilic texts, although in an indirect form.

A second subject of exile is the author figure of Bakhtin's analysis. He, too, has his discourse taken away from him by a series of cultural-ideological changes which rob him of the right to, or possibility of, his own authoritative word. I am referring to the historical shift away from authoritative discourse and monolithic, politically enforced world-views, in the course of which, according to Bakhtin, the heteroglotic novel developed. The non-monologic writer of fiction, as I shall demonstrate, is obliged to hide his or her true face, to become discourse's fool, a master of indirect speech, which for Bakhtin ('Notes of 1970-71', 352-3) is a form of silence. Naturally, there is a parallel between the silent/exiled author and the silent/exiled Bakhtin who elaborates the theory: even in the twentieth century, he implies, there are, ironically, somewhat different cultural conditions under which even a writer of non-fictional prose cannot allow him or herself the luxury of direct speech. But in Bakhtin's theory of the silenced author the notion of 'falling' silent, if I may be allowed the licence of a play on words, may be lent, I believe, a theological interpretation. As will be argued in Chapter 6, the authoritative, direct authorial word becomes suspect precisely because discourse itself becomes suspect in Bakhtin's view, corrupted by violence and falsehood, that is to say, by the effects of the Fall on language and, behind it, language users. Silence in Bakhtin, on all levels so far discussed, is at once the result of and the response to the Fall.

Finally, it is possible to speak of the silencing, or exile, of a third subject, God Himself, whose supremely authoritative discourse has been squeezed out of the world of culture as a result of the same paradigmatic shift which, if Bakhtin is correct, forced the writer of prose fiction to hide his or her true self. Bakhtin closely associates God with the author in his early and late work; their fates are intertwined. Yet although evil (the Fall) comes between God's word

and the world, it does not mean the death of God for Bakhtin, any more than it means the death of the author. In his late essays, when Bakhtin is at once emerging from his physical and literary exiles (his move to Moscow in 1969; the republication of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and the publication of his dissertation on Rabelais in 1963 and 1965 respectively), he takes up the themes of God and Christ again, working towards an integration of his exilic discoveries about silence and the renewed possibility of raising one's voice in genuine dialogue.

It remains to say a word about the structure of the book. Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6 together comprise a narrative of development in Bakhtin's Christian worldview from its open, fully elucidated character in 'Author and Hero' to the emphasis on silence in the late work. Chapter 4 comprises what I consider to be a necessary diversion to consider the question of Bakhtin's Marxism or non-Marxism, and Chapter 7 offers an 'alternative' analysis of the writings on carnival. These chapters are so ordered to preserve the basically chronological approach to my subject. Finally, Chapter 8 goes over old ground to bring motifs already discussed into a thematic order, leading in each case to an examination of Bakhtin's final position as it can be ascertained from his late texts.

*Fall and Incarnation in 'Towards a Philosophy
of the Act'*

The world of semantic content is endless and suffices to itself, its in-itself significance renders me unnecessary, my act is arbitrary for it. This is the sphere of endless questions, where even the question, 'who is my neighbour?', is possible.

('Philosophy of the Act', 114)

Bakhtin's earliest surviving texts date back to the first half of the 1920s. They comprise a very short essay entitled 'Art and Responsibility' (1919), and two much longer, although incomplete, philosophical essays known as 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' and 'Towards a Philosophy of the Act'. 'Author and Hero' is a treatise on aesthetics; it forms the subject of the next chapter. 'Philosophy of the Act' was almost certainly written before 'Author and Hero', but even if it was not it belongs before it on thematic grounds. We know this because in 'Philosophy of the Act' (122) Bakhtin himself provides an outline of a large philosophical project (which he never completed) in four parts, of which 'Philosophy of the Act' is the first. The second part was to be on aesthetics, so it is reasonable to assume that 'Author and Hero' fits in at this point, and the third and fourth parts were to be devoted to the ethics of politics and the ethics of religion respectively. These last two parts, if they were ever begun, have unfortunately not survived.

All of these works were produced during Bakhtin's years in Nevel' and Vitebsk immediately following his graduation from Petrograd University in 1918. At the time of writing them he was a leading light in a circle of intellectuals from various disciplines who met regularly to discuss a whole range of topics. High on the agenda were the most recent trends in German philosophy, at that time dominated by Neo-Kantianism, which was a subject of fierce debate in the post-revolutionary intellectual world. Clark and Holquist, among others, have documented Bakhtin's thorough grounding in German phil-

osophy, and the fruitful relationship he enjoyed in Nevel' with M. I. Kagan (1889–1937), a slightly older thinker who had spent nine years studying in Germany and was well acquainted with the Marburg School of Neo-Kantians (1984a, 41–2; 1984b, 300).¹ 'Philosophy of the Act' arose out of this intellectual climate; it is partly an exploration of, partly a reaction against, key Neo-Kantian ideas.

Bakhtin describes 'Philosophy of the Act' as an analysis of the 'basic structural features of the real world' (122²); it is his attempt to establish a 'primary philosophy' (105). In a sense everything that Bakhtin went on to write flows from the basic philosophical premises established in 'Philosophy of the Act', and it therefore seems appropriate to begin my study with an analysis of this essay.

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE ACT

Bakhtin employs a set of basic oppositions as a framework for his thinking. The most important of these is the distinction between the 'given' (*dannyi*) and 'posited' (*zadannyi*) modes of reality. The 'given' mode is characterised by closure and stasis. It is completed (*zavershennyi*), present, or 'on hand' (*nalichnyi*), and self-sufficient (*samodovol'nyi*). If there is development within the 'given' world this is only according to the laws of causality, for it is an autonomous realm which can never transcend itself. The 'posited' mode of reality, on the other hand, is characterised by openness and process. It is in a state of development, and is dependent, not self-sufficient but seeking its true and fullest identity beyond itself.

Bakhtin has a complex understanding of the way the given and the posited modes of reality are distributed within the world, or within 'being' (*bytie*), to use his preferred term. Their various manifestations are centred around what Bakhtin isolates as several crucial divisions within human culture. On one level there is the distinction between the product of cultural activity and the activity itself, the former being part of a closed intellectual realm developing according to its own internal, autonomous laws, where everything is a theoretical possibility but nothing is concrete, the latter being rooted in real time and space, in what Bakhtin calls 'the open event of being'. The cultural product is of course given, whilst the cultural act is posited. On a smaller scale every individual act consists of a given product and a posited action which gives rise to that product. In a third sense the human subject displays both given and posited

modes in his or her situation in being. According to Bakhtin our perception of the way things are is intrinsically evaluative (it has an axiological dimension) and dependent upon certain relational categories, which he labels 'I-for-myself' (*Ya-dlya-sebya*), 'the-other-for-me' (*drugoi-dlya-menya*), and 'I-for-the-other' (*Ya-dlya-drugogo*) (122). These categories determine whether we function as given or posited. I perceive myself as incomplete and developing, but other people perceive me as completed and whole. Likewise, in my nature as agent I am active and posited, whereas in my capacity as object I am passive and given.

These sets of oppositions appear clear-cut and inflexible as they are articulated here, but Bakhtin is concerned to find principles by which the two aspects of being may be understood as a unity. Indeed, the demonstration of the unity of reality may be said to be the dominant quest of Bakhtin in his early work. In the opening sentence of 'Art and Responsibility' we find the following concern: 'The whole must be called mechanical if its separate elements are joined together only in time and space by an external link, and not penetrated by the inner unity of meaning' ('Art and Responsibility', 5). How, Bakhtin wonders here, can the three fields of art, science and life be united? This problem is reiterated in 'Philosophy of the Act':

Facing each other there are two worlds, absolutely not communicating with each other and impervious one to the other: the world of culture and the world of life – the unique world in which we create, cognise, contemplate, have lived, and die; the world in which the act of our activity is made objective and the world in which that act uniquely and actually flows, is accomplished. (82–3)

What is needed, Bakhtin continues, is a single plane upon which the two faces of this Janus can define each other reciprocally in relation to an overarching unity. Since, as we have seen, the world of culture displays all the characteristics of 'givenness' for Bakhtin, and the world of life all those of 'positedness', it seems the plane he speaks of will bring these, also, together.

Bakhtin identifies the human act as the locus for the unification of given and posited being. For Bakhtin an individual life may be seen as a complicated act (*postupok*). My life is an act of entering, or joining, the wider event of being: '[The world] is found by me insofar as I go out of myself [*iskhozhu iz sebya*] in my act-vision, act-

thought, act-affair' (124). The thoughts, feelings and experiences which together constitute my life are all in their turn acts which act out the drama of entering life on a small scale.

But the act not only joins the subject to the world, it also has the potential to reconcile the products of culture with life. Bakhtin devotes twenty pages to the refutation of the all-pervasive assumption of his day that the key to the unity of culture and life may be found within one of the branches of the former, be it ethics or aesthetics or psychology. He asserts that far from being able to incorporate life into theory, theory must be seen as only one feature of life. It is the human act alone in its performative aspect which knows and possesses life as a whole:

The responsible act alone overcomes every kind of hypotheticalness, for the responsible act is the actualisation of a decision – inescapably, unalterably and irreversibly; the act is the final total, the all-round definitive conclusion; the act pulls together, relates and resolves in one single and *already final context* both meaning and fact, the general and the individual, the real and the ideal, for everything enters into its responsible motivation; in the act there lies the way out of mere possibility into uniqueness once and for all. (103)

Responsibility is crucial to Bakhtin's conception of the act and is based on the fact of our uniqueness as an 'I', on what Bakhtin calls our 'non-alibi in being', from which it follows that 'what can be accomplished by me cannot ever be accomplished by anyone else' (112). Faced with this fact I can either ignore it, or acknowledge it and structure everything around an awareness of my moral responsibility for my unique actions. In the latter case everything I do becomes a confirmation of my uniqueness in being and links me to it. Further, in my responsible action I hold all oppositions together in my person without eradicating them:

Here both the moment of passivity and the moment of activity are given as distinct and inseparable: I am found in being (passivity) and I actively participate in it; I am both given and posited: my uniqueness is given, but at the same time it is only insofar as it is actually realised by me as uniqueness, it is always in the act, in the deed, i.e., posited; there is being and obligation: I am, actually, irreplaceably, and therefore am obliged to realise my uniqueness. (113)

We have here, then, three kinds of unity in the act: firstly, I am united with the world, secondly, the theoretical world is drawn into

the event of being, and thirdly, in acting the human agent unites in his or her person the given and posited aspects of reality.

Such, in brief, is the central argument of the very dense and difficult 'Philosophy of the Act'. It presents a world of profoundly dual aspect and puts forward the human act as the means by which the two aspects may be joined in an organic unity. What is interesting about this is that the world's double aspect is experienced by Bakhtin as a problem, to which human action offers a potential (but not a guaranteed) solution: there seems to be an existential drama going on in Bakhtin's world. His understanding of reality incorporates an awareness of 'primal fault' and a strong sense of moral struggle in the attempt to heal the gap. It is probably this, combined with his almost visionary optimism about the potential for a vital moral universe, which accounts for the vibrancy of Bakhtin's work. Still more interesting from the point of view of a religious reading of Bakhtin are certain aspects of the text which strongly indicate that this existential drama is conceived in Christian terms. As a point of departure for what follows, I should like to suggest that 'Philosophy of the Act' can legitimately be read through the Christian motifs of the Fall, or fallenness, and Incarnation.

THE FALL IN BEING

We have seen how the conscious exercise of one's personal responsibility is the keystone of Bakhtin's vision for a unified, living reality. But there is clearly potential for tragedy inherent in the individual's freedom of choice to acknowledge, or fail to acknowledge, his or her existential uniqueness and the obligations that this, in Bakhtin's view, imposes. After repeating that as unique selves we have a responsibility towards all that is 'other' because it is precisely and only to us that it is other, Bakhtin concedes:

Of course, this fact may yield a split, it may be impoverished; it is possible to ignore activity and live by mere passivity, it is possible to attempt to prove one's alibi in being, it is possible to be a pretender [*samožvanets*]. It is possible to deny one's *obligation-imposing uniqueness*. (113)

The first thing to notice about this passage is the word 'split', in Russian, *treshchina*, which may also be translated as 'crack' or 'fissure': the term is a strong one. Elsewhere in the essay the same phenomenon is referred to as a 'gulf' (*bezdna*: 123), or, tellingly, as a

'schism' (*raskol*: 82, 119, 120). As I have already indicated, in context it is clear that the fissure runs through every aspect of being, dividing all that is closed, abstract, impersonal, repeatable and deaf to value (the 'given'), from the event of being as a vital, open, personal, unique process, charged with value (the 'posited'). In essence, the gulf divides life itself and spiritual death.

This damaged universe is strongly reminiscent of the fallen universe of Judaeo-Christian theology, according to which the Fall introduces death into the world for the first time and the struggle for life begins (the expulsion from paradise and the injunction to work 'by the sweat of one's brow' and to endure pain in childbirth). In a fallen universe chaos always threatens: 'the whole transcendental unity of objective culture is in fact *dark and elemental* [*stikhiinyi*] when cut off completely from the single and unique centre of responsible consciousness' (104, my emphasis). Any clarity it may seem to possess when we declare it to be autonomous is derivative; it 'shines by the borrowed light of our responsibility' (104). There is a real potential for cultural crisis should the product and performance aspects of the act be split. Once the product has been torn away from its ontological roots the spatio-temporal aspect of the act degenerates into mere biological subjectivity – the act-drive – whereas everything of objective significance becomes located in the product. The situation then exists in which 'we have evoked the spectre of objective culture, which we are unable to exorcise' (123). The world of givenness, if it is allowed to, will dominate and sterilise the open event of being. Bakhtin is convinced that the given aspects of reality, however they are conceived, may always potentially erode or devour the posited aspects, which for him constitute the life-force of being.

The other important point to make about the passage quoted at the beginning of this section is that it places the burden of the struggle for life, and conversely the blame for the triumph of death, firmly on the shoulders of individual human beings. Like Paul, Bakhtin credits human beings both with free will and an innate sense of right and wrong; he asserts that we know what is right, but may choose to ignore it. His description of the 'pretender' (*samožvanets*: impostor; the Russian word used for false claimants to the throne) echoes the existentialist concept of 'bad faith'. In full knowledge that he (or she) has a unique contribution to make towards the unification of being, the pretender consciously rejects the moral implications of this for himself, and in doing so perpetuates the split between the

world of endless theoretical possibility and the world of concrete historical reality. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, of course, human beings bear the responsibility for cutting themselves off from God and so perpetuating the law of sin and death.³

It is also significant that the pretender is opting for givenness, the passive world of 'is' and not the active one of 'ought', when he attempts to disclaim responsibility for his uniqueness. I have already noted how the given mode of being is also described by Bakhtin as autonomous. It is not, I think, a coincidence that in the Bible the Fall occurs when Adam and Eve give in to the temptation to 'be like God'⁴ and that subsequently fallen humanity is characterised by the claim not to need God, to be independent of Him.⁵ In 'Philosophy of the Act' the conscious suppression of one's active subjectivity, the desire to be passively closed off from the event of being, is ruinous both for oneself and for the world for which one has abdicated responsibility.

However, this is not yet all. Bakhtin employs recognisably biblical language in his evaluation of our choices. The following quotation shows how a person's moral abdication (here described as living life ritualistically) is bound up with pride:

The unspoken premise of the ritualism of life is generally not humility, but pride. One must humble oneself to the level of personal participation and responsibility. In trying to understand the whole of our lives as a masked representation, and each of our acts as ritualistic, we become pretenders. (121)

Humility, of course, is one of the greatest Christian virtues, and the quality needed to enter the kingdom of heaven, to be reconciled with God.⁶ In this quotation Bakhtin is countering the potential objection that retreat from life may be motivated by humility, along the lines of 'who am I, that I should assert myself in being?' He insists on several occasions that to assert oneself responsibly in being is the very opposite of acting selfishly. On the contrary, he argues, it is my unique position in being that makes it possible (and morally necessary) to sacrifice myself (118). Here, a theme which, as will become clear, is absolutely central to Bakhtin's world-view is articulated for the first time: the morally good act of self-assertion is the act of self-denial, the kenotic act, to use a theological term, whereby one empties oneself, humbles oneself, for the sake of another. Moreover, the self-sacrificial action leads to life (in Bakhtin, the enrich-

ment of the event of being). Ultimately, self-denial leads to self-fulfilment.⁷ Pride is humility's polar opposite; the sin of pride lies behind the Fall, behind humanity's bid for autonomy, and leads to death.

There are further linguistic markers underpinning the Fall motif in 'Philosophy of the Act', notably the prefixes *samo-* (self-) and *ot-* (the Russian prefix variously denoting such concepts as 'from', 'off' and 'away'), as well as the verb *pretendovat'* ('to lay false claim to'). The act's 'content-semantic' facet, the act as product, for example, 'claims falsely to define itself [*pretenduet samoopredelit'sya*] completely and finally in the unity of this or that area of meaning' (82). Elsewhere the same world of theory is described as 'a law unto itself [*samozakonnyi*]' (87). Further, 'the torn-off [*otorvannyi*] content of the cognitive act is in the power of a law immanent to it, according to which it also develops, as it were, of its own accord [*samoproizvol'no*]' (86). Life itself may be '*otpavshaya*' ('fallen away'): 'Life which has fallen away from responsibility cannot have a philosophy' (124). Other usages of the prefix *ot-* include *otdannyi* ('given over', for example to the power of the immanent law described in the above quotation), *otbrosil' sebya* ('to throw oneself off' out of life, used to describe the rejection by the subject of participatory living in favour of self-submergence in the autonomous world of theory, 88, 94) and, more persistently, the very adjective 'abstract', *otvlechennyi* (literally, 'attracted away from', used on multiple occasions to describe the autonomous, given cultural product), and *otkazat'sya* ('to refuse', 'to reject'). This latter is employed wherever the human subject chooses not to take responsibility for his or her life; such a person, as I noted above, is a *samozvanets*, a 'pretender' (it is interesting how the English equivalent picks up on another of Bakhtin's key terms), literally 'one who names himself' (95, 113, 119, 121). In Bakhtin's universe one cannot name oneself, and all autonomy is falsely conceived, for life depends upon interdependence, on the willingness and ability of each consciousness to transcend itself in a self-denying, creative, affirmative move out into the world. To repeat, to claim autonomy is both self-destructive and destructive of the world.

SALVATION THROUGH INCARNATION

The Fall motif, with its negative emphasis on fissure and autonomy (the theoreticism which is spiritual death), is counterpointed in

'Philosophy of the Act' by what might be called an Incarnation motif, characterised by a positively evaluated stress on temporal and spatial unity and concretion along with responsible interrelatedness. In other words, 'incarnation' is the antidote offered by Bakhtin to 'fall'. Needless to say, this exactly mirrors the biblical progression from the first to the second Adam. Indeed, Bakhtin seems to be saying as much when he points out that the I/other opposition identified by him as central to the phenomenology of personal responsibility that constitutes his personal 'primary philosophy' is not receiving expression for the first time, since it comprises 'the meaning of all Christian morality' (138).

'Philosophy of the Act' employs the term *voploshchenie* (and its Latin equivalent, *inkarnirovanie*), translatable as 'incarnation', 'embodiment' or 'incorporation', with striking frequency and consistency⁸ to denote the incorporation of the abstract realm of truth into the concrete 'event of being' by the responsible human agent. In personally subscribing to a theoretical truth, this agent rescues it from rootlessness and empty determinism by locating it, not only spatially and temporally, but also axiologically, since every responsible act must take up an evaluative stance towards the world in which it finds itself (86, 108, 114). In actualising truth, the human subject also brings it into the history of which he or she is an active and unique part. Indeed, Bakhtin's understanding of moral responsibility is based on the historical (spatiotemporal) irreplaceability of the subject: 'I occupy in unique being a unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable position which is impenetrable to another. No one else in the unique time and space of unique being has ever stood in the given unique place in which I now stand' (112, see also 124). Conversely, if a person's obligations are imposed on him or her by their situatedness in time and space, time and space, for their part, take their bearings from the individual and become concrete only in relation to him or her: 'Only the value of mortal man affords a measure for the spatial and temporal order: space takes on flesh as the potential horizon of mortal man, his potential surroundings, and time possesses axiological weight and gravity as the duration of the life of mortal man' (131). In another place, Bakhtin describes the participation of the subject in history as 'pouring flesh and blood' into theoretical time and space (126, see also 139).⁹ Thus personality and history are interdependent, each gaining concretion from the other, and in solidarity, together effecting the unity of being by

incorporating within themselves otherwise merely theoretical ethical positions. I believe Bakhtin's concern with the moral implications for individual human beings of their concrete, spatiotemporal and historical existence to be inspired primarily by the Judaeo-Christian world-view, according to which the drama of salvation and damnation is acted out in history and hinges on the concrete moral choices, embodied in action, of men and women. The human individual's existential choice to refuse the challenge of a responsible life based on constant incarnationary action is described by Bakhtin as the choice to live as a 'disembodied spirit' (*razvoploshchennyi dukh*): 'as a disembodied spirit I lose my proper obligating relation to the world, I lose the reality of the world' (117). As has been seen above, this is the attitude which characterises fallen humanity. It therefore appears that Bakhtin lends his own peculiar interpretation to the Christian understanding of the Incarnation as a remedy for the Fall: the Incarnation in his work is the antidote to abstraction (everything pertaining to the prefix *ot-*, discussed above) and closure.

Nor does Christ himself escape mention in 'Philosophy of the Act'. Whenever Christ is mentioned in Bakhtin's early work (and not only in his early work) it is to put him forward as a perfect model of the ideal which Bakhtin is setting out. In 'Philosophy of the Act' he is said to epitomise the subject aware of his or her unique position in being and acting responsibly in the light of it. His kenotic act of condescension, his taking on of mortal flesh, is 'the great symbol of activity' (94), of a kind which has a real impact on the world: 'The world departed from by Christ will never again be the same world as the one in which he had never been: it is a fundamentally different world' (94), declares Bakhtin.¹⁰ Above all for Bakhtin, Christ's life shows how, in order to sacrifice oneself fully, to be fully selfless, one must nevertheless be active: 'To live out of oneself, from one's unique position, does not by a long way imply living only for oneself' (118). Indeed, Christ is introduced to illustrate this very point that 'in self-denial I realise, in a maximally active way and in full, the uniqueness of my place in being' (94). The term used by Bakhtin to denote the human subject's responsible act of transcending his or her own boundaries to engage with the world is *iskhozhdenie*, or 'going out'. Clearly this is closely linked semantically and axiologically with Christ's act of Incarnation, described by Bakhtin (94) with the term *niskhozhdenie*, or 'going down'.

One might, however, go so far as to suggest that for Bakhtin

Christ is much more even than a perfect example of authentic living. He also demonstrates in himself how two opposites may be brought harmoniously together: in Christ the transcendent God becomes immanent. Further, the Incarnation informs and theologically legitimates Bakhtin's consistent preference for the concrete world of human experience against abstract concepts, for what we may term an 'incarnational' view of truth. In 'Philosophy of the Act', as we have seen, Bakhtin lays great emphasis on the necessity for theoretical truth to be incorporated into spatiotemporal reality if it is to become living and binding upon individuals. The adjective he employs in describing the alternative is highly suggestive: 'But it is possible to have an unincarnated (*neinkarnirovannaya*) thought, unincarnated (*neinkarnirovanoe*) action, an unincarnated (*neinkarnirovannaya*), arbitrary life as empty possibility; life on the unspoken basis of one's alibi in being falls away into impersonal, rootless being' (114). Even where he prefers the Slavic adjective *voploshchennyi* to *inkarnirovannyi* the Christian connotation is unmistakable. A living truth is an embodied truth, a word made flesh. Finally Bakhtin's strong sense of values as rooted in relationships also echoes Christ. He disputes the ability and the right of a disembodied spirit to take up any axiological stance (118), insisting that there are no abstract values, any more than there are abstract human beings: 'there is no man in general, there is I, there is a definite concrete other: my neighbour, my contemporary' (117). In becoming Man, Christ saves God from the necessary neutrality of a disembodied consciousness and allows him to participate fully in the world. Thus Christ may be said literally to embody many of the ideas closest to Bakhtin's heart.

CONCLUSION

In this brief chapter I have attempted to draw attention to what I believe to be two specifically Christian motifs which are of fundamental importance to Bakhtin as he elaborates his 'primary philosophy' on paper for the first time. I refer the unconvinced to the following chapter, which offers an analysis of 'Author and Hero'. In this essay, written in the same general time period as 'Philosophy of the Act', the function of Christian motifs is even more apparent, to the extent of providing a conceptual framework for Bakhtin's aesthetics. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that according to Bakhtin's own plan 'Author and Hero' is concerned

with art specifically as a model of the world described in 'Philosophy of the Act': his study of art, he asserts, 'will help us to approach an understanding of the architectonic structure of the real world' (128). 'Author and Hero' also utilises the motifs of Fall and Incarnation, and introduces a whole range of other Christian motifs, two of which in particular (Creation and love), along with those of Fall and Incarnation, as I hope to show, will continue to inform Bakhtin's thinking over the course of his writing career.

CHAPTER 3

The aesthetic gospel of 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'

My aim in this chapter is to draw out the Christian dimension to Bakhtin's early text 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. In the first section of the chapter I discuss briefly the critical reception of 'Author and Hero' in Russia and the West. I then go on in further sections to offer a reading of the essay in which I have opted to reverse the situation found in the work itself, where Christian motifs and theological concepts form a kind of subtext to the larger sweep of the argument as a treatise on aesthetics, and to arrange the aesthetic material under a theological framework. It is because 'Author and Hero' primarily deals with questions of aesthetics that to disregard the theological undertones of the essay is not completely to destroy its significance, although, as I hope to show, such a disregard must impoverish any interpretation. My intention in foregrounding its Christian motifs is not to imply that 'Author and Hero' is really a work all about Christianity, but rather to bring order to its scattered religious references so as to bring out the hidden principles of organisation of Bakhtin's aesthetics which I believe they represent. In the last section of the chapter I address what seems to me to be the most striking question arising out of the divine model for aesthetic creativity outlined by Bakhtin, namely the issue of authority, with a view to penetrating to the deepest core of his conception.

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF 'AUTHOR AND HERO IN AESTHETIC ACTIVITY'

For the most part Western commentators on 'Author and Hero' have chosen to explore the philosophical background, trends and concepts that informed Bakhtin's ideas at this stage, and to demonstrate the continuity evident between the key themes of the essay and the

recurrent, central concerns of Bakhtin's later output. In doing so the multiple references in 'Author and Hero' to things spiritual have often been ignored or, at best, merely alluded to. Where the impact of religious philosophy and Christian (Orthodox) tradition on Bakhtin in his early years has been taken seriously and carefully described, it has been in general terms and with only very limited reference to the text(s) in which these religious influences are actually reflected.

The two most comprehensive Western expositions of Bakhtin's early work to date are found in Todorov (1984, 94–112) and Clark and Holquist (1984a, 64–94).¹ Todorov does not go into the philosophical background to 'Author and Hero' and makes no mention at all of its religious dimension. Clark and Holquist, on the other hand, provide a great deal of information on both the intellectual history and the philosophical content of the work. Their documentation includes an account of the Neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen's efforts in later life to reconcile his strict philosophical idealism with the Jewish God of experience, and shows Bakhtin to be the inheritor of a tradition stretching back to Kant himself, continuing 'this ongoing attempt to bring philosophy somehow into congruence with theology' (1984a, 61). Clark and Holquist's chapter 'The Architectonics of Answerability' treats all of the early manuscripts without precisely distinguishing, in its account, between exact sources. It can be difficult to know whether their discussion of 'Author and Hero' is being supplemented by new information or whether another, unpublished, text is being explained. No close reading of 'Author and Hero' is offered. However eight pages are devoted to Bakhtin's spirituality, especially to the influence upon his thought of the Russian Orthodox kenotic tradition, with its high regard for the material and its emphasis on community (1984a, 80–8). More importantly for a discussion of 'Author and Hero', the I/thou distinction, pivotal to the essay's argument and inherited by Bakhtin from classical philosophy, is placed into the context of Cohen and Buber's religious thought (where the I/thou opposition is linked with that of man/God), leading Clark and Holquist to conclude that 'ultimately, Bakhtin's thought is a philosophy of creation, a meditation on the mysteries inherent in God's making people and people's making selves, with the activity of people creating other people in literary authorship as a paradigm for thinking at all levels of creating' (1984a, 80). This

helpful summary of the theme of 'Author and Hero' is a useful introduction to my own reading of the essay.

Russian scholars have devoted more attention to 'Author and Hero' than their Western counterparts. Bibler's book contains a lucid discussion of the role that 'aesthetic love' plays in the essay (1991, 18–23), whilst Bonetskaya's article on the author in Bakhtin (1985, 63–76) examines 'Author and Hero' in some detail: neither of these, however, openly acknowledge the Christian sources for the concepts they examine. Other articles that discuss 'Author and Hero' focus primarily on the evidence it contains of influential movements and individuals in Bakhtin's philosophical development. Nikolaev's work is an example of such an approach (1991a, 1991b). There are, however, several articles in Russian which focus specifically on Christian motifs in 'Author and Hero', notably Isupov's contextualising studies of 1990 (on Bakhtin's early work and the Russian cultural context of the first decades of the twentieth century) and 1992 (on Bakhtin and Florensky), Il'insky's pioneering article of 1985 and Babkina's Orthodox approach to 'Author and Hero' (1992). My own reading of 'Author and Hero' is more systematic, and differs from theirs in terms of scope and detail, but in other respects may be considered complementary.

GOD

Traditionally, any exposition of the basics of Christian doctrine begins with the nature and attributes of God, and proceeds to the nature of humanity before discussing the interrelationship of the two. In approaching 'Author and Hero' with this scheme in mind the question immediately arises as to the legitimacy of starting off with God, since at first glance it may appear that divine alterity is very much accorded third position after the human other and the author in terms of the amount of text devoted to each. That, as I shall argue, Bakhtin's understanding of God and Christianity forms the organising centre for his phenomenological analysis of the self/other relation becomes fully apparent only in the last third of the essay, with some of the most pertinent passages situated in the last few pages. I should like to turn 'Author and Hero' as the reader receives it on its head for the duration of this chapter, however, in order to underline the extraordinary importance of the Christian paradigm for Bakhtin's early philosophy. An examination of the many specific

references to God² leads to the conclusion that there is no question of assigning them to the category of metaphor: this I hope will become clear in the course of this discussion.

There are two passages in 'Author and Hero' in which Bakhtin makes explicit that Christianity provides a model for his thinking. During his first exposition of the self/other distinction upon which his aesthetics rests, he appeals to the Christian model for evidence of a radical distinction, crucial to his own thought, between the way one relates to oneself and the way one relates to others:

It suffices to point to the fundamentally unequal value ascribed to *I* and *the other* from the viewpoint of Christian morality: you must not love yourself but you must love the other, you must not be easy on yourself but you must be easy on the other, altogether you must free the other from every burden and take it upon yourself. (36³)⁴

Bakhtin makes a second appeal to Christianity in the course of a general historical overview of cultural attitudes to the human body. Of all the different conceptions outlined by him it is one of the tendencies in early Christian thought that most closely approximates his own aesthetic, insofar as it exhibits, according to Bakhtin, an awareness of the difference between one's negative relation to oneself and one's affirming relation to the other: this difference is epitomised in humanity's relationship with God:

Lastly, the idea of grace as the descent of merciful justification from without, and the acceptance of givenness, which is fundamentally sinful, and insuperable from within oneself. Connected to these are both the notion of confession (penitence taken to its limit) and absolution. From within: my penitence, my total self-negation; from without (God – the other): restoration and mercy. A person can only repent, and only the other can absolve. (52)

The problematic of the author/hero relation, as will become clear, is conceived by Bakhtin in precisely the same way as that of the Christian thinkers to whom he ascribes the concepts outlined in the quotation, and is verbalised by him in precisely the same terms. It is notable that God is here identified with the category of other ('God – the other'). This may serve as an initial justification for treating the author as a reflection of the divine Creator in the following discussion.

'An aesthetic event may only be accomplished in the presence of two participants; it presupposes two unmerging consciousnesses' (22).

This proposition lies at the very centre of Bakhtin's aesthetics. For art to exist at all there must be alterity. Moreover, the consciousness of the creator must exist on a qualitatively different level from that of the one created. He or she must occupy a position external in every respect to the aesthetic object (whether person or thing) in order to be able to complete (*zavershat'*) it by bringing to bear on its final image all of those spatial, temporal and semantic features of which it itself, on its limited level of consciousness, cannot be aware; this privileged viewpoint is described as the 'surplus of vision' (*izbytok videniya*) of the creator. Bakhtin also introduces the term *vnenakhodimost'*, 'outsidedness' or 'exotopy',⁵ to convey the concrete sense of spatial and temporal separateness required for aesthetic activity. The distinction between self and other, crucial to Bakhtin's thesis, provides the model for the two fundamentally different modes of perception of creator and creature. On the level of daily life, each self plays an essential part in authoring, or bestowing aesthetic form on, everyone and everything which is other to him or her; separateness is guaranteed by physical distinctiveness, the incarnation of consciousnesses in bodies. On the level of literary creativity the author functions as the self who moulds and shapes his or her heroes/others. Transcendence here becomes more radical: whilst the hero continues to exist on the 'cognitive-ethical' (*smyslovoi-eticheskii*) plane, immersed in the 'event of being' (*sobytie-bytiya*), the author, for as long as he or she is engaged in creative activity, exists on the aesthetic plane, which is qualitatively different from the cognitive-ethical, superior to it, embracing it and endowing it with aesthetic value. On a cosmic level, God appears as the 'higher authority' (*vysshaya instantsiya*, 179), the 'supreme outsidedness' (*vysshaya vnenakhodimost'*, 166), an ultimate Self giving aesthetic significance to all human lives.

There is, then, no pantheism in Bakhtin's conception; the creator is separate from and transcendent to his creation. But it is not a deist conception either, for the creator is indeed intensely involved with his creation: Bakhtin conceives the creative process as an event occurring between consciousnesses, involving struggle (the 'primary artistic struggle' (171, see also 75) of the artist with chaos for an aesthetic point of view) and sacrifice on the part of the creator. The artist must become pure activity, and thus pure self, since the realm of the other is the realm of passivity; he must remove himself from being in order to enrich being, so that the act of creation might be

nadbytiistvenen', or 'super-existential' (119). From this position, the artist 'goes out of', or 'proceeds from' (*iskhodit' iz*) himself in the act: 'To the extent that I actively discover and realise something as given, on hand, determined, I am already above it by my very act of defining . . . in this lies my architectonic privilege: proceeding from myself, I discover the world outside myself as I proceed from myself in my act' (118). At the outset of the essay, Bakhtin describes the author as 'the uniquely active forming energy' (10). However, the exertion of authorial energy is not confined to the initial act of creation, but continues to manifest itself in the work, much as God continually sustains the world in Christian theology: 'The author is the bearer of the intensely active unity of the finalised whole, the whole hero and the whole work, which is transgredient to each of its individual features' (14). It is in this sense that the author-creator is a feature of the work of art (12), who continues to exert his authority at its recreation in the event of reading or contemplation. As readers we are said to immerse ourselves in the author's vision, the author actively directing our own vision ('our activity is his activity') until the end of the work (180): 'From the event of the work [of literature] the author must be understood above all as a participant, as the reader's authoritative guide, present in the work' (180). Thus for Bakhtin the author/self combines in himself activity, energy and authority, being the initiator and sustainer of an intense interactive event which is always – the last feature of the creative act to be stressed – productive in character, affirming and enriching being (10, 119).

MAN

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the contrast between Creator and creature is characterised on all levels by the relation of sufficiency to need. In 'Author and Hero' a similar imbalance is evident in the relationship between self and other and its parallel in their respective states of being *zadannost'* (that which is incomplete, as yet only conceived, in the process of becoming), and *dannost'* (that which is given, fully present or on hand (*nalichno*), completed) (for example, 47). To these may be added a third pair of terms designating the two absolutely distinct categories employed by each of us in every act of perception, the category 'I-for-myself' (*Ya-dlya-sebja*), pertaining to the way we experience ourselves, and the category 'the-other-for-

me' (*drugoi-dlya-menya*), pertaining to the way we experience everything external to ourselves (23).⁶ In the category of 'the-other-for-me' the other is perceived by me as given, possessing an intrinsic value and rounded-off aesthetically in time and space (for example, 47). In fact it is I who give the other his value by exploiting my external position and its corresponding 'surplus of vision' (*izbytok videniya*) with respect to him (14) in order to bestow an integral and complete image upon him. We have already seen that the most central attribute of God for Bakhtin's purposes is this same quality, taken to its extreme, of outsidedness – his transcendence and corresponding omniscience. By contrast, we from within ourselves have no aesthetic perspective on ourselves, since we are incapable of seeing ourselves as a whole either physically in space or as a fully evolved life in time. We thus stand in need of the other for aesthetic justification. This motif is constantly repeated. In relation to our bodies we read: 'The body is not some self-sufficient thing, it needs the *other*, his recognition and form-giving activity. Only the inner body – heavy flesh – is given to the person himself, the outer body of the other is posited; he must create it actively' (47). Regarding our sense of self-worth: 'I feel an absolute need for love, which only another from his unique position *outside* of me may realise inwardly' (47). Again, with respect to ourselves as personalities:

it is possible to speak of a person's absolute aesthetic need for the other, for the seeing, remembering, gathering and uniting activity of the other, which alone may create his outwardly completed personality; this personality cannot exist unless the other creates it: aesthetic memory is productive, it gives birth for the first time to the *external* person on a new level of being. (34)

This frequently repeated idea of Bakhtin's takes on added weight and intensity in the section devoted to the hero's temporal form, where it becomes apparent that the magnitude of our aesthetic need extends beyond the here and now and consequently exceeds the ability of other individuals to meet it. Here Bakhtin introduces the notion of the 'absolute semantic future' (*smyslovoe absolutnoe budushchee*, 107ff.) to denote an absolute criterion of meaning with a metaphysical status (it is outside space and time, and lies in the future only from the perspective of mortal human beings, who, according to Bakhtin, can never know it here and now). As conscious selves we are by our very nature oriented towards the future; we can

never perceive ourselves to be exhaustively defined by what we are but rather strive towards some future goal or meaning which will justify our lives: 'To be for oneself means still to be forthcoming (*to cease being forthcoming, to prove to be already complete here, means to die spiritually*)' (109). Thus my lack of full identity fuels my life and drives me on but at the same time ensures that I shall always be in a profound state of need: 'in time . . . I find only an uncoordinated direction, unsatisfied desire and striving – the *membra disjecta* of my potential wholeness' (108).

Yet, painful though this situation is, Bakhtin maintains that it is a fact which cannot be suppressed or denied without doing damage to our nature, and thus that to accept our situation of need is the healthiest way to exist. He calls it the 'proper madness of one's fundamental non-coincidence with oneself as given' (112). In his discussion of the physical affirmation of others in embraces, kisses and the like, he points out the 'untruth' (*nepravda*) on the emotional-volitional level of such affirmation being conferred by oneself upon oneself (39). For Bakhtin, self-rejection is a phenomenological fact of one's self-experience. Love is an emotion, or state of will, which is of right applicable only to others, because 'From within myself, in my lonely and pure relationship with myself, only the eternal judgement of the soul is intuitively comprehensible, and only with this judgement can I be in inward solidarity' (90). The iron law of self-rejection is underlined time and again in 'Author and Hero': 'one cannot *love* oneself as one's neighbour' (44); 'an organism simply lives, but it is not justified from within itself' (51); '[life] from within itself is in essence powerless' (68).⁷ All of this points to the fact that for Bakhtin fictional hero and human subject, indeed being itself (119), do not enjoy an autonomous existence but are dependent on transcendent others for their value.

FALL

Bakhtin likens the refusal to acknowledge our dependence on the absolute semantic future to the biblical Fall, the original disobedience to God by Adam and Eve which led to their expulsion from Paradise. He claims that to pretend to axiological self-sufficiency is to fall into a state of profound self-contradiction and self-negation, to live a lie:

We may say that this is the Fall [*grekhopadenie*], which is immanent to being and experienced from within it: it lies in the tendency of being towards self-sufficiency; this is the inner self-contradiction of being – insofar as it claims [*pretenduet*] to abide self-sufficiently in its presence before the face of meaning – the self-condensed self-affirmation of being in defiance of the meaning which gave it birth (a breaking-away from its source), a movement which suddenly ceased and without justification put a full-stop, turned its back on the goal which created it . . . This is absurd and perplexing completeness experiencing the shame of its form. (109)

This passage is notable for the density of terms containing the prefix 'self-' (*samo-*). Wherever this prefix occurs in 'Author and Hero' and, as was shown in the previous chapter, in its sister essay 'Philosophy of the Act', it is to denote some gesture on the part of being or the subject to autonomy. In 'Author and Hero' this is largely an axiological autonomy.⁸ Put differently, it is the perverted attempt of the *zadannoe* to exist in the mode of the *dannoe*. For Bakhtin, this is the 'bearing of pride and self-satisfaction' (*opora gordosti i samodovol'stva*, 111), which is, nevertheless, a reason for shame. A further member of the complex of words connected with the Fall motif is 'pretension', or 'claim' (*pretenziya*)⁹; in the following quotation it appears as the 'pretence' of the present and past to the finalised state of givenness:

my justification is always in the future, and this justification, eternally standing in opposition to me, countermands my past and present as they are for me, with their pretension to prolonged already-presentness [*uzhe nalichnost'*], to tranquillity in givenness, to self-sufficiency, to true reality of being, with their pretension to be all of myself and my essential self, to define me exhaustively in being (the pretension of my givenness to declare itself to be myself in my entirety, to be my true self, the imposture [*samozvanstvo*] of givenness. (107)

As Bakhtin's discussion of the temporal whole of the hero (in which the above passages are to be found) continues, an increasingly negative emphasis is placed on the category of the given, as it comes to be seen as an affront to the metaphysical future out of which all true form must come: 'Everything that already *is*, *is* without justification; it has dared, as it were, to define itself already and dwell (stubbornly) in this definition of itself in the world' (116–17). Here Bakhtin employs an interesting (especially in the light of his later work) analogy with language. The real world is like a thought which has been given expression prematurely and thus inadequately to the ultimate meaning of the whole. Being, like the spoken word, is the

mortal flesh of meaning (*smertnaya plot' smysla*, 117), and is ashamed before the future, just as Adam and Eve became ashamed before God.¹⁰ Again, as in the biblical account, the fall entails a lie – the lie of unjustified self-expression (117) – and results in a lie, the ‘lie of being’ (109, see also 104, 110).

The term *grekhopadenie*, in English, ‘Fall’, is used without irony and is not intended to be read metaphorically.¹¹ The passage in which it occurs (109) is devoted to Bakhtin’s understanding of the absolute semantic future, the ‘source’ (*istochnik*) mentioned in the quotation given at the beginning of this section, which for him is the source of all true justification, alluded to directly as God, or the Author at other points in the text. In a later section on the confession as a literary form, for example, Bakhtin restates the idea of an aesthetic fall from grace in terms of openness and closedness to God: ‘Where the axiological self-sufficiency of being-presence is overcome in me, precisely that which had shut God out is overcome; where I absolutely do not coincide with myself a place is opened for God’ (126). If we yield to the temptation to declare axiological independence from God we cut ourselves off from the unity safeguarded for us in the future. In fact, our very self-experience as fragmented and incomplete is testimony to our fallen state, which Bakhtin indicates is an ongoing process: ‘For myself only the story of my fall is possible; the story of my gradual rise is fundamentally impossible’ (108). The result of the fall for life as a whole, as for each individual, is darkness, chaos and tragedy: ‘when I myself fall away into being, I extinguish the lucidity of the event of being for myself, and become a dark, elementally passive participant in it’ (110); ‘the falling of life away from the absolute future, its transformation into a tragedy without either chorus or author’ (179).

The proper attitude of the self, if it is not to fall prey to the temptation of pride, is penitence (*pokayanie* – this is one of the most persistent motifs in ‘Author and Hero’)¹²: ‘in one’s moral self-reflex inner givenness can only be apprehended in penitent tones’ (101). Synonyms for this humbled self-expression include the cry (*krik*, 71), request (*pros'ba*, 76, 126, 175), prayer (*molitva*, 102, 126) and repentance (*raskayanie*, 123). For Bakhtin penitence is the natural expression of the ‘I-for-myself’, indicating that to stay on the right path, as it were, is neither more nor less than to live in harmony with one’s self-experience, not to reject self-rejection, but to project it forward in the hope of finding affirmation outside oneself. Penitence may be

experienced in different degrees. In lieu of absolute justification we turn to others in an attempt to use their powers precisely as other to provide us with some kind of unified identity, although the implication is that this is a deeply inadequate solution:

as soon as I let the fact that I am posited out of my axiological field of vision and cease intensely to be with myself in the future, my givenness loses its future unity for me. It falls apart, separates out into dumbly present fragments of being. It remains only to take refuge in the *other*, and to gather from the other the fragmented pieces of my givenness, in order to create a finalised unity out of them parasitically, in the soul of the other and on his strength. (111)

In its pure form, however, penitence spills over into confession (52): under his discussion of the confession as a literary phenomenon Bakhtin shows the penitent's desire for justification to be directed away from his or her fellow human beings, whose words of affirmation are rejected as sullyng the purity of the penitent's self-condemnation, and towards divine affirmation in the future: 'The denial of justification here and now passes over into the need for religious justification; it is full of need for forgiveness and atonement as an absolutely *pure gift* (not by merit), of pardon and blessing from an axiologically utterly other world' (125).

SALVATION

According to Bakhtin's aesthetic gospel, however, the penitent is not abandoned to his (or her) state of fragmentation and need; aesthetic salvation is at hand in the guise of the authoring activity of others on each of the three levels of alterity. In all cases this aesthetic activity comes to the needy self from outside, from above, and as an unearned gift (see the last quotation, above); the analogy with the Christian doctrine of free grace is quite unmistakable.¹³ On the level of interpersonal relationships, for example, my right to a loving reception of my external form 'descends on me from others like a gift, like a blessing which cannot be inwardly grounded and understood' (45). In the realm of art something similar is at work: 'In the tragedy in its whole as an artistic event the author-contemplator is active, but the heroes are passive, saved and atoned for by an aesthetic salvation' (65). Here again the emphasis is on the helplessness of the hero. In the same passage we read:

the event of life as a whole has no way out: from within, life may express itself as a deed, as repentance-confession, or as a scream; absolution and benediction descend from the Author. The exit is not immanent to life, rather it descends upon it as the gift of another's activity coming to meet it. (71)

The same themes occur in Bakhtin's discussion of the soul (by which he means our inner life as perceived by the other, that is, aesthetically completed (89)):

From within myself there is no soul as a given, axiological whole already present in me; in relation to myself I have nothing to do with [my soul]; my self-reflex, insofar as it is mine, cannot give rise to a soul, but only to an evil and fragmented subjectivity, something which ought not to be; my inner life, flowing in time, cannot be condensed for me into something valuable, precious, deserving of preservation and eternal life . . . the soul descends on me as a blessing upon a sinner, as an unearned and unexpected gift. (89–90)

The theme of grace is inseparable in 'Author and Hero' from the theologically related concepts of salvation (*spasenie*), atonement (*iskuplenie*), absolution (*otpushchenie*), forgiveness (*proshchenie*) and justification (*opravdanie*),¹⁴ as the above citations in part demonstrate, in many cases serving as so many synonyms. Bakhtin's employment of the last of these is interesting for the relation it bears to the Fall motif. He draws out the link by playing two shades of meaning of *opravdanie* off against each other: within the discourse of the Fall, being is 'unjustified' in assuming control over its aesthetic definition in defiance, as it were, of the semantic future (109, 116, quoted above), in the sense that it has no natural right to do so, it is a usurper, *samozvants* (107); within the discourse of salvation, however, justification is used in the sense of 'exoneration', 'vindication', when the other, author, God, justifies the hero, and being itself, on a fundamentally different level from that of his or her time-bound existence, on the extra-temporal level of aesthetic memory. Being is said to be justified 'apart from the future' (*pomimo budushchego*) (105), and the hero apart from his or her continuing condition of inner fragmentation and constant striving on the ethical level of being as he or she perceives it from within (for example, 76). Justification in this latter sense unambiguously connotes the biblical usage of the term, according to which the sinner, whilst continuing in this life to sin, is nevertheless justified by Christ's death on the cross, that is to say, accounted by God as sinless.¹⁵ Finally, I cite another key passage

which supports the claim that Bakhtin saw in artistic activity an exact parallel of divine grace:

The relationship of transgressive aesthetic form to the hero and his life, taken from within, is the unique relationship of lover to beloved . . . the relationship of unmotivated appreciation to its object ('whatever he's like, I love him', which then leads to active idealisation, the gift of form), the relationship of affirmative acceptance to the one affirmed and accepted, the relationship of gift to need, of forgiveness *gratis* to transgression, of grace to sinner: all these relationships (the series may be extended) are like the aesthetic relation of the author to the hero, or of form to the hero and his life. (80)

INCARNATION

Given the density of the references to authorial salvation, it may well be asked what role the Incarnation, so indispensable to the Christian understanding of redemption, plays in 'Author and Hero'. Christ does in fact receive direct treatment in the essay (as he did in 'Philosophy of the Act'). In the course of an historical overview of cultural attitudes to the human body, Bakhtin presents Christ as the most profound historical instance of the synthesis of 'ethical solipsism' and 'ethical-aesthetic goodness towards the other' (51). In his life Christ applies the most severe moral standards to himself whilst totally affirming everyone else with all their limitations as valuable and unique individuals: 'For him all people divide up into himself alone and everybody else, himself, the lover, and others, the beloved, himself, the Saviour, and all the others, the saved, himself, the one who takes upon himself the burden of sin and atonement, and all the others, the ones set free from that burden and atoned for' (51-2). Thus Christ is at once the paradigmatic self and the ideal other. Further, with Christ our understanding of God and our relationship to him is revolutionised as he models how God is not a condemning and judging voice within us (in the category 'I-for-myself') but 'other' for us, 'a heavenly father who is *above* me and who may justify and love me where I from within myself cannot love and justify myself in principle' (52). The indispensability of the Incarnation for Bakhtin consists in the fact that in Christ, God, the ultimate Other, is materialised and historicised: 'Every act of evaluation is the taking up of an individual position in being; even God had to be incarnated in order to show mercy, to suffer and *forgive*, to come down, as it were, from the abstract viewpoint of justice' (113). This statement is

extremely significant for Bakhtin's work as a whole, pointing up as it does the relation between temporal and spatial specificity (individuation, history), and value, which is developed in his earliest work, 'Philosophy of the Act', and remains pivotal, becoming one of the most fundamental preconditions for his dialogism.¹⁶ It also indicates why the concepts of justice and judgement are relatively undeveloped in his work; they demand a degree of impartiality which is unacceptable to Bakhtin. Love and forgiveness, however, are on the contrary possible only in an intimate relationship, thus the love and forgiveness of God were realised concretely only after the Incarnation. The term 'incarnation' (*voploshchenie*), in its adjectival as well as its substantive form, is frequently employed in 'Author and Hero',¹⁷ largely as a metaphor for form: whilst the 'I-for-myself' is unincarnated in a unified external image (35, 76, 47, 101), the other's inner life is incarnated in the finalised image which I bring to him or her (26, 49, 76, 80, 81, 115). Thus the other's aesthetic value is inseparable from his or her incarnation. Conversely, I am able to redeem the other by the gift of form only because I occupy a concrete position outside him or her; in this, somewhat different, sense it is possible to speak of the incarnation of the author/observer (23), and it is this principle which Christ most fully represents (113).

NEW BIRTH; ETERNAL LIFE

The motif of new birth, also borrowed from Christianity, is applied by Bakhtin wherever he describes the authorial activity of transposing the hero from the plane of *zadannost'*, in the 'open event of being', to the aesthetically finalised plane of *dannost'*:¹⁸ '[the author] gives birth to [the hero] as a new person on a new level of being, on which he cannot be born for himself and by his own strength, and clothes him in that new flesh which for him is not essential and does not exist' (16). It is a new birth into eternal life, the state in which the hero/self is invested with aesthetic value independent of his own slavery to a meaning for his life which for him always lies in the future. For Bakhtin the key to this aesthetic finalisation of the personality lies in memory. In life we preserve the memory of the departed person, after whose death we may for the first time start the work of aestheticisation (since only then all the data of his life are available to us). Often, however, we anticipate a person's death by forming a complete picture of his personality while he is still alive

and developing (94-5); the aesthetic memory of the artist also functions in this way, anticipating the hero's death but at the same time liberating him from the limitations of his own consciousness. Aesthetic memory is eternal: the life of the hero is preserved for ever in the eternal memory of art (115-16), which for Bakhtin constitutes an 'aesthetic victory over death' (115).

FAITH, HOPE

What does our dependence on others, ultimately on God, for aesthetic justification mean for our lives? Since there is no guarantee that our identity will be affirmed from without (126) we are left with the option of life by faith, or, to be more accurate, we have no option but to live by faith, since for Bakhtin life as lived by the 'I-for-myself' is indeed faith: 'Life (and consciousness) from within oneself is nothing other than the carrying out of faith; pure self-consciousness of life is the recognition of faith (i.e., of need and hope, lack of self-sufficiency and possibility). That life is naive which does not know the air it breathes' (126-7). Again, 'deep down in myself I live by eternal faith and hope in the constant possibility of the inner miracle of new birth' (112). Bakhtin describes the faith and hope of the hero/self as 'madness' (*bezumie*, 112), because from the point of view of their givenness they are totally without foundation; from within, however, they are necessitated by the impossibility of my ever accepting my *nalichnost'*, the finishedness, the determinedness of my existence. To repeat, this state of undeterminedness and becoming is, in Bakhtin's view, a right and necessary condition for the self, and the surest sign of true life, therefore he considers the absence of a guarantee to be a good thing (126). The phenomenological basis of prayer, for Bakhtin, is the absence of a guarantee of one's value combined with a desperate need for affirmation; thus the tones of penitence which colour our self-rejection are complemented by the tones of petition and prayer which are the expression of our faith. In the remarkable passage on the literary genre of the self-account/confession he insists that God is the ultimate addressee in one's existential appeal for acceptance (126, 131): 'the self-account/confession informs us of and teaches us about God, for, as we can see, by way of the solitary self-account God is made plain and one is made conscious of the faith which is already alive in life itself (life is faith)' (131). The flip-side, as it were, of faith is trust, since, whilst life is

impossible in the presence of a guarantee, it is no less impossible to exist in an axiological void. Faith, hope and trust in God as absolute Otherness (126) are therefore the natural media of self-experience.

LOVE

Several interesting and controversial questions arise out of the theological basis I have suggested for 'Author and Hero'. One of these has to do with the extreme contrast of authorial/divine activity and heroic/human passivity, stressed time and again by Bakhtin. In the current cultural climate the idea that human subjects should in any way be dependent on a transcendent Being for their identity or the ultimate justification for their lives is highly unpopular, as is the corresponding notion of authorial authority in the world of literature. In her article 'Bodymatters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes' (1989), Ann Jefferson is quick to question the 'astounding' degree of acquiescence required of the hero/self in Bakhtin's scheme. On his terms, she suggests, 'the hero would have every reason to refuse the gift of his incarnation, to refuse to play the role of hero, and to demand that the demarcation line that constitutes his role as hero be crossed or simply erased' (1989, 158). Bakhtin's own arguments in 'Author and Hero' would seek to answer her objection by pointing to the hero/self's intrinsic condition of need; the hero is not free to refuse to play his role, not because of the authoritarian strictures of the author/other, but by virtue of the hero's very nature. I have tried to show how, according to Bakhtin's view, the attempt to do what Ann Jefferson suggests leads to self-contradiction and fragmentation, the destruction of the personality. Bakhtin allows us free will – we may take this path, but autonomy is achieved (and that imperfectly) at the price of wholeness. Again, this notion is surely deeply rooted in the Christian conviction that true freedom is found in willing service and submission to God and one's neighbour. Dependence on the other lies at the heart of both Christianity and Bakhtin's thought. Indeed, Bakhtin writes of the great happiness available to us in our passive state of surrender to givenness (the aesthetic gift of the other): 'Joy is alien to an active attitude towards being; I must become naive in order to rejoice . . . Only in God or in the world is joy a possibility for me, that is to say only where I justifiedly attach myself to being through the other and for the other, where I am passive and receive a gift' (120).

If the passivity of the hero is a problem for Jefferson, the other side of the equation, the activity of the author, is no less so. Jefferson further objects to what she sees as the 'undialectical' nature of the author/hero relation in the essay, which, she claims, alone enables the harmony evident between the two. Her objection does not hold on the level of interpersonal relationships, where the loving aesthetic relationship between self and other is not a 'strikingly one-way process' (1989, 155) but very much a reciprocal affair whereby each partner functions as both self and other, each supplying what the other one lacks. The point is, however, valid on the levels of literary creativity and divine authorship, where the balance of power lies clearly on one side of the relationship. Bakhtin is not oblivious to the tension here. He describes the process of artistic creation as that of the artist's struggle for aesthetic form, in which the hero, being drawn from life into art, puts up a genuine resistance (173). There are, moreover, limits to how far the author determines his or her hero. Bakhtin describes artistic form as the result of the interaction (*vzaimodeistvie*) of author and hero whereby the hero, despite his greater passivity 'determines his form all the same, for it has to answer precisely to him, to complete from without precisely his inner, objective, vital directedness; in this respect the form must be adequate to him, although in no way as his possible self-expression' (75). The battle for outsidedness may be lost by the author – in his review of different forms of author/hero relationship Bakhtin shows how the hero enjoys more or less independence from his creator according to how their relationship is constructed. But, as Todorov points out, Bakhtin is prescriptive in his insistence in 'Author and Hero' that the 'better' artistic forms are those in which the author most successfully maintains his or her external position (1984, 103). In the case of the divine Author, of course, the outsidedness is absolute. How then may such a degree of authoritativeness be justified? On the whole, rather than attempting to diminish the power gap, Bakhtin accepts it as a 'given' of the relationship but is constantly at pains to deconstruct it with the powerful weapon of love. I wish to conclude my exposition of 'Author and Hero' with an examination of this dominant aspect of his theory.

It is no exaggeration to say that love is the most important motif of 'Author and Hero'.¹⁹ At all levels of aesthetic activity it is represented as the lubricant in the mechanics of intersubjective relationships, and their motivating force. In his book *The Four Loves*

C. S. Lewis draws a distinction between ‘Gift-love’ and ‘Need-love’ (1960, 7). Human relationships most often display a combination of the two; we have seen how, according to Bakhtin, each self is in need of the loving authorship of others whilst at the same time acting as the loving giver of completion to them. In the relationship of author to hero and God to humanity the two kinds of love are highly distinct, the more powerful partner displaying ‘Gift-love’, the less powerful, ‘Need-love’, but love remains the basis of the relationship. It is not, as Jefferson suggests, acquiescence in the active/passive power structure which guarantees the ‘amorous harmony’ of Bakhtin’s relationships (1989, 155–6), but precisely the opposite: love is the guarantee that the power structure will not be abused. The power structure itself is presented as an inevitable consequence of the discrepancy between the self’s need and the other’s sufficiency. Yet authorial love is not presented as overbearing, as veiled tyranny, but according to Bakhtin manifests itself through sacrifice. The more powerful partner in the relationship gives of him- or herself for the sake of the less powerful. Christ is described in terms of ‘absolute sacrifice for himself and grace for the other’ (53). The author likewise sacrifices him- or herself for the hero by adopting the ‘difficult’ external position necessary to complete the hero aesthetically: ‘This is the external position [*vnenakhodimost’*] of the author in relation to the hero, his loving self-elimination from the field of the hero’s life, his clearing of the whole field of life for him and his being, the participatory understanding and completion of the event of his life by a cognitively and ethically impartial observer’ (16). Bakhtin suggests that love is the prerequisite also for the preceding stage of the aesthetic enterprise, empathy; we shall not want to get inside another subject in order to understand them if we do not find them sympathetic (73). All in all, aesthetic activity is hard work and cannot function without the motivation of love. Bakhtin provides us with an indication of what might happen should love be absent from aesthetic relationships under his discussion of the confession. The penitent may rebel against the authority of his or her judge and become cynical and twisted (as in the case, for example, of the hero of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*). Likewise, the other acting as judge may withhold affirmation and forgiveness or even reverse them, cursing the vulnerable self standing before him or her: ‘The worst curse is the just curse, expressing in tones of spite and mockery what the other might have said about himself in penitent-pleading

tones, the exploitation of one's privileged position external to the other for purposes directly opposite to the right ones' (128).

Given such aberrations from the ideal, which in life are manifold, Bakhtin might well be accused of taking too optimistic a view of self/other relations. But he is basing his system on a model in which one of the partners is absolutely reliable, the God of love of Christianity. Whatever may go wrong on the human level, the divine dimension to alterity vindicates all its other manifestations. Its existence provides human others with a model for their own behaviour ('that which I ought to be for the other, God is for me' (52)), and a safety net in the event of failure. Furthermore, for Bakhtin the existence of an ultimate other legitimates the artistic enterprise: 'The divinity of the artist lies in his being joined to the supreme outsideness' (166). Indeed, the artist cannot function in a cultural climate where his or her right to adopt an exotopic, aesthetic position is placed into doubt. Ultimately this right is guaranteed by God:

[For me as an author] a special responsibility is necessary – it is impossible to create directly in God's world; but this special responsibility may be based only upon a deep trust in a higher authority blessing culture, a trust that there is someone higher who answers for my special responsibility, that I am not acting in an axiological void. (179)

Finally, trust in God as the ultimate bestower of value, the absolute other, is seen by Bakhtin to be an 'immanent constitutive feature of pure self-consciousness and self-expression' (126), without which meaningful human life is impossible. Just as a child flourishes best in the atmosphere of parental love, affirmation and security in which he or she first becomes aware of himself or herself as an individual (46), so God provides all human selves with a climate of security in which to develop. Bakhtin's own description of this essential loving otherness provides a fitting conclusion to my discussion:

A certain degree of warmth is necessary in the axiological atmosphere surrounding me in order for self-consciousness and self-expression to come about in it, in order for life to begin. The very fact that I ascribe significance, however endlessly negative, to my determinedness, that I invite judgement on it at all, that is, the very fact that I realise myself to exist, already says that I am not alone in my self-account, that I am reflected axiologically in somebody, that somebody is interested in me, that somebody needs me to be good. (126)

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt, as I believe any reasonably impartial reader must conclude, that the structures of the Christian kerygma are consciously and thoroughly incorporated by Bakhtin both into his phenomenological aesthetics and into the 'primary philosophy' of life for which his analysis of art is a model. In 'Author and Hero' the concept of the author is derived from God the Creator, and the paradigm for responsible, active self-hood is found to be Christ. But what happens to Bakhtin's Christian phenomenology in the subsequent phases of his career? As I shall argue in Chapter 5, there is strong evidence to show that in the later 1920s Bakhtin felt the need radically to revise his aesthetics, but that this inevitably involved rethinking his theology also. This philosophical and religious crisis is manifest in the first monograph to be published in his own name, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work* (1929). However, it is first necessary to broach the question which has dogged (and continues to dog) Bakhtin scholarship, namely the extent to which Bakhtin was involved with the production of Marxist works on Formalism and the philosophy of language in Leningrad in the twenties, and, concomitantly, the extent to which any degree of involvement implies that Bakhtin himself adopted a Marxist orientation from the 1920s onwards. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Was Bakhtin a Marxist?: The work of the Bakhtin Circle, 1924–1929

Any assessment of Bakhtin's development from his position of the early 1920s in 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero' threatens to be tripped up at the very first hurdle, when approaching the work of the Bakhtin Circle from 1924, the date of Bakhtin's return to Leningrad, to 1929, the year of his arrest and sentence to exile. This is the period of the by now infamous texts of disputed authorship, around which debate has raged since the early 1970s, a debate whose details it has become tedious to rehearse.

THE NATURE OF THE CRITICAL DEBATE ON AUTHORSHIP

What is most striking about the numerous articles on this issue is the syncretistic approach adopted by all parties concerned. By this I mean that a given scholar's position is defended and that of his (or her) opponent attacked, using a variety of different strategies; quantity of proofs has been preferred to quality. Such an approach is understandable given the bewildering variety of angles from which one may address the question, but it does not make for either coherent arguments or satisfying conclusions. For this reason it is put to best use by those who, like Todorov (1984) or Perlina (1983), are not committed to one side or the other, or who, as in Wehrle's case (1978), derive post-structuralist satisfaction from the very ambiguity of the authorship question, or, again, whose main concern is to raise questions or cast doubts, as do Titunik (1984, 1986) and Morson and Emerson (1989, 1990). These latter have shown clearly and convincingly in their attacks on Clark and Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984a) how unsatisfactory the syncretistic approach is when used to construct a comprehensive, positive case for one side or the other. In their biography of Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist employ a whole range of strategies to argue for Bakhtin's authorship: anecdotal

evidence based on interviews and circumstance; arguments on the grounds of probability, even possibility; arguments from Bakhtinian theory (the textual confusion as ‘carnival’; the circle’s love of ‘dialogue’); intertextual analysis (among Medvedev and Voloshinov’s texts as well as between texts by the various ‘authors’); and the analysis of individual texts in their terminological, stylistic and thematic dimensions (1984a, 146–70). Morson and Emerson have documented the contradictions and dubious conclusions which arise when Clark and Holquist attempt to merge these pluriform approaches (1990, 105–16). It is notable, however, that they themselves do not then venture on a positive exercise to construct a case for the separate authorial identities of Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev. In fact, with the partial exception of Titunik’s article of 1984 and Vasil’ev’s of 1991, no attempt to resolve the mystery of the 1920s texts has avoided the temptation to jump from one strategy to another to support its author’s point of view. As a result, the reader of these articles is inclined to weary of the question and prematurely declare it unsolvable, even irrelevant.

However, since I am seeking to understand Bakhtin’s work as a whole, and in particular to establish the religious orientation of his thought, it would be irresponsible not to take a stand in the debate, since from the point of view of this book the crucial issue is really not who wrote what, but, more profoundly, who stands for what, and to what degree. The question of Bakhtin’s Marxism or non-Marxism is central to the authorship debate because, of course, all of the disputed texts are self-consciously and unapologetically Marxist, in direct contrast to those published in Bakhtin’s name. Titunik, in the above-mentioned article, agrees about the centrality of the Marxism question: ‘This is an absolutely fundamental question and one that cries out to be resolved. Indeed it is hard to understand how we could proceed with our study of the Bakhtin legacy without having this question resolved. Despite all that, it is the one “big issue” of the Bakhtin legacy which is most conspicuously marked by silence’ (1984, 546). After naming a few prominent examples of silence he does go on to review those researchers who in fact have addressed the issue (Yaguello (1977), Jameson (1974) and Glueck (1976)). However, neither these nor subsequent commentators on Bakhtin’s position vis-à-vis Marxism have undertaken a thorough intertextual analysis of the key texts under dispute with a view to determining the extent and nature of their several allegiances to Marxist theory,

and thus to making inferences about their likely authorship. Titunik himself (1984), whilst implicitly acknowledging the need for such a study, confines himself to a comparison of two works on psycho-analysis both published under Voloshinov's name, and, unable to draw any conclusions about their authorship, rather highlights an unaccountable discrepancy between the varieties of Marxism displayed in the texts. If, as I strongly suspect, Bakhtin was not responsible for these works, the discrepancy becomes unimportant for the debate; at any rate a comparative study with works by other members of the circle would be needed to illuminate the matter.

The task of this chapter is to undertake such a study, by combining the adoption of a single line of approach, that of a thematic intertextual analysis, with a focus on the question of the Marxist (or anti-Marxist) bias of the texts. Although a detailed stylistic analysis would serve equally well to illuminate the question of authorship, I have rejected it both on the grounds that it would provide enough material for an essay in its own right, and because it would be only tangentially relevant to an investigation of Bakhtin's world-view. The present essay can therefore claim to fill only one of the many gaps in this area of Bakhtin scholarship. In the interests of thoroughness, the texts to be discussed are also limited in number: Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* of 1928; Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* of 1929; Bakhtin's 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Creative Literature' of 1924, and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, published under Bakhtin's own name in 1929. Account will be taken of his 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero' (both of *circa* 1920-4), where they clearly inform Bakhtin's later work or make a strong contribution to the argument. It is hoped that, by comparing and contrasting the concepts of these texts within the broader framework of their respective philosophies and methodologies, it will be possible to become convinced of the independence and strength of two distinct world conceptions.

Having said this, I feel it necessary to circumscribe the argument which is about to follow with a number of important reservations. Firstly, it seems clear that no amount of textual analysis, however rigorous, can prove beyond doubt that Bakhtin had no hand in the production of *Formal Method* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Indeed, it seems to me to be unnecessary to do so. After all, Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev were meeting regularly in the mid to late twenties for intellectual discussion, and it is of course quite unreason-

able to suppose that Bakhtin did not at the very least influence the content of his colleagues' books. Moreover, despite the notorious unreliability, which should not be underestimated, of the anecdotal evidence provided by Bakhtin's friends and disciples of the sixties and seventies, and indeed of Bakhtin's own documented comments on the degree of his involvement in his friends' projects, there is too much on record testifying to some kind of cooperation to make it worthwhile asserting, on the basis of textual analysis, that on ideological grounds alone Bakhtin could not have had anything to do with the books in question. Nor do I wish to maintain that Voloshinov and Medvedev, for their part, had no effect upon Bakhtin's subsequent thinking. His shift away from a predominantly phenomenological and synchronic approach to literature to a predominantly sociohistorical approach from the thirties onwards (though the latter is prefigured in his early essays, and though, I would insist, the essays on the novel and the book on Rabelais can in no way be described as Marxist in any obvious sense of the word), undeniably occurred at least partly as a result of the impact of Marxism on Russian intellectual groups in general, and the Bakhtin Circle in particular, during the 1920s.¹ Thirdly, it is not my intention to set up a straw target – unsophisticated Marxism – in order to shoot it down with an alternative, 'superior' Bakhtinian ideology. As is well known, in *Formal Method* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Medvedev and Voloshinov were specifically concerned to distance themselves from the cruder interpretations of Marx, and indeed their books constitute attempts to raise the level of sophistication of their respective intellectual fields within the Marxist debate. In any case, the period was one of 'Marxisms' rather than 'Marxism', and if I isolate common-denominator terms, I venture comment on them only within Voloshinov and Medvedev's own framework. The point at issue in this chapter, I repeat, is whether Bakhtin's own-name publications of the period can be distinguished philosophically and methodologically in any meaningful way from those published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev, and what such a distinction might tell us about Bakhtin's world-view in general, and about his attitude to Marxism in particular.

There is one further caveat: some justification for the fact that I have not included Bakhtin's Tolstoy Prefaces of 1929 and 1930 in my list of texts for consideration is necessary. The Prefaces are the only texts published under Bakhtin's name to be saturated with Marxist

ideology. In the context of his other 'own-name' works, in particular of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, published in the same year as the first of the Prefaces, they appear utterly incongruous. Naturally, to those who are persuaded of Bakhtin's authorship of Voloshinov and Medvedev's texts of that period, the Prefaces serve as a convenient confirmation of the fact that Bakhtin, even if not himself a Marxist, was willing to adopt the language where it suited him. Yet it is hard to be flippant about what, if this is true, can have been no game for Bakhtin. When he wrote the Prefaces he was on temporary release from prison pending departure for a labour camp, and the success of his appeal for clemency was at stake. I attribute the tone of the Prefaces to these circumstances, and at the same time have sympathy for Shukman's suggestion (1989) that Bakhtin to some extent, so far as he was able, highlighted Tolstoy's spiritual views in the course of his ostensibly Marxist critique of them. Bakhtin himself rejected his Prefaces in later life, calling them 'hack-work' (*khaltura*) and crossing them off the list of publications destined for translation in Hungary (Bocharov 1993, 78). This piece of evidence seems to me to confirm Bakhtin's distaste for ungenue writing as much as it confirms his distaste for undiluted Marxism, and as such strengthens the case for his minimal involvement in Medvedev and Voloshinov's monographs.

BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

Both Voloshinov and Medvedev show an explicit commitment to the Marxist theory of the determination of society's ideological superstructure by its economic base, integrating this view fully into their respective projects. As his first objective Voloshinov 'seeks to bring out the position that the philosophy of language occupies in the Marxist world-view' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 11 [xv]), devoting to this end the entire first part of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, including a separate chapter on the relationship between base and superstructure. In this first section one finds repeated unequivocal declarations of allegiance to this aspect of Marxian analysis: 'Ideological reality is the immediate superstructure over the economic basis' (20 [13]); 'every domain of ideology is a unified whole which reacts with its entire constitution to a change in the basis' (24-5 [18]); 'the actual dialectical generation of society . . . emerges from the basis and comes to completion in the super-

structures' (25 [18]). Voloshinov sees the importance of language for Marxist thought to lie precisely in the fact that the word, the material medium for human communication and the 'ideological phenomenon *par excellence*' (21 [13]), occupies the mediating ground between base and superstructure: 'On one side, it links up directly with the processes of production; on the other, it is tangent to the spheres of the various specialised and fully fledged ideologies' (21 [14]). Thus language provides an ideal objective means of tracing the complicated path from subtle changes in the socioeconomic base to sophisticated ideological phenomena like the novel. Having once established this, his central thesis, Voloshinov does not let it slip from view even in the most technical sections of his book. In Part 2 language change is explained as follows: 'social intercourse is generated (stemming from the basis); in it verbal communication and interaction are generated; finally, this generative process is reflected in the change in language forms' (114 [96]). Similarly, 'the evaluative purview of a particular social group . . . is entirely determined by expansion of the economic basis' (127 [106]). In Part 3 Voloshinov sees a community's evaluative purview to be registered in its actual linguistic practice: 'It is the function of society to select and to make grammatical . . . just those factors in the active and evaluative reception of utterances that are socially vital and constant, and, hence, that are grounded in the economic existence of a particular community of speakers' (138 [117]). Quasi-direct discourse is just one example of a grammatical modification in language traceable to changes in the socioeconomic order. Voloshinov concludes his study by expressing concern for the 'depression of the thematic value of the word' (188 [159]), the undermining of ideological discourse which quasi-direct discourse, along with other forms of the 'picturesque' style of reported speech, embodies, but indicating clearly that the new socioeconomic order in the Soviet Union holds out hope for change.

Medvedev, for his part, undertakes to show how literary scholarship needs to be integrated into a general science of ideologies: 'Between the general theory of superstructures and their relationship to the base and the concrete study of each specific ideological phenomenon there seems to be a certain gap, a shifting and hazy area that the scholar picks his way through at his own risk, or often simply skips over, shutting his eyes to all difficulties and ambiguities' (*Formal Method*, 11 [3]). He does not question the validity of the base/

superstructure model, rather he demands a more sophisticated account of their interrelationship. All ideologies are said to be part of the 'ideological environment' of man, 'the realized, materialized, externally expressed social consciousness of a given collective' which is 'determined by the collective's economic existence' (24 [14]):

Man the producer is directly oriented in the socio-economic and natural environment of production. But every act of his consciousness and all the concrete forms of his conduct outside work (manners, ceremonies, conventional signs of communication, etc.) are immediately oriented in the ideological environment, are determined by it, and in turn determine it, while only obliquely reflecting and refracting socio-economic and natural existence. (25 [14])

According to Medvedev, literature is unique among ideologies insofar as it reflects not only the economic base (along with all other ideologies) but also the ideological environment, and thus it requires treating in a manner consonant with its complexity. While it is appropriate for literary theorists to focus on the way in which a given work refracts ideology, the job of the literary historian is to 'reveal the very mechanics of ideological generation . . . He must penetrate the ideological horizon to the real socio-economic being of a given group' (32 [20]). The bulk of his work is devoted to showing how Formalist scholarship fails on both counts: in starting from the parts and working out towards the whole they prove incapable of integrating art with life. Medvedev asserts that there is only one way to achieve the integral system he aspires to:

Only Marxism can bring the correct philosophical direction and necessary methodological precision to the problems we have raised. Only Marxism can completely coordinate the specific reality of literature with the ideological horizon reflected in its content, i.e., with other ideologemes. And only Marxism can do so in the unity of social life on the basis of the socio-economic laws which totally permeate all ideological creation. (40 [26])

Voloshinov and Medvedev, then, consistently display a commitment to the reduction by Marxist theory of the cultural sphere to socioeconomic relations. By contrast, nowhere in his work up to 1929 does Bakhtin so much as gesture towards such a commitment. The lexis of Marxist economics ('base', 'superstructure', 'instrument of production', 'consumer good', 'commodity', 'fetishisation') is alien to his vocabulary. One detects the glimmer of a point of comparison only in the motif of 'object-ification' (*oveshchestvlenie*), to which

Bakhtin is opposed from the outset, and which could be aligned with the Marxist concepts of fetishisation and alienation. In 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', for example, Bakhtin opposes philosophical Idealism on the grounds that in elevating the ego to a dominant role in cognitive activity the person cognised is reduced to the status of an object ('Author and Hero', 79). This objection is strongly reiterated in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. More relevant to a discussion of economic references, however, is the form Bakhtin's opposition to objectification takes in 'Content, Material and Form', where he criticises Formalist poetics for reducing literary form to an aspect of the verbal material, and for substituting technical craftsmanship for true aesthetic activity, which according to Bakhtin is evaluative in nature. In this way, he argues, the work of art becomes a product for consumption, and the consuming of it a hedonistic game ('Content, Material and Form', 14). Bakhtin and Medvedev agree on the importance of value and purpose for literature; Medvedev, however, interprets value within a Marxist framework, arguing that a work of art is not a 'consumer good', not an 'object of individual pleasure and experience', but an 'object of intercourse' (*Formal Method*, 21 [11]), that is, thoroughly social in character. Bakhtin, on the other hand, advocates a view of art as a particular kind of event in which the author interacts meaningfully with the world around him. For him the notion of objectification denotes the death of genuine otherness rather than a capitulation to market economics.

Several commentators on the 'Marxism question' have pointed to certain sections of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, either as evidence for Bakhtin's political commitment or to explain them away, since they constitute the only exceptions (apart from the Tolstoy Prefaces) to the absence of socioeconomic analysis in his work. In fact, there is only one passage where the language of Marxist economic analysis is employed explicitly, namely Bakhtin's review of Otto Kaus' *Dostoevski und sein Schicksal* (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 28–31 [19–20]). Yet over half of this passage, excluding the lengthy direct quotation from Kaus, is a paraphrase of Kaus' explanation for the multiplicity of ideological points of view to be found in Dostoevsky's work as 'the purest and most authentic expression of the spirit of capitalism' (30 [19]), and thus it 'quotes' his vocabulary (indeed, the most purple phrases, such as for example 'a world born out of the fiery breath of capitalism' (30 [19]), occur in a direct citation from Kaus). The

paraphrased argument consists of an account of the impact of economic change – the onset of capitalism – on Russia and the Russian novel (that is, it explores the influence of base on superstructure). In the following paragraph Bakhtin does freely concede the influence of capitalism on Dostoevsky, but conspicuously does not take the opportunity to place Kaus' analysis into a Marxist framework; on the contrary, he translates the exegesis into his own unmistakable idiom: evolving social life could not fit 'within the framework of a confident and calmly meditative monologic consciousness' and thus set the stage for 'the multi-leveledness and multi-voicedness of the polyphonic novel' (30 [20]). Bakhtin's main objection to Kaus, that in seeking to relate the artistic phenomenon to reality he bypasses the central question of novelistic structure, echoes Medvedev's apology for a Marxist poetics, but once again the Marxist context of Medvedev's argument is completely lacking. Indeed, Bakhtin's concentration on questions of structure in Dostoevsky functions, among other things, as a device for avoiding a confrontation with Marxist analysis: the skilful merging of his authorial discourse with that of a politically minded 'hero' (in this case Kaus, but see also his discussions of Chernyshevsky and – in the 1963 edition – Lunacharsky) enables him admirably to keep his distance under the guise of engaging with specifically Marxist points of view.

IDEOLOGY

Although Bakhtin ignores the concept of superstructures, it is instructive to compare Medvedev and Voloshinov's use of the related concept of 'ideology' with its apparent Bakhtinian parallels. In his work up to 1929 the term as such never occurs, to the best of my knowledge, but references to 'human culture' may be said to come close to it. By 'the unity of human culture' ('Content, Material and Form', 9) Bakhtin understands the sum of human cultural activity in its cognitive, ethical and aesthetic dimensions. According to him, if one is to comprehend the part correctly, one must first have grasped the principles of the whole; literature should thus be defined from the standpoint of general systematic aesthetics, and aesthetics from the standpoint of systematic philosophy. Although his concern for proper definition runs along similar lines to that of Medvedev, the term 'ideology' in Medvedev's sense is not appropriate to Bakhtin's

discourse; he is not defining culture against another kind of reality which determines it, as Medvedev defines ideology against the economic basis. If anything stands over against culture, it is 'life', but if culture is seen in Bakhtin's dynamic conception, as cultural activity, there is no qualitative difference between the two categories. 'Ideology', for Voloshinov and Medvedev, is roughly synonymous with 'superstructure'. The adjective 'ideological' is employed to denote anything pertaining to the superstructure as a whole (for example, ideological meaning, generation, or environment), whilst the separate branches of science, religion, art and so forth, are referred to as 'ideologies'. When Bakhtin does eventually make use of the term in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* its context generally lends it a broader meaning. Here 'ideological' may be read as 'that which pertains to the idea', 'idea' being understood in the spirit of Dostoevsky as the defining centre of a person's entire world outlook:

[For Dostoevsky] the loftiest principles of a world-view are the same principles that govern the most concrete personal experiences. And the result is an artistic fusion . . . of personal life with world-view, of the most intimate experiences with the idea. Personal life becomes uniquely unselfish and principled, and lofty ideological thinking becomes passionate and intimately linked with personality. (73 [479])

Thus a person's ideology is tantamount to his world-view, which is inseparable from his unique personality. For Bakhtin there are as many ideologies as there are human beings. Indeed, Bakhtin refers sometimes to Dostoevsky's own 'form-shaping ideology', sometimes to his 'form-shaping world-view', as that which determines his polyphonic creative style. Further, a character's ideology, as his philosophical viewpoint, is not contrasted with another type of ideology (in Voloshinov and Medvedev's sense) or with something that is non-ideological, but with another hero's philosophical viewpoint. Where 'ideology' is not used in this very personal way it still tends to convey the sense of 'philosophy', 'having to do with ideas', as for example in this sentence from the Foreword: 'Dostoevsky's work has been, up to now, the object of a narrowly ideological approach and treatment' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 4 [276]). In general, then, Bakhtin noticeably avoids the more explicitly Marxist connotations of the word 'ideology', while Medvedev and Voloshinov deliberately explore them.

MAN AND SOCIETY

The frequent use of the terms 'sociology' and 'social' in Voloshinov and Medvedev's work accurately reflects a proper Marxist emphasis on man as a member of a collective as opposed to man as an individual. The fact of man's social being is central to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *Formal Method*: Voloshinov bases his Marxist philosophy of language on the premise that language is the common property of the 'language community', rejecting both the 'abstract objectivist' theory of language as a system existing independently of its users, and the 'individualistic subjectivist' notion of language being created by isolated individuals; language is neither impersonal nor individualistic, but social in nature. Similarly, Medvedev subtitles *Formal Method* 'a critical introduction to sociological poetics' and launches it with the claim: 'it is precisely a developed sociological doctrine of the distinctive features of the material, forms and purposes of each area of ideological creation which is lacking' (11 [3]). As an ideological product art is primarily a social phenomenon from its creation to its perception: 'It is not within us but between us' (17 [8]).

Bakhtin agrees that both art and language are between, rather than within us. One need only cite his dictum from 'Author and Hero', 'An aesthetic event may only be established in the presence of two participants; it presupposes two unmerging consciousnesses' (22) as proof of the first, and the well-known line from *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 'Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence' (216 [252]), to be convinced of the second. It would, however, be a mistake to extrapolate a sense of society in Bakhtin from these and similar assertions, as the use of the number 'two' indicates. Bakhtin conceives alterity as a dyad in the early essays, and his passionate defence of it is conducted from the first on the very intimate scale of self and other, author and hero, and is based on a strong sense of the value of the 'single and unique' individual. Bakhtin's philosophy starts from the self and develops outwards: the responsibly active 'I' of 'Philosophy of the Act' becomes the 'I and Thou' of 'Author and Hero' when the architectonic triad 'I-for-myself', 'the-other-for-me' and 'I-for-the-other' is formulated as the foundation for a phenomenology of human perception. When in the Dostoevsky book the interpersonal is extended (for the first time) the result is a 'plurality of unmerged consciousnesses' (*Dostoevsky's Creative*

Work, 41 [26]), where the one is not lost in the many, a community rather than a collective. Even in this book, however, Bakhtin uses dialogue between two people (Tikhon and Stavrogin, for example, or Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov) whenever he illustrates his dialogic principle in depth. Voloshinov and Medvedev, by contrast, start from the whole and from there move to the parts. Despite their claim to deal with concrete reality, as self-styled Marxist critics they are, perhaps inevitably, bound to assimilate the individual to the abstract and generalising concept of society. Departing from a notion of society, it is difficult to arrive at the unique human being; he or she must always be depersonalised to a certain degree, as a member of this or that social group or class, a follower of this or that ideological tendency.

Of the two thinkers, Medvedev is the more rigorous and enthusiastic promoter of Marxist collectivism. One senses a certain tension in Voloshinov, a desire to credit the individual with as much 'spiritual' autonomy as possible given the strictures of what is essentially a materialistic, deterministic world-view. In his concern to counter the position of the Romantics, however, his initial premises are pushed rigorously to their logical conclusion, resulting in statements which would be inconceivable from the pen of Bakhtin. If consciousness only exists in the material of signs, and if each individual receives those signs from his or her immediate social environment, then it follows that 'the personality of the speaker, taken from within, so to speak, turns out to be wholly a product of social interrelations' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 107 [90]). And if there is no sense in which we are separate from our ideological milieu, then there is no true creativity: 'What usually is called 'creative individuality' is nothing but the expression of a particular person's basic, firmly grounded, and consistent line of social orientation' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 110 [93]).

Bakhtin warned about the deadening effects of 'general concepts, theses and laws about this world' in his early appeal for a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive, primary philosophy ('Philosophy of the Act', 105). He is able himself to preserve human uniqueness and creativity by adopting a broadly existentialist philosophical approach that allows for the full consideration of the emotional and volitional as well of the rational dimensions to being. The creative act is described as the interaction of the whole person with the world in its fullness, as this passage from the conclusion of 'Content, Material

and Form' illustrates: 'In verbal artistic creativity the event-al (*sobytiinyi*) character of the aesthetic object is especially clear – the interrelationship of form and content here bears an almost dramatic character. Especially clear is the entrance into the object of the author – the person of body, soul and spirit' (71). The creative autonomy of the author/self is clear in Bakhtin's work from the start. What can be seen in the Dostoevsky book, however, is a movement towards understanding the hero/other as maximally free also (this will be examined further in the next chapter). Dostoevsky exemplifies a non-authoritarian authorial approach, Bakhtin maintains, in refusing to fix his characters in a finalised and evaluated image, and allowing them to speak for themselves. Each of his heroes are in pursuit of their own word, their own philosophical point of view (Bakhtin never suggests, as does Voloshinov, that the quest is hopeless or that they are no more than representatives of a particular social or ideological purview), and since they are engaged in continual dialogue it is impossible that the final judgemental word should ever be spoken about them. In Bakhtin (as in Dostoevsky) there is always something left over after our attempts to define man, a certain irreducible that resists systematisation, and this sets him apart from Voloshinov and Medvedev.

MATERIALISM

There is no attempt on Voloshinov or Medvedev's part to disguise or evade the strict materialism of Marxism, although both distance themselves from its cruder forms – 'predialectical mechanistic materialism', as Voloshinov calls it in his Introduction (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 10 [xiv]), which, in the words of Medvedev, 'strove to reveal a natural mechanical regularity at work everywhere' (*Formal Method*, 18 [9]). Indeed, a more sophisticated understanding of the materialist dimension of Marxism is the bedrock of their analysis of their respective fields. Voloshinov is able to work a synthesis out of the Romantic (Idealist) and Formalistic (Saussurean) views of language by focusing on the materiality of language. The dualism of psyche and ideology characteristic of the Romantic view is overcome, he maintains, when the content of both consciousness and ideology is understood to be thoroughly material (the word moves freely between the two realms): 'only on the grounds of a materialistic monism can the resolution of all . . . contradictions [of

this view] be achieved' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 52 [40]). Likewise, the Saussurean divorce of the abstract system of *langue* (which in fact, Voloshinov argues, enjoys the status of a metaphysical entity despite the fact that the Saussure school claims to be antimetaphysical) from the historical speech performance – *parole* – is rendered null and void when language is seen as exclusively material, therefore historically concrete. In *Formal Method*, Medvedev's general thesis is explicitly founded on Marxist monism – 'a general name for those theories which deny the duality of matter and mind'² – as a basis on which to synthesise different philosophies, in his case Idealism and Positivism. It can also solve that theoretical bugbear of the Marxist thinking of his day, the precise relationship between base and superstructure, he asserts: the world of everyday existence and the realms of ideological production can be reconciled by way of their common social and material nature: 'Every ideological product (ideologeme) is part of the material social reality surrounding Man' (17 [9]).

In my opinion there is no convincing evidence in the four Bakhtin texts under consideration here to support the view that his philosophy shares the materialism of Marxist ideology.³ Certainly, he criticises Idealism along with his colleagues; however, not for its psychologism or individualism as such, but rather for its reduction of his own treasured monism of existence to a monism of consciousness located in the self (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 76 [80]). There seems little doubt that Marxism's materialistic monism would offend Bakhtin equally, inasmuch as it is another kind of reduction of the plurality of existence. This particular critique of Idealism is intimately related to Bakhtin's attitude to dialectic, as will become clear below. It is also true that Bakhtin is opposed to systems of thought which fail to deal with concrete reality and become embroiled in an abstract theoreticism that has little to do with lived experience ('Philosophy of the Act'). His concern for a hands-on approach to life would certainly seem to mesh with the Marxist understanding of the world as philosophy's laboratory. However, he is far from rejecting idealistic thought out of hand, as Voloshinov and Medvedev do, and indeed adapts some central Neo-Kantian concepts to his own philosophy.

Foremost among these is transcendence, on a number of levels a leitmotif in Bakhtin's work. Certain of these levels can be reconciled with a materialist world-view, as for example the theme of self-

transcendence through action found in 'Philosophy of the Act', whereby I enter the world, joining it with myself, as I go out towards it in my thinking, feeling, doing (125). Voloshinov in fact has a similar understanding of the speech-performance as a basis for real communication between human beings, a transcendence of self which is not only compatible with the theory of the material nature of consciousness but conditional upon it, since the fact that the content of my psyche is constituted by a shared, material system of signs is what enables me to make myself understood. Bakhtin shows no interest in the materiality, the semiotic dimension of human self-expression in the works of the period published under his own name, focusing rather on its spiritual (in the looser sense) aspect. However, the recurrent theme of embodiment, or incarnation, in these works leads one to suppose that it is a dimension he could embrace (and did later go on to embrace) without reservation. It is a short step from asserting the necessity of lending theoretical positions value by incorporating them in responsible action, under which Bakhtin would include speech, to an understanding of meaning itself as embodied in the material of language. Yet Bakhtin's work has a place not only for transcendence in this limited, 'horizontal' sense, but also for a 'vertical' transcendent dimension, and in this he clearly departs from the position of his Marxist colleagues. In particular his aesthetic pivots on the outsideness and the superiority of the artist with respect to his creation, the 'transgredient', benevolent viewpoint making aesthetic finalisation possible. In 'Author and Hero', as we have seen, the guarantor of aesthetic endeavour and the perfect model for creative activity is God, 'the supreme being-outside' (166). God also looms large in Bakhtin's phenomenology of interpersonal relationships. He appears in 'Author and Hero' as the 'absolute semantic future' towards which every self strives, a moment that is not part of the temporal series of history but is situated in another dimension. Our access to this dimension is by faith, by which we must live if we are to cope with our perception of ourselves as fragmented and incomplete. In connection with this, Bakhtin has constant recourse to the concepts of soul and spirit to characterise our inner life as perceived by ourselves (spirit), and others (soul). None of this, of course, is detectable in Voloshinov and Medvedev. By the late 1920s open advocacy of such ideas, and the use of such terms, had become impossible. In the Dostoevsky book of 1929 one finds the extremely intriguing phenomenon of a critical

work which, although scrupulously (perhaps too scrupulously?) neutral as regards its subject's (religious) world-view, nevertheless manages to convey a strong sense of affinity with it. This needs to be explored in depth in another place. For now it suffices to assert that the language of materialism is wholly absent from this work also.

HISTORICISM

If Bakhtin cannot be described as a materialist, there is still less justification for maintaining he is a historical materialist in the Marxist sense. Although all of the texts that are being considered share an interest in development, process and change, the philosophical underpinning for such a notion is rather different in the Bakhtinian texts from the Marxist interpretation of historical development of Voloshinov and Medvedev. The early Bakhtin texts have a strong sense of the open-endedness, the 'positedness' (*zadannost'*), of being, which is seen as a complex web of events generating the total event that is the whole; being is said to be 'in the process of becoming' (*v protsesse stanovleniya*). Despite the potential for a historicist approach which the concepts of *zadannost'* and *stanovlenie* imply, however, the focus of both 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero' is on the present and the future rather than the past. The essays offer a phenomenological analysis of the human act (in 'Author and Hero' the aesthetic act), and as such ignore all large-scale concerns, including that of history. Life is broken up into a multitude of intimate interactions of the self with another person, or with a novelistic hero drawn from life, or with some other aspect of being. 'Philosophy of the Act' stresses that life is in the here and now; even the wealth of values embedded in the past is dead capital, so to speak, unless it is reactivated by a concrete individual drawing it evaluatively into his or her own living framework. 'Author and Hero' does once explicitly involve history when it offers an overview of historical attitudes to the body (in Section 5 of Chapter 2). Various cultural epochs are said to have entertained either a subjectivistic notion of the body, the incomplete perception of the 'I-for-myself', or an objectivistic one, the finalised image of 'the-other-for-me'. Notably, no attempt is made to demonstrate either a causal or a dialectical progression from one cultural outlook to the other; at this stage Bakhtin is concerned with the modes of perception themselves rather than their historical grounding. The situation is not very

much different with his work of the 1920s. Both 'Content, Material and Form' and *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* treat their subject matter synchronically, dismissing the historical dimension with tactful disclaimers in the introductory paragraphs.⁴ In 'Content, Material and Form' Bakhtin justifies the omission of an investigation of Formalism's history in the following way: 'In studies which have set themselves purely systematic goals, where the only significant quantities are theoretical positions and proofs [such reviews] are not always appropriate' (6). This is one of the most significant ways in which Bakhtin's critique of Formalism differs from Medvedev's, about half of which is historical in approach in accordance with his commitment to historical materialism. The Foreword to *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* is still more carefully worded and comes straight to the point:

The present book is limited solely to theoretical problems of Dostoevsky's art. We have had to exclude all historical problems. This does not mean, however, that we consider such an approach to the material methodologically correct or normal. On the contrary, we think that every theoretical problem must without fail be oriented historically. Between the synchronic and diachronic approach to a literary work there must be an indissoluble bond and a strict reciprocity. But such is the methodological ideal. It is not always realised in practice. (3 [275-6])

Although the review of works on Dostoevsky's poetics contained in the first chapter is presented chronologically, it does not attempt to establish an evolving process of understanding Dostoevsky: no method is seen in the critics' madness. Still more pertinent, in my view, is the choice by Bakhtin of a writer whose works are themselves structured according to his synchronic vision. It is as though Bakhtin's choice of methodology was in direct sympathy with that of Dostoevsky. He places great emphasis on Dostoevsky's preference for space over time:

The fundamental category in Dostoevsky's mode of artistic visualising was not evolution, but coexistence and interaction. He saw and conceived his world primarily in terms of space, not time . . . Dostoevsky strives to organize all available meaningful material, all material of reality, in one time-frame, in the form of a dramatic juxtaposition, and he strives to develop it extensively. (43-4 [28])

This characteristic of Dostoevsky's is compared by Bakhtin to Dante (like Dostoevsky himself, an artist with a Christian worldview), and is specifically likened to 'the church as a communion of

unmerged souls' (see below for a discussion of the importance of this for Bakhtin's crusade against the dialectical method). It is of course undeniable that Bakhtin came to be intensely interested in history as in time generally, and this shift may well have been partly motivated by the Marxism of his day. Nevertheless, at the time of Medvedev and Voloshinov's publications, up until the end of the 1920s, the amount of actual historical analysis in Bakhtin is extremely limited, in striking contrast to that of his Marxist friends.

THE DIALECTICAL METHOD

While Bakhtin's 'event of being' is complex, it is important to point out that he does not conceive its development to be born of contradiction and struggle in the Marxist (or indeed Hegelian) dialectical sense. The only kind of struggle put forward by Bakhtin in the early essays takes place in the most intimate of spheres, the human soul. 'Philosophy of the Act' examines the moral implications of our uniqueness, the consequences of failing to take responsibility for our place in being, and implies the possibility of cultural crisis arising from unauthentic living. In 'Author and Hero' our choice of how to act is shown to affect interpersonal relationships, again on the very intimate level of I and another. There is on the one hand, as we have seen, the responsibility of the author/self to carry through his or her task of the aesthetic affirmation of the other, a task which may be neglected with serious consequences for a needy hero/other, and on the other there is the freedom of the fragmented self to reject the loving affirmation of the other, with an intense inner struggle to accept one's existential state of need and not pridefully to assert one's autonomy. Struggle in the early Bakhtinian essays differs from that of historical materialism in its strong moral connotations and because of the personal sphere in which it is worked out. Most significantly of all, it is not dialectical. Not only are we never relieved either of our responsibilities or of our incomplete nature with all their attendant tensions, the resolution of which comes only after death, but also our relationships with others are never resolved into a synthesis; we continue to define ourselves *vis-à-vis* others all our lives.

Medvedev and Voloshinov take on board the Marxist dialectic as it applies to social and economic processes on a large and broadly impersonal scale, the whole superseding the parts in a way that is

alien to Bakhtin. More importantly, history is generated in Marxist thought by a continuous dialectical process of struggle. Contradictions within a given system are overcome only through the demise of opposing polarities and the birth of a new synthesis. Here is a typical example of how Medvedev endorses this theory of change: 'The ideological environment is constantly in the active dialectical process of generation. Contradictions are always present, constantly being overcome and reborn. But for each given collective in each given epoch of its historical development this environment is a unique and complete concrete whole, uniting science, art, ethics, and other ideologies in a living and immediate synthesis' (*Formal Method*, 25 [14]). It is particularly striking in this passage that the ideological environment is stressed rather than the human beings who, as Bakhtin would argue, are the real agents of change, the creators of that environment on whom Bakhtin wishes to focus in his work. Voloshinov is more in tune with Bakhtin when he takes the individual's perception of the system of language as the standpoint from which to attack the Saussurean concept of *langue*; such an abstract system could only be perceived by the individual consciousness (that is, it has no absolutely objective existence as its advocates claim), but in actual fact 'the speaker's subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms'. Rather, his 'focus of attention is brought about in line with the particular, concrete utterance he is making' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 81 [67]). However, this affinity with Bakhtin, the focus on the individual, should not obscure either Voloshinov's clear emphasis on dialectic as the principle for change even on the small scale, or the fact that interaction on the level of individuals is seen by him to be a microcosm of ideological development on the level of whole societies. Concerning the former, for example, he states: 'Between the psyche and ideology there exists, then, a continuous dialectical interplay: *the psyche effaces itself, or is obliterated, in the process of becoming ideology, and ideology effaces itself in the process of becoming the psyche*' (50 [39]). Concerning the latter, we read: '[The] process of ideological generation is reflected two ways in language: both in its large-scale, universal-historical dimensions . . . and in its small-scale dimensions as constituted within the framework of contemporaneity, since, as we know, the word sensitively reflects the slightest variations in social existence' (31 [23]).

The commitment of both Voloshinov and Medvedev to the

Marxist dialectic is, however, most apparent in their critical methodologies. Both consistently practise the technique of setting up the views of their opponents as the thesis and antithesis of which their own, Marxist, standpoint is the synthesis. One especially clear example will suffice as an illustration of this technique. After a detailed comparison of 'abstract objectivism' and 'individualistic subjectivism' in the philosophy of language, Voloshinov rejects the possibility of a compromise between the two in the following way: 'We believe that in this instance, as everywhere else, the truth is not to be found in the golden mean and is not a matter of compromise between thesis and antithesis, but lies over and beyond them, constituting a negation of both thesis and antithesis alike, i.e., constituting a *dialectical synthesis*' (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 98 [82]). Thus for Medvedev and Voloshinov whole philosophies are involved in the historical-dialectic process of change. The early Bakhtin essays do not discuss philosophy in this way; as has been mentioned before, in Bakhtin individuals interact with cultural values, the values do not interact with each other. Moreover, he does not employ a dialectical technique when he himself analyses opposing views. Instead, he either shows a view to be inadequate to a thorough philosophical approach, inconsistent in itself or poorly developed, as is the case with his critique of Formalist poetics in 'Content, Material and Form', or he lays out a series of different approaches to a subject and shows them all to be guilty of the same error, if in different ways. Two good examples of this are, firstly, his analysis of Dostoevsky scholarship in the first chapter of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, where no critic is found to have uncovered the polyphonic structural principle of Dostoevsky's novels, and, secondly, his critique of 'expressivist' and 'impressivist' aesthetics in 'Author and Hero'. According to this critique, both philosophical tendencies deny art its status (to Bakhtin very elevated) as an event by eliminating one of the consciousnesses which make that event possible. The expressivists lose the authorial consciousness in the moment of empathy with the hero, while the impressivists relegate the content of the work to the level of material and thus denigrate the heroic consciousness; the author's craftsmanship becomes all ('Author and Hero', 81-2). Bakhtin never attempts a synthesis of opposing views as Voloshinov would have understood it in the works published under his name: he rather takes up a dialogical position against these views.

DIALECTIC VERSUS DIALOGIC

Dostoevsky's Creative Work sheds much light on Bakhtin's relationship with the Marxist dialectic. In the comments which follow, it should be borne in mind that Bakhtin is almost always careful to speak for Dostoevsky rather than himself. However, each point seems to me to be consonant with the world-view of his earlier essays, as I hope to show. In *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, Bakhtin comes out expressly against the dialectical method when applied to Dostoevsky's fiction. In the first chapter he objects to Engelhardt's view of Dostoevskian themes as 'separate stages in the dialectical development of the spirit' (38 [24]):

If the ideas contained in each separate novel . . . were in fact arranged as links of a unified dialectical sequence, then each novel would form a completed philosophical whole, structured according to the dialectical method . . . The ultimate link in the dialectical sequence would inevitably turn out to be the author's synthesis – which would then cancel out all preceding links as abstract and totally superseded. This is not in fact what happens. In none of Dostoevsky's novels is there any evolution of a unified spirit; in fact there is no evolution . . . Each novel presents an opposition, which is never cancelled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of an evolving spirit, just as souls and spirits do not merge in the formally polyphonic world of Dante. (40–1 [25–6])

This critique is, of course, directed against a Hegelian interpretation of Dostoevsky, but implies a rejection of the application of any dialectical model or theory to his work. His specific objection to Hegelianism, as I have noted above, is continuous with his objection, in 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', to the reduction in Idealism of everything to one transcendental consciousness. The new term for this practice is monologism, and its opposite, the coexistence of separate consciousnesses pleaded for by Bakhtin from the very beginning, polyphony. Bakhtin reiterates his opposition to such reductionism in Chapter 3 of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, where he states: 'Ideological monologism found its clearest and theoretically most precise expression in idealistic philosophy. The monistic principle, that is, the affirmation of the unity of *existence*, is, in idealism, transformed into the unity of the *consciousness*' (76 [80]). Bakhtin wholly endorsed the notion of the unity of existence, indeed, made it the foundation of his 'primary philosophy', and for him the 'event of being' was inexhaustibly plural. Hence his dismay at the tendency of

monologic thinking to locate truth in a single consciousness and adopt error as the only principle of cognitive individualisation. It seems to me that Bakhtin's criticism of Hegelian dialectic as an interpretive tool for Dostoevsky's novels and his general aversion to Idealist monologism are intimately related. In refusing to treat his characters as evolutionary stages in a development towards his own synthesis, Dostoevsky automatically sets the polyphonic principle above the monologic. Monologism entails synthesis, and synthesis implies monologism. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that Bakhtin would have been equally suspicious of Marxist materialist dialectic, although for obvious reasons he does not take it on directly in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. Indeed, he comments in the same passage that has been under discussion here that monologism is 'characteristic of ideology in general' (77 [80]). There is strong evidence to suggest that synthesis of any variety is anathema to Bakhtin because of its overtones of dogmatism and closure.

This can be examined further by considering Bakhtin's apology for dialogue as an alternative to monologic thinking. As he states in Chapter 3, Idealistic reductionism is not in fact necessary:

It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth is only one of the possible ways. (78 [81])

Surely the unified truth requiring a plurality of consciousnesses of which Bakhtin speaks here is that principle on which Dostoevsky is shown to construct his novels? Returning to the criticism of Engelhardt in Chapter 1, we see how Bakhtin counters a 'dialectical' interpretation of Dostoevsky. He states, 'The fundamental category in Dostoevsky's mode of artistic visualizing was not evolution, but *coexistence* and *interaction*' (43 [28]):

The possibility of simultaneous coexistence, the possibility of being side by side or one against the other, is for Dostoevsky almost a criterion for distinguishing the essential from the non-essential. Only such things as can conceivably be linked together at a single point in time are essential and are incorporated into Dostoevsky's world; such things can be carried over into eternity, for in eternity, according to Dostoevsky, all is simultaneous, everything coexists. (45 [29])

Although Dostoevsky's world, and his heroes, are complex, even contradictory, they do not develop dialectically and there is never a resolution in synthesis. Rather, they are 'spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel' (48 [30]). There is a remarkable resemblance here with the emphasis of Bakhtin's early essays on co-being (*so-bytie*) and the way past and future are activated alike by interaction with the present, as in general with the largely ahistorical nature of his approach which I have already mentioned above. Coexistence is what makes polyphony possible and dialectical evolution towards a final synthesis impossible.

But the coexistence of different ideological positions without some kind of enforced synthesis, or dominance of one over the others, is only possible in Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, because ideas are not treated by him in the abstract, but are always lodged in the persons who bear them: 'For Dostoevsky there are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist 'in themselves'. Even 'truth in itself' he presents in the spirit of Christian ideology, as incarnated in Christ; that is, he presents it as a personality entering into relationships with other personalities' (50 [31-2]). What is striking about this incarnational motif, here strictly attributed to Dostoevsky and his religious world-view, is its consonance with Bakhtin's own philosophy of 'Philosophy of the Act', where he comes out against all abstract systems of thought and continually stresses the need for the embodiment of values in the action of individuals. In 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin makes an eloquent appeal for alterity in the face of the reductionism of contemporary thought. It is therefore probable that embodiment is for him the surest guarantee of otherness, both of consciousnesses and of the truths they stand for, and that he sees in Dostoevsky's art a model of the pluralistic universe he himself pleads for. Ideology tends towards monologism. But:

Dostoevsky's form-shaping ideology lacks those two basic elements upon which any ideology is built: *the separate thought*, and a unified world of objects giving rise to a *system* of thoughts. In the usual ideological approach, there exist separate thoughts, assertions, propositions that can by themselves be true or untrue, depending on their relationship to the subject and independent of the carrier to whom they belong. These 'no-man's'

thoughts, faithful to the referential world, are united in a systemic unity of a referential order. In this systemic unity, thought comes into contact with thought and one thought is bound up with another on referential grounds. A thought gravitates toward system as toward an ultimate whole; the system is put together out of separate thoughts, as out of elements. Dostoevsky's ideology knows neither the separate thought nor systemic unity in this sense. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 84 [93])

Thus once thoughts have been embodied in consciousnesses they successfully resist the systematisation to which Bakhtin is averse.

To coexistence and embodiment can now be added dialogue. In the Dostoevsky book dialogue is the means by which individuals interact. Bakhtin is still intensely interested in the phenomenology of interpersonal relationships, the 'I-for-the-other' and the 'other-for-me' of 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', but now these have taken on an ideological and, in Chapter 4, a discursive dimension. Voloshinov has had his effect on Bakhtin; ideology has been fused with the personal and individual, and the individual's ideology is worked out and communicated in verbal discourse. Truth is not only embodied in an individual, but in that individual's word, and it is in dialogue with others that each person defines himself:

Dialogue [in Dostoevsky] is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is – and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end . . . Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 215–16 [252])

If a person's existence is inseparable from dialogic communication, so an idea, in order to thrive, must be shared:

The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse. At that

point of contact between voice-consciousnesses the idea is born and lives. (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 116 [87–8])

Here the intimate relationship between coexistence (alterity), embodiment and dialogue can clearly be seen. In combination they are a sure guarantee against monologism, since in true dialogue it is impossible that anyone should make a final judgement on a person; each self is unfinalisable, each has a loophole, 'the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 181 [233]). Indeed, Bakhtin makes much of the notion of 'eternal dialogue', always, of course, attributing it to Dostoevsky's own world-view (for example, 216 [252], 240 [280]). In the conclusion to the 1929 edition of the Dostoevsky book he states that for Dostoevsky 'the combination of unmerged voices is the end in itself and the ultimate givenness', and that his world comprises a 'plurality of other consciousnesses revealing themselves in intense interaction with [the hero] and with each other'. This model harmonises completely with the philosophy of Bakhtin's early essays. Moreover, it sets against dialectic a strikingly Christian way of accommodating differences, a Trinitarian model of unity in diversity from which the church as a 'communion of unmerged souls' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 42 [26]) draws its inspiration.

CONCLUSION

The disadvantage, of course, of taking Marxist concepts for one's headings is that one may fail to grasp the integrity and specificity of Bakhtin's alternative world outlook. Various reference points have emerged in the course of this discussion, notably 'being', 'event', 'embodiment', 'dialogue', 'coexistence', 'plurality', 'responsibility' and 'outsidedness'. The key to understanding these as they appear in successive Bakhtinian texts is given to us, I believe, in his very earliest essay 'Philosophy of the Act', where he outlines his fundamental concerns and formulates a 'primary philosophy' (105) which survives and thrives right through to *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. One may summarise these concerns in the form of four deeply felt aversions that can help us understand why, in spite of some considerable overlap of Bakhtin's interests with those of Voloshinov and Medvedev, he could never in the long run be identified with

Marxism or claimed for its cause. The first aversion is to prescriptive philosophies of any kind, countered by a call for description: 'it is clear that a primary philosophy . . . may not construct general concepts, theses and laws about this world (the theoretical, abstract purity of the deed), but may only be a description, a phenomenology of this world of the deed' ('Philosophy of the Act', 105). Bakhtin's methodology is first and foremost phenomenological and is thus diametrically opposed to the dogmatism of Marxism. The second of his aversions is to abstraction, against which he sets an enthusiasm for lived experience in all its dimensions. In 'Philosophy of the Act' he sympathises with those intellectuals who, despairing at the barrenness of contemporary, abstractivist philosophy and seeking a framework for 'engaged thought' (*uchastnoe myshlenie*) turn to historical materialism, which 'attempts to construct its world such as to find room in it for the distinct, concretely and historically real deed' (96). However, ultimately, as we have seen, historical materialism turns out to be one more particularly rigorous system of concepts that denies genuine access to what is most intimate and personal in reality. Although Bakhtin appreciates systematicness when dealing with academic questions (as in 'Content, Material and Form') he cannot allow of it in his most fundamental philosophy. The third aversion is to reductionism, against which he sets a passionate appeal for plurality. The way to this, in his view, lies, I have argued, in embodiment, coexistence and dialogue. Marxian, as well as Hegelian, dialectic and synthesis militate against plurality: contradictory voices are swallowed up in a new triumphant whole. In his time and place Marxism occupied the position of the new synthesis. I believe that Bakhtin intuited from the dogmatic and reductive nature of this ideology, indeed from the very fact that Marxism is an ideology, that 'monologism' had to follow. Fourthly and finally, Bakhtin was averse to conclusion, to the ultimate finalisation that monologic discourses imply. For him Marxism could never be the final answer, as Medvedev proudly proclaims it to be, but only one position among many, a vital one perhaps, but never with more than equal rights with others. Bakhtin's call for open-endedness takes on almost religious tones, becomes almost a plea for the recognition of eternity; one is constantly struck while reading *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* of the affinities between the world outlooks of him and the author he admired. Dostoevsky opposed the socialism of his day in the name of spiritual values: I suggest

that Bakhtin did the same. Whatever input he may have had into the writings of Voloshinov and Medvedev, and whatever he may have learned from them, too much of the Marxist world-view was alien to his own for him to be called a Marxist in any meaningful sense of the term, not only in the twenties but also in the decades that followed.

Falling silent: the critical aesthetic of Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work

In my discussion of 'Author and Hero' I sought to demonstrate the existence of a coherent theistic framework to Bakhtin's aesthetic theory which underlies his understanding of creativity and, specifically, authorship. To recap, key elements of this framework include the radical and ineradicable difference between the levels on which author and hero exist (the transgredient 'outsidedness' of the author), the characterisation of aesthetic creativity as self-sacrificial and active as opposed to the receptive passivity of the created hero, and the understanding of authorial activity as redemptional, the gracious (because motivated only by love) salvation of the fragmented and repentant hero through the gift of form. The resulting picture is as harmonious as it is, however, prescriptive. Bakhtin, in his attempt to apply his model to various types of novel (the precursor of his several later typologies), is ineluctably drawn to discuss divergent constructions of the author/hero relation in terms of the degree to which they deviate from the norm, that is to say, critically.

With respect to the contextualisation of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work* (1929) it is illuminating to note what 'Author and Hero's' 'redemption' model of the author leads Bakhtin to conclude about Dostoevsky. He is an example of an author who 'loses [his] axiological point of outsidedness to the hero' ('Author and Hero', 18). In his novels 'the hero takes possession of the author . . . the author is unable to find any convincing and stable axiological point of support outside the hero' ('Author and Hero', 18). He fails in his 'necessary' task of lifting the hero out of the helpless realm of *zadannost'* onto the level of *dannost'* by the *authoritative* act of finalisation. Bakhtin concludes:

Dialogues between whole human beings, in which their faces, their dress, their expressions and the setting beyond the bounds of a given scene are

indispensable, artistically significant features, begin to degenerate into self-interested disputations in which the centre of value lies in the problems under discussion. And, lastly, the finalising moments are not unified: there is no unitary authorial face – either it is scattered or there is a conventional mask. This type includes almost all of Dostoevsky's main heroes. ('Author and Hero', 20)

Notable in these comments is the vocabulary of loss, failure and degeneration; according to the norms laid out in 'Author and Hero', Dostoevsky must be considered a poor author.

To the reader who has thoroughly absorbed the bias of 'Author and Hero' towards what comes down to thoughtful representation as the basis for a 'good' novel, the opening credo of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* comes as a surprise. Practically the same set of features of Dostoevsky's relation to his heroes are presented in a wholly positive light, indeed in terms of liberation from Bakhtin's own earlier model:

Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him.

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. (Dostoevsky's Creative Work, 8; Dostoevsky's Poetics, 7 [6]¹)

This reversal demands investigation, especially from the point of view of the Christian motifs pervading 'Author and Hero'. Precisely in what way is Bakhtin's understanding of aesthetic activity modified in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, what motivates the change, and what are its ramifications for the earlier, theistic cast to his model of the author/hero relationship?

MONOLOGISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: THE FALL MOTIF IN
DOSTOEVSKY'S CREATIVE WORK

Dostoevsky's Creative Work famously introduces two new concepts into Bakhtin's theoretical vocabulary: these are the 'monologic' and the 'polyphonic' author. The monologic author retains complete control over his or her heroes; they are always the objects of representation and tools in the hands of their creator, who uses them essentially for the expression of his or her own 'truth', or point of view on the world. The polyphonic author, by contrast, renounces control over his or her characters to the maximum possible extent, allowing them

to seek and express their own 'truths', which are in no way inferior to the 'truth' of their creator. By introducing a binary opposition into the category of the author, Bakhtin significantly departs from his unitary presentation of the author figure in 'Author and Hero'. However, in another sense, as I argued in the previous chapter, the monologic/polyphonic opposition is a continuation of a major theme of 'Philosophy of the Act'. For, as so often in Bakhtin's work, behind the concrete phenomenon lies the universal principle: the monologic and polyphonic authors are particular manifestations of the monologic and dialogic principles which, in Bakhtin's presentation, run throughout being in permanent and irreconcilable opposition. The monologic principle is nothing other than the theoreticism of 'Philosophy of the Act', the closed and dead world of the abstract truth, the unity of consciousness which is cut off from the unity of being (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 76 [80]). The dialogic principle, on the other hand, stands for life and freedom.

In terms of the Fall motif which I have been tracing, the monologic principle is about autonomy and closure. But something new and very significant has been added: if in 'Philosophy of the Act' human subjects express their prideful claim to be self-sufficient by failing to act, failing to engage in the 'open event of being', in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* Bakhtin is trying to accommodate the apparently new realisation that ideological and personal closure is more often than not expressed not in withdrawal, but in aggressive self-assertion. In the literary context, this results in the reification of heroes by their author. Bakhtin's about-turn on his assessment of Dostoevsky is a direct result of the application of the Fall motif to the author figure, so conspicuously absent, as I have commented, in 'Author and Hero': Dostoevsky becomes the champion of the dialogic cause.

What Bakhtin is charting in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, then, is ostensibly a radical democratisation of creative prose, the levelling of author and hero. Against the background of 'Author and Hero', this involves to an equal extent the 'decrease' of the author and the 'increase' of the hero. The tone of the work is joyful (the Good News is announced to all mankind, God is no longer above us – 'Author and Hero', 52 – but with us), but, I suggest, misleading. In spite of the force of emancipatory statements such as the one quoted above, the central concept of the polyphonic novel actually considerably problematises the author/hero relation. Reading *Dostoevsky's Creative*

Work, one has a sense that Bakhtin, in his enthusiasm for his idea, would like not to have to interrupt his exegesis of Dostoevsky in order to deal with the theoretical questions arising from it lest they should force a modification (or even rejection) of his new model. His text is punctuated with unanswered questions and abrupt qualifications, the hasty clearing up of 'possible misunderstandings', which leave the reader struggling to make sense of the whole. For this reason it is helpful to consider polyphony from two points of view: as the starting point for the book, yet equally as an ideal towards which it strives.

One key problematised area centres on the precise position and role of the polyphonic author. In 'Author and Hero' an unambiguous authorial position based on the principle of *vnenakhodimost'* (outsidedness) is delineated. Author and hero are situated on two radically different planes, the hero on the cognitive-ethical plane, caught up in the event of being, the author at a self-imposed remove, on the aesthetic plane, observing and judging the hero, forming him aesthetically by employing his *izbytok videniya* (surplus of vision). Thus the authorial consciousness always surrounds and envelops the heroic consciousness; as Bakhtin puts it, it is the 'consciousness of a consciousness'. Inherent in this relationship is an imbalance of power. As I have argued in an earlier chapter, to the extent that this disturbed him during the writing of 'Author and Hero', Bakhtin sought to deal with it under the rubric of benign dictatorship based on the reassuring model of the Creator's relationship to his Creation: the power of the author will never be abused because aesthetic activity is always motivated by self-sacrificial love.

By the time of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* Bakhtin has come to see all finalising activity of the author as mendacious: no longer does it bestow a fuller, more beautiful truth on the needy hero; rather, it must of necessity distort a truth about the hero which only he can reveal:

the 'truth' at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself, can essentially be for Dostoevsky only *the truth of the hero's own consciousness*. It cannot be neutral towards his self-consciousness. In the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth. (67 [55])

The praiseworthy author has now become the one who most consistently abstains from employing his visual surplus and 'does not

use a person's back to expose his face' (102 [278]). Dostoevsky exemplifies that kind of author: 'From the first to the final pages of his artistic work he was guided by the principle: never use for objectifying or finalising another's consciousness anything that might be inaccessible to that consciousness, that might lie outside its field of vision' (101–2 [278]).

The hero, for his part, also undergoes a corresponding transformation between 'Author and Hero' and *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, which nevertheless consists less in the redefinition of heroic nature than in its re-evaluation. According to 'Author and Hero' the hero by his nature is unable to give himself any kind of aesthetic form, since he lacks access to a comprehensive perspective on himself from which he might form a credible judgement; rather he experiences himself as fragmented and profoundly incomplete:

As soon as I try to define myself *for myself* (not for the other or from the other's point of view), I find myself merely there, in a world where everything is only conceived . . . , I find myself to be something which as to its meaning and value is still to come; but in time . . . I find only an uncoordinated directedness, unrealised desire and striving – the *membra disjecta* of my possible wholeness. (108)

The Dostoevskian hero, far from deviating from 'Author and Hero's' description, perfectly illustrates the suffering and torment which Bakhtin considers to be part and parcel of our self-experience. The difference in emphasis in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* consists in the affirmation of the hero's exclusive right to his own definition, however hopeless. In a rejection, as it were, of the Grand Inquisitorial features of the author of 'Author and Hero', in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* Bakhtin decisively privileges freedom over happiness.

Once all manifestations of authorial finalisation have been consigned to the negative category of the 'monologic', and once the metaphor of the 'polyphonic' has been introduced to express Bakhtin's new novelistic paradigm of '*a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 9 [6]), the role of the author appears to become restricted to that of orchestration (much as a conductor does not write the parts for his or her orchestra but coordinates the play). In the first chapter Bakhtin explains: 'one could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event' (33 [21]). Or again, 'Dostoevsky's world is the *artistically organised* coex-

istence and interaction of spiritual diversity' (49 [31], my emphasis). Further, it seems the author still controls the plot and designates to each character the basic type of personality he is to be free to develop, delimits the space for his possible self-expression (for example, Dostoevsky 'inflicts' a 'special sort of moral torture' on his heroes, 63–4 [54]). Still further, at other points in the narrative the principle of representation appears to remain firmly intact for Bakhtin, who, on this point shifting not at all from his position in 'Author and Hero', regards it as the only safeguard against the subjectivisation of the work of art:

Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero's image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world – but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouth-piece for his voice; only on condition, consequently, that accents of the hero's self-consciousness are really objectified and that the work itself observes a distance between the hero and the author. (60 [51])

Later on he repeats, 'distance is an integral part of the author's design, for it alone guarantees genuine objectivity in the representation of a character' (70 [64]). Thus although the polyphonic author does not 'represent' his characters in the sense of speaking on their behalf, he nevertheless 'objectively' depicts their self-consciousness; there is no getting round the fact that authorial consciousness is still inevitably, as it was in 'Author and Hero', the 'consciousness of a consciousness'.

Bakhtin's recasting of the author/hero relationship as it has so far been presented here may be characterised as evolutionary, a modification of the 'redemption' model of 'Author and Hero', retaining the central Christian tenet of the active goodness of the ideal author-creator whilst redefining the best possible manifestation of aesthetic love such as to have it consist in a radical respect for the freedom of his creation/characters rather than a guarantee of their blessedness. If we examine the text of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* closely, we see that one line of argument never departs from this more conservative position; it is the line that reminds itself of the fundamental divide between the createdness of the characters and the creating activity of the really existing author, and which confidently speaks of the author's 'plan' or 'design' for the novel, and of his 'ultimate semantic

authority' (especially prevalent in the fourth chapter of the original work). The role of the author has changed; his position has not.

Within this modified framework from the earlier essay, Bakhtin addresses the theoretical difficulties arising from the attempt to speak of the 'freedom' of a fictional hero with respect to his creator in terms reminiscent of a theologian's efforts to hold in tension the equally indispensable notions of predestination and free will:

This does not mean, of course, that a character simply falls out of the author's design. No, this independence and freedom of a character is precisely what is incorporated into the author's design. This design, as it were, predestines the character for freedom (a relative freedom, of course), and incorporates him as such into the strict and carefully calculated plan of the whole. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 19 [13])²

The extreme tension inherent in this familiar paradox – how is one to make sense of the almost oxymoronic concept of 'relative freedom'? – spills over, as it were, into the discourse that is trying to accommodate it and destabilises it. The context of passages like the one quoted above clearly illustrates this; they tend to be introduced as a corrective to an argument which has appeared to privilege one side of the paradox, usually heroic freedom, and are often launched into abruptly (the passage discussed immediately below is a good example of this), interrupting the flow of the text. Moreover, Bakhtin's treatment of the control–freedom problematic frequently takes the form of a hidden question-and-answer session (see above and below): here is an example of double-voiced discourse, so to say, whereby the theoretician thinly conceals a crucial and therefore painful debate with himself under the mask of reassuring the hesitant reader (witness the bravado in the use of 'of course', 'precisely' (above) and 'in fact there is no such contradiction' (below)); the dialogue in these passages is as much between Bakhtin and himself as it is between Bakhtin and the reader.

The following passage, which I quote in full, is particularly illustrative of the 'evolutionary' line of argument under strain. This time old ideas from 'Author and Hero' and the essay 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Creative Literature' (1924) are extended in an attempt to give some credibility to the notion of the autonomy of a fictional character:

Here we must warn against one possible misunderstanding. It might seem that the independence of a character contradicts the fact that he exists,

entirely and solely, as an aspect of a work of art, and consequently is wholly created from beginning to end by the author. In fact there is no such contradiction. The characters' freedom we speak of here exists within the limits of the artistic design, and in that sense is just as much a created thing as is the unfreedom of the objectivised hero. But to create does not mean to invent. Every creative act is bound by its own special laws as well as by the laws of the material with which it works. Every creative act is determined by its object and by the structure of its object, and therefore permits no arbitrariness; in essence it invents nothing, but only reveals what is already present in the object itself. It is possible to arrive at a correct thought, but this thought has its own logic and therefore cannot be invented, that is, it cannot be fabricated from beginning to end. Likewise an artistic image, of whatever sort, cannot be invented, since it has its own artistic logic, its own norm-generating order. Having set a specific task for himself, the creator must subordinate himself to this order. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 71–2 [64–5])

Here Bakhtin suggests not only that heroic freedom can exist alongside heroic createdness but also that authorial freedom coexists with a kind of authorial constraint.³ Two ways in which the author might be constrained are implied in the passage. Firstly, the hero is said to pre-exist the work in some way (the creative act 'reveals what is already present in the object'); this should be understood in the context of 'Author and Hero' and 'Content, Material and Form', with Bakhtin's early insistence, against the Formalists, that the artist draws primarily from life, and that his creative activity is essentially a struggle to overcome the resistance it puts up to being encapsulated in art (for example, 'Author and Hero', 173; 'Content, Material and Form', 36). Secondly, the artist's concept of the kind of hero he wants, once he begins to put it into practice, reveals a logic of its own which he is obliged to follow. This second form of constraint leaves room for the creative act to be *ex nihilo* and is mindful of the divine model of creativity that informs 'Author and Hero'. In the end neither rings completely true, for both leave the creative initiative and the intonation of the hero's every word and gesture in the author's hands, where indeed they must be as long as his transgredient position remains intact.

POLYPHONY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: AUTHORIAL POSITION

Running through *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* is a second line of argument representing a decisive break from the 'Author and Hero'

model, not attempting to accommodate the now burdensome theoretical ramifications of the earlier viewpoint, and touching the evolutionary line of argument only, as it were, in provocation. It might be labelled the 'revolutionary' line. If the evolutionary line strives towards polyphony as an ultimate ideal (stumbling into insuperable conceptual obstacles at every point), the revolutionary line takes polyphony as its starting point and develops from there into a potentially radical new theory of discourse, but, as I will suggest, sacrifices its object (the novel, its author and heroes) on the way. Not only are both lines of argument fraught with internal difficulties, they also come into constant conflict with each other, since both are present in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* from the very beginning and no compromise is ever reached.⁴

Conceptually (although not necessarily chronologically) the revolutionary strand of thought in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* takes off at the point where the demand for genuine, meaningful equality between author and hero forces a radical re-evaluation of the authorial point of view. It is latent in the notion of the 'higher unity' (24 [16]) of the polyphonic novel, where we are given more to understand what this is not (it is not the monologic unity of the author's controlling consciousness) than what it is, and emerges clearly in the concept, introduced very early on, of 'an ultimate dialogicality, that is, a dialogicality of the ultimate whole' (27 [18]). The clear implication of 'ultimate' dialogicality is the inadmissibility, in theory, of any kind of observing or controlling discourse whatsoever: 'Not only does the novel give no firm support outside the rupture-prone world of dialogue for a third, monologically all-encompassing consciousness – but on the contrary, everything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable' (27 [18]). The author may only be a participant in the dialogue, one of the independent voices that make up polyphony, but if this is so, then we are caught in the nonsensical situation whereby the novelist who 'invented' polyphony and worked it out in his novels cannot exist as a novelist.

Bakhtin keenly senses that the object of his own discourse is under threat of abolition, but in the 1929 edition fails to find a way out of the impasse: the author is crucial to him, yet compromises his main idea. His nervousness is demonstrated by his consistent failure to deal satisfactorily with the question of authorial position in the polyphonic novel which he himself nevertheless persistently raises,

either directly or by implication. Introducing the concept of dialogicality, he states, 'by this means a new authorial position is won and conquered, one located above the monologic position' (28 [18]); but what is his position exactly? And how can Bakhtin risk the metaphor 'above' in this context, reminding us as it does of transgression and *venakhodimost'*? In rejecting decisively Engelhardt's interpretation of Dostoevskian themes as a dialectic of the spirit, Bakhtin asks rhetorically, as if about to put the opposite case: 'how are the heroes' worlds, and the ideas that lie at their base, united with the world of the author, that is, with the world of the novel?' (39–40 [25]). However, we are told only that the author's spirit is either a spectator or one of the participants, but not how we are to reconcile this with authorial control. In Chapter 2 we read: 'In Dostoevsky, the author's word stands opposite the fully valid and pure unalloyed word of the hero. Therefore a problem does arise with the positioning of authorial discourse, the problem of its form and artistic position with regard to the hero's discourse' (68 [56]). In the original version of the text Bakhtin goes on to point out how compositional devices such as first-person narration do not necessarily weaken the monological position of the author, but he is reticent as to how the polyphonic author avoids the trap (in 1963 Bakhtin added on an important section, to which I shall return below). In the fourth chapter (of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*), 'Discourse in Dostoevsky', the issue is brought up again, although couched in the new terminology of discourse: 'How and in what aspects of the verbal whole is the author's ultimate semantic authority implemented?' (134 [203]). Again, the question is half-answered by reference to the monologic model to which Dostoevsky does not conform, but it remains unclear whether Bakhtin understands him in some way to renounce his ultimate semantic authority or, if not, where we are to locate it.

How does Bakhtin manage to get so entangled? The explanation lies in the earlier essays 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', without whose context it is impossible to make sense of the anomalies of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. Bakhtin's interpretation of Dostoevsky, as we have seen, represents both a development and a serious revision of his philosophy of art as elaborated in 'Author and Hero'; this in turn was originally conceived as an investigation of the phenomenological structures found in life, an application of the 'primary philosophy' (set out in 'Philosophy of the Act') to art, which for Bakhtin provided, as it were, a model of manageable

proportions closely approximating the conditions of the real 'event of being':

In order to provide a preliminary understanding of the possibility of such a concrete, evaluative, architectonic, we offer here an analysis of the world of aesthetic vision – the world of art, which, by virtue of its concreteness and the fact that it is imbued with emotional and volitional tones, to a greater extent than all abstract cultural worlds (when taken in isolation) approximates the integral and unique world of the act. It will also help us to approach an understanding of the architectonic structure of the real world-event. ('Philosophy of the Act', 128)

The text of 'Author and Hero' gives abundant evidence of this; aesthetic activity and authorship are from the outset conceived of in the broadest possible terms, as an indispensable, perhaps defining feature of human relations as such, and discussion of authorship in the narrower sense is interwoven with more general reflections on the aesthetic architecture of life. Especially pertinent is Bakhtin's habit, in 'Author and Hero', of making no concessions through the vocabulary he employs to the utter fictiveness of the hero in art, who is consistently treated as another multidimensional consciousness engaging in life and reaching out inarticulately to his creator for (aesthetic) affirmation, as the human individual gropes towards another inaccessible plane for God.

In *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* nothing has changed in this regard; the novel is still treated as a model for life. Polyphony and dialogism in the novel are seen both to have been prompted by profound changes in the world outside it and to render human relations under new cultural and social conditions in concentrated form, and in the first three chapters the hero is again treated as a fully existent individual apart from in the few 'asides' analysed above, exceptions drawing painful attention to the rule. Most importantly, the author/hero relation of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* still oscillates between that of the creator to his creature (the 'art' plane), and that between two equal subjects (the 'life' plane of 'Author and Hero'). In order to elaborate a theory of dialogic discourse without contradiction, Bakhtin needs to abandon the model of art with its distorting dimension of the author, who cannot satisfactorily be made an equal partner in the dialogue. This he of course is unable to do on a practical level, since the subject of his book is a novelist and his novels. But it is even harder for him to do on a philosophical level because it involves renouncing what has been most central to his thinking up to this

point, namely the intense interrelationship between life and art (right back to his first published piece, 'Art and Responsibility') on the one hand, and, on the other, his own keen sense of personal authorship and its moral weightiness, its self-renouncing movement towards the other, which, it must be insisted, is inseparable in his mind from Christian ethics and the notion of the gracious Creator and Redeemer. After all, polyphony is characterised by the right of each to fight for his own voice, to define himself against others; something is lost in the triumph of egalitarianism. The root cause of the theoretical contortions of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* is to be found here.

AUTHORING WITHOUT AN AUTHOR: THE INCARNATION MOTIF

The crisis of authorship involved in dialogism, then, is experienced by Bakhtin to a considerable extent as a crisis of faith. The reader may not sense the loss of the Author when reading *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* because of the assertive presence of the 'evolutionary' voice, but under its cover, I suggest, Bakhtin is already exploring ways to accommodate concepts of 'authority' and 'truth' within the new polyphonic paradigm. In Chapter 3, 'The Idea in Dostoevsky', he declares his belief in the possibility of such a project:

It should be pointed out that the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth. It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth is only one of the possible ways. (77–8 [81])⁵

In Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, ideas (truths) are always embodied in human individuals, and are born and kept alive by their constant interaction; ultimate truth may therefore only be born through contact with a particularly authoritative voice:

Among [the world of consciousnesses] Dostoevsky seeks the highest and most authoritative orientation, and he perceives it not as his own true thought, but as another authentic human being and his discourse. The image of the ideal human being or the image of Christ represents for him the resolution of ideological quests. This image or this highest voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 88–9 [97])

Although Bakhtin hastens to point out that the specifically Christian orientation of this tendency in Dostoevsky is not relevant to his argument, it nevertheless bears comparison with his own treatment of the theme of Christ and the Incarnation in the early essays. There, the reader will recall, the highly responsible behaviour of Christ and his concomitant selflessness is emphasised ('Philosophy of the Act', 93; 'Author and Hero', 51), as well as his revolutionary demonstration of God as a loving other ('Author and Hero', 52). In particular, the thrust of the third chapter of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, including the above quotations, is entirely consonant with the philosophy of 'Philosophy of the Act', specifically with its denial of the validity of a disembodied truth ('Philosophy of the Act', 117–18). Already in 'Philosophy of the Act', as I have suggested in a previous chapter, Bakhtin finds in the Incarnation a powerful vehicle for truth apart from the Transcendent. It can be no coincidence that he draws on it here, through Dostoevsky, as a way to fill the gap left by the abolished monologic author.

The notion of the authoritative, embodied voice is explored further in the final chapter, 'Discourse in Dostoevsky', and is given a radical dialogic edge. Striking in this chapter are those sections where Bakhtin treats inter-heroic relations, leaving aside, as it were, the problem of the author, and dealing with the characters' relationship with themselves, others and the world as if on the plane of life with no transcendent dimension. Here, along with the (egotistical) quest of the self for a stable self-definition (its own truth), the self-sacrificial, gracious element of authorial activity according to the old, 'redemption' model is restored, having been stripped of its hierarchical limitations. In Bakhtin's presentation of Dostoevsky's material, the most truly authoritative characters are those who selflessly move out towards the other, not to impose a definition, as in 'Author and Hero', but to help the other towards his or her own self-understanding. In this regard he cites Myshkin, Alyosha Karamazov and Tikhon, as bearers of the penetrative word.

What is most interesting is the close approximation of penetrative and hagiographic discourse in Bakhtin's analysis. Penetrative discourse is 'a firmly monologic, undivided discourse, a word without a sideward glance, without a loophole, without internal polemic' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 210 [249]). Likewise, 'the hagiographic word is a word without a sideward glance, calmly adequate to itself and its referential object' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 208 [248]). No

formal attempt is made to connect these two types of discourse despite the fact that they are introduced within a few paragraphs of each other and in almost identical terms; none of the examples of hagiographic discourse cited (Maria Lebyadkina, Makar Dolgoruky, the Life of Zosima) are taken up in the subsequent discussion of the penetrative word. Nevertheless the connection becomes clear as the chapter progresses: the best partners in dialogue, those most capable of helping others, are those who have already found themselves, or are close to having done so, and these without exception have fallen under the influence of the image of Christ, becoming themselves embodiments of his kind of authority.

Authoring in the image of Christ, then, as Bakhtin understands it, involves an orientation towards the other in dialogue – penetrative discourse ‘is only possible in actual dialogue with another person’ (210 [249]) – in which authority is not external and imposed but internal and, as it were, manifested in an attitude. Fundamental to this attitude is love, as Bakhtin makes explicit in his ‘Towards a Reworking of the Book on Dostoevsky’ (1961): authorial activity in the absence of all finalisation is essentially ‘persuasion through love’ (317 [292]). Further in the same notes, while reaffirming the value of otherness and its concomitant surplus of vision, Bakhtin states: ‘The most important aspect of this surplus is love (one cannot love oneself, love is a coordinate relationship), and then, confession, forgiveness (Stavrogin’s conversation with Tikhon), finally, simply an active (not a duplicating) understanding, a willingness to listen’ (324–5 [299]). Thus the privileging of love as a value is decisively retained from ‘Author and Hero’ whilst its mode of expression is radically altered in accordance with the new privileged values of freedom and dialogue. Moreover, there is a sense in which the author/other continues to play the role of the redeemer-from-without, although emphatically not the redeemer-from-above, as for example Alyosha Karamazov in dialogue with Ivan, who “‘as other”, carries tones of love and reconciliation, which are of course impossible on Ivan’s lips in relationship to himself’ (*Dostoevsky’s Creative Work* 222 [256]), but also Myshkin (absolving Nastasya Fillipovna from guilt), and Tikhon (in his forgiveness of Stavrogin), among others. It is notable that Bakhtin no longer attempts to cast confession, love and forgiveness in an aesthetic mould, but treats them on the moral and spiritual level. This corresponds with his confinement of such categories, in *Dostoevsky’s Creative Work*, to the

immanent sphere of human relations; if Dostoevsky is ever discussed in these terms, it is always within the 'revolutionary' line of argument, as an equal partner in dialogue.

We find, then, in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, a model of authorship that vacillates between design and dialogue, transcendence and immanence, whereby the former pole gravitates back to a notion of control no longer acceptable to Bakhtin, whilst the latter pulls towards the equally undesirable and resisted extreme of the dissolution of the distinction between author and characters, that is, the death of the novel. I have called that 'line' of argument (the quotation marks are called for because in fact the two strains are interwoven) which tends towards the first 'evolutionary', and that tending towards the second 'revolutionary', in accordance with their relationship to the aesthetics of 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero'. But because, as we have just seen, the dialogic relation in its most developed form as described by Bakhtin on the basis of Dostoevsky's material is pervaded by spiritual motifs developed in the early essays, it might be equally helpful to label the more conservative model the 'Old Testament' model, and the new dialogic paradigm the 'New Testament' model of authorship. Such a distinction underlines the continuity as well as the change inherent in revolution. The coming of Christ did not so much bring about the absolute displacement of the old image of God by the new as it decisively shifted the dominant of the representation of God to the believer in such a way as to give primary emphasis to aspects of divine activity already present under the old covenant. Yet at the same time something absolutely new occurs, namely the embodiment of the creator in the creature, the author communicating with his characters for the first time in a dialogue of equals. Although the analogy may be disputed in general (theological) terms, the evidence is there to show that Bakhtin in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* is rethinking his understanding of authorship along precisely these lines. Of course there is a point at which Bakhtin seems about to step beyond all possible biblical models – the moment of negation of the author in light of his necessary existence in an ineradicably superior realm – but the step is not taken in the bounds of the Dostoevsky book.

ADDITIONS TO THE ORIGINAL TEXT: TENSIONS UNRESOLVED

Bakhtin's revision of his monograph in 1963, and the notes towards it made in 1961, evidence both a partial resolution of the tensions of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* and a continued failure finally to untangle its theoretical knots. The concept of dialogicality, although introduced in 1929, receives its most extended treatment in the added sections of 1963. The extension of Chapter 1, for example, introduces the idea of the 'great dialogue'. Here we notice that Bakhtin's love of blurring the distinction between art and life (which as I have noted most problematises the question of the author) persists, indeed is made more explicit and emphatic:

Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 56 [40])

In his extensive additions to Chapter 2 (they more than double the length of the original) Bakhtin attempts to match the main motif of the 1929 chapter, self-consciousness as Dostoevsky's artistic dominant in the representation of character, with a more concrete definition of the correspondingly altered authorial position, which, as we have seen, he failed to provide in the original version. This he now describes as 'radically new' (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 77 [57]), a 'new and *integral* authorial position' adequate to the '*new integral view on the person*' (77 [58]) brought about by Dostoevsky. For the first time he fleshes out his early description of the polyphonic author as a participant in dialogue on the basis of his conviction that any other approach must necessarily reify the character to some extent: 'The genuine life of the personality is made available only through a *dialogic* penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself' (79 [59]). He concludes: 'Thus the new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is a *fully realized and thoroughly consistent dialogic position*, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, un-finalisability, and indeterminacy of the hero' (84 [63]). We further learn that such a position does not exclude authorial presence in the work, indeed 'the consciousness of the creator of a polyphonic novel

is constantly and everywhere present in the novel, and is active in it to the highest degree' (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 91 [67–8]), but active in a new way, 'broadening', 'deepening' and 'rearranging' itself to make room for his autonomous heroes. 'Reworking of Dostoevsky', in addressing this question of dialogic, as opposed to finalising, activity, emphatically confirms the fact that in rethinking his aesthetics Bakhtin has constant recourse to theological models. Of Dostoevsky's work he writes: 'This is, so to speak, the activity of God in His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself. This is activity of a higher quality' (310 [285]).

These additions in fact introduce nothing essentially new into the text of 1929, but rather amplify what is already present, substituting for 'polyphony' 'dialogue' as a more flexible, less image-bound concept that gives scope for the inclusion of the author in the capacity of something more than orchestrator of voices not his own, for a meaningful understanding of the author as participant. The dialogic author described above represents the maximal extension possible of the 'evolutionary' line of reasoning in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. However, the basic problem of the existence of a transcendent author in a dialogic universe remains unresolved, such that one must be reconciled, in the last resort, to the conclusion that Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book offers no consistent theory of authorship, but remains hung, internally divided between two incompatible models. In this the work reflects the epistemological crisis of his time, and indeed of Dostoevsky's time. More than once Bakhtin himself points out the relevance of the era to his subject's thinking, implicitly acknowledging a link between them: 'By no means all historical situations permit the ultimate semantic authority of the creator to be expressed without mediation in direct, unrefracted, unconditional authorial discourse. When there is no access to one's own personal "ultimate" word, then every thought, feeling, experience must be refracted through the medium of someone else's discourse' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 132 [202]).⁶ There is no doubt that Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky is also a document of a critical stage in his own development towards an understanding of the Creator whose presence in the world of his creation, whilst real, is detectable only indirectly, and who in himself cannot be known. The consequences of this movement are explored more fully in Bakhtin's later work. However, I conclude with a quotation from *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*,

which, taking into account the full consequences of the dialogic revolution, gestures towards a radical breach between the author and his word passing beyond the problematic of the Dostoevsky book:

As we have already said, logical and semantically referential relationships, in order to become dialogic, must be embodied, that is, they must enter another sphere of existence: they must become *discourse*, that is, an utterance, and receive an *author*, that is, a creator of the given utterance whose position it expresses.

Every utterance in this sense has its author, whom we hear in the very utterance as its creator. Of the real author, as he exists outside the utterance, we can know absolutely nothing at all. (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 246 [184])

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the second edition of the Dostoevsky book, and from the notes made in the process of its preparation, that Bakhtin never did embrace the death of the author (*pace* his structuralist critics). It is also clear that he continued to equate the author with the Christian God. But *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, as I have tried to show, is not ultimately successful in its attempt, through the introduction of the polyphonic author, to reconfigure the author/God concept in such a way as to retain the principle of transgression (outsidedness) and at the same time eliminate the potential of the transgressive position for abuse in the form of reifying, ultimately violent and destructive, authorial self-assertion. The articulation of this potential represents the continuation of the Fall motif in Bakhtin's work. As a result the position of the author, and with it the authorial word, becomes problematic. The author begins to renounce his own direct discourse; he begins to fall silent. The Incarnation motif is carried forward also, and indeed I suggest that it becomes still more important to Bakhtin in the light of his new understanding of 'bad authorship'. Bakhtin uses Dostoevsky's Christ-like characters to illustrate what 'good authorship' should look like in his new polyphonic/dialogic paradigm. Here we see the continuation of the kenotic motif of active self-renunciation, as responsible authors/others facilitate the self-discovery of their partners in dialogue rather than impose a definition from without.

In 1929, shortly after the publication of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*,

Bakhtin was arrested and sent into exile, where he effectively remained for more than thirty years. Since he had been arrested on charges of underground religious activity, and given the climate of terror that prevailed until Stalin's death, it is not surprising in the least that the Christian motifs I have identified ceased to receive direct expression in the published works of the thirties, forties and fifties. Nevertheless, Bakhtin continued to grapple with the problem of the author and literary discourse, and it is here, as I shall argue in the following chapters, that these motifs continue to influence Bakhtin's own discourse.

CHAPTER 6

The exiled author: 'Discourse in the Novel' and beyond

The work produced by Bakhtin in the first decade of his exile shows two marked departures from the methodology, or general philosophical approach, of the work written and published under his own name in the 1910s and 20s. Firstly, human thought, human relations, indeed all of human culture, is no longer portrayed as the interaction of responsible consciousnesses but in semiotic terms, as realised through the medium of sign systems, in particular in discourse. Secondly, Bakhtin now abandons the synchronic phenomenological analysis practised hitherto and re-applies his ideas on a full historical and social scale; the previously intricate and intimate description of creative activity as an event taking place between persons is exchanged for its other extreme, an understanding of each act of writing as a particular participation in ancient and global conflicts of language. Taken together, these developments have a considerable impact on the religious motifs I have been examining so far, involving the rethinking of truth, especially personal truth, of individuality and creativity. This chapter attempts to trace the changes and examine the consequences for the author in exile, in the essays on the novel and beyond.

Much of the chapter will be concerned with the essays 'Discourse in the Novel' (1934–5), 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' (1940), and 'Epic and Novel' (1941).¹ These essays elaborate the primary features of Bakhtin's revolutionary theory of the novel, in which many of the major traits of his earlier philosophy are manifested. My focus will be on those features which have a close bearing on the Christian motifs I have been tracing. However, eventually this chapter moves beyond the three essays mentioned to consider ways in which Bakhtin sought to resolve some of the problems which his discourse theory raises.

FROM MONOLOGISM TO MONOGLOSSIA: THE FALL IN
LANGUAGE

As is well known, Bakhtin coined a veritable dictionary of new terms to serve him in the articulation of his ideas on the origin and nature of the novel genre, terms which are new not only to the Russian language or to the literary critic's box of conceptual tools, but also to his own philosophical and critical vocabulary. One thing about them is not new, however, and that is the way in which Bakhtin sets them up polemically against each other as binary oppositions (this in itself is of great significance, as I shall argue below). The central concepts in question are, firstly, 'monoglossia' (*odnoyazychie*), to which are opposed 'polyglossia' (*mnogoyazychie*) and 'heteroglossia' (*raznoyazychie*, or *raznorechie*), and, secondly, the 'centripetal' (*sentrostremitel'nye*) forces of language, which stand in opposition to the 'centrifugal' (*sentrobezhnye*) linguistic forces. To these may be added the opposition of epic and novel. Although this last pair is familiar enough, both terms are given a broad interpretation by Bakhtin: 'epic' can denote all the 'high' literary genres (the lyric, the tragic genres), and 'novel' can be extended to include prenovelistic forms also.² The poles of these three oppositions are closely related: monoglossia, the centripetal forces of language, and the epic genre belong together, as do heteroglossia, the centrifugal forces of language, and the novel. As a preliminary hypothesis, I should like to suggest that all these oppositions closely resemble the opposition of the given/closed/abstract and the posited/open/concrete modes of being of 'Philosophy of the Act', and, more recently, the opposition of monologism and polyphony of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. As such they may be seen as a direct continuation of the Fall motif in Bakhtin's work.

Although 'Epic and Novel' was the last of the three essays under discussion to be written, it provides perhaps the most succinct formulation of Bakhtin's polemical polarities. The epic is described as 'completely finished [*gotovym*], a congealed and half-moribund genre' (457 [14]). Epic time is the time of the absolute past:

. . . precisely because it is walled off [*otgorozheno*] from all subsequent times, the epic past is absolute and complete [*zaversheno*]. It is as closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished, already over. There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy. There are no loopholes in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuation nor requiring it. (459 [16])

The world-view of the epic is not open to question and admits of no competition: 'The epic world knows only a single and unified world view, obligatory and indubitably true for heroes as well as for authors and audiences' (477 [35]); it may only be revered. Similarly, the epic hero, Bakhtin asserts, 'is a fully finished [*zavershen*] and completed being. This has been accomplished on a lofty heroic level, but what is complete is also something hopelessly ready-made [*beznadezhno gotov*]; he is all there, from beginning to end he coincides with himself, he is absolutely equal to himself' (476 [34]). By contrast, the novel is a young and still developing genre; it is the 'genre of becoming' whose natural element is the present: 'The novel is the only developing [*stanovyashchisya*] genre, and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding' (451 [7]). The hero of the novel, likewise, 'ceased to coincide with himself, and consequently men ceased to be exhausted entirely by the plots that contain them' (478 [35]). The polemical contrast of closure and openness, of self-sufficiency and non-coincidence with oneself, clearly echoes the arguments of the early essays: even the vocabulary is essentially the same. Bakhtin has cast the novel in the role of the standard-bearer in the battle with closure, and the epic has been assigned the role of the enemy.

In 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' Bakhtin explores the roots of the novel. Put briefly, he presents the novel as 'a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other' (414 [47]). His argument is that the novel arose out of parody, since parody was the earliest way of representing alien languages. Parody, however, became possible only under the linguistic conditions which Bakhtin describes as polyglossia/heteroglossia. Polyglossia is introduced as the coexistence of a variety of national languages in one cultural space (such as the Romans' familiarity with Greek as well as Latin), whilst heteroglossia is brought in to account for the existence of parodic genres in the Ancient Greek culture, where only one national language was known: heteroglossia denotes the variety of 'social' languages at work within the boundaries of any national language. This linguistic variety became significant for literature, he argues, only when boundaries between languages were broken down, and they were brought into contact (and conflict) with each other, although he is not clear as to when and how exactly this was supposed to have taken place. Further, 'Prehistory of Novelistic

Discourse' briefly introduces monoglossia as the cultural dominance of a single language: the epic genres are said to have come into being under these conditions. Monoglossia is always, however, under threat from a host of unofficial heteroglottic languages.

'Discourse in the Novel' brings the issues of genre (examined in 'Epic and Novel') and language (the main subject of 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse') together, and elaborates on them at length. The link between the epic genres and monoglossia, on the one hand, and between the novelistic genres and heteroglossia, on the other, is firmly established. The battle between monoglossia and heteroglossia is given more succinct expression and is at the same time universalised as the battle between centrifugal and centripetal linguistic forces: 'Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted process of decentralization and disunification go forward' ('Discourse in the Novel', 85 [272]). Moreover, as can be seen already in the above quotation, the ideological dimension to this linguistic struggle is driven home by Bakhtin. The monoglottic 'unitary language' embodies a particular point of view on the world, and therefore its striving for linguistic dominance is at the same time a bid for ideological dominance: 'Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization' (84 [271]). In this way the unofficial and official nature of heteroglossia and monoglossia respectively is developed polemically by Bakhtin. The dominant, official language is presented as a destructive force, opposed to linguistic and ideological diversity in principle. Bakhtin makes his position in this struggle very plain: a language's claim to be the only language, and its truth to be the only truth, is a 'myth' ('Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', 432 [68]), and its imposition an unpardonable act of violence. This sharply polemical opposition of the dominant language of an era and the multitude of languages which oppose it is clearly descended from Bakhtin's theory of monologism and his opposition in principle to the subjugation of heroic voices to one authorial consciousness. In the essays on the novel, then, the Fall motif is projected onto Bakhtin's theory of language development, and the destructive principle is located in 'official' language.

As I indicated above, in 'Discourse in the Novel' generic distinctions in literature are firmly wedded to the opposing linguistic tendencies identified by Bakhtin. The section of the essay entitled 'Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel' is particularly illuminating in this regard. Here Bakhtin presents poetry as the genre of monoglossia. 'The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance' (109 [296]). This presentation clearly echoes the description of the proud, would-be autonomous self of the early essays, and the monologic author of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. No account of other languages is taken by the poet, except insofar as he strives to exclude them totally from his discourse: the poet always speaks in his own language, directly. For this reason 'the language of poetic genres . . . often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic, and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects' (100 [287]). By contrast, the novelist is the champion of unofficial discourses, of heteroglossia. The novel is presented by Bakhtin as 'dialogised heteroglossia'. It wages war against the tyranny of the unitary language, incorporating into itself a multitude of different languages and organising them artistically, that is, bringing them into contact with each other. The novel stands for the freedom of languages to express themselves, the freedom of multiple truths to exist. Here we can see the extension of the polyphonic principle, the same debunking of the single authorial truth, now expressed in linguistic terms.

Bakhtin employs two striking biblical metaphors in 'Discourse in the Novel' which throw some light on the Fall motif as it is reinscribed into the novel essays. The first describes the different approaches to language of poetry and novelistic prose as 'pre-lapsarian' and 'post-lapsarian' forms of consciousness:

If the art of poetry, as a utopian philosophy of genres, gives rise to the conception of a purely poetic, extrahistorical language, a language far removed from the petty rounds of everyday life, a language of the gods – then it must be said that the art of prose is close to a conception of languages as historically concrete and living things. (144 [331])

According to Bakhtin the poetic word seeks to 'forget' the reality of heteroglossia and strives precisely towards a direct relation to its object; it is speech about a hypothetical 'Edenic' world (144 [331]).³ But Bakhtin comments:

Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege: it can deviate from such inter-orientation only on a conditional basis and only to a certain degree. (92 [279])

Human culture after the Fall – to stay within the biblical metaphor – consists of a

vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages – all of which are equally capable of being ‘languages of truth,’ but, since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life. (178 [367])

Switching to another image taken from Genesis, Bakhtin describes how the prose-writer, in contrast to the poet, soberly takes into account ‘the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object’ (92 [278]). His allusion to the Tower of Babel is, I believe, very significant. According to Genesis, the Tower of Babel was conceived by the as yet single-languaged, geographically and socially united people of the world as a means of attaining glory and thereby maintaining unity (and with unity, of course, strength): ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth’ (Genesis 11.7). In order to prevent humankind from gaining inordinate power, God proceeds to ‘confuse their language’ and scatter them over the earth; linguistic unity in the account is equated with arrogance and the will to power; linguistic diversity, on the other hand, is equated with cultural diversity, and diversity as such with the containment of power. This metaphor takes us on to a consideration of the Incarnation motif as it is manifested in the essays on the novel.

LANGUAGE AS THE FLESH OF IDEOLOGY

In Chapter 4 I argued that Bakhtin uses the principle of incarnation as a weapon against all forms of monologising dialectic. The ideas expressed in Dostoevsky’s novels are always embodied in individual and concrete human beings, who come together on one plane in an eternal dialogue which is never resolved. Sometimes Bakhtin alludes to embodied consciousnesses, and sometimes to embodied voices.

The term 'consciousness' is inherited from the early essays; the term 'voice' is no doubt introduced for its aural quality, to harmonise with the metaphor of polyphony which is used exclusively in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*. Already in this book, however (in the fourth and final chapter), Bakhtin begins to move away from an understanding of heroes as 'consciousnesses' and 'voices' to a conception of them as embodied 'discourses'. The aesthetic relation of author and hero correspondingly becomes 'discourse about a discourse':

Whenever we have within the author's context the direct speech of, say, a certain character, we have within the limits of a single context two speech centers and two speech unities: the unity of the author's utterance and the unity of the character's utterance. But the second unity is not self-sufficient; it is subordinated to the first and incorporated into it as one of its components. The stylistic treatment of the two utterances differs. The hero's discourse is treated precisely as someone else's discourse, as discourse belonging to some specific characterological profile or type; that is, it is treated as an object of authorial understanding, and not from the point of view of its own referential intention. The author's discourse, on the contrary, is treated stylistically as discourse directed toward its own straightforward referential meaning. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 107-8 [187])

In this fourth chapter we may see the beginnings of a development which was to be brought to completion in the essays on the novel. In these essays, as we have seen, the novel is conceived as an orchestrated system, not of different consciousnesses, but primarily of different languages. Now characters no longer embody a truth unique to them, but are bearers of a given national or social language which embodies the world-view, the 'truth', of all those who speak it. One consequence of this is that the emphasis on the individual, characteristic of all of Bakhtin's previous work, is sacrificed to a less personalistic understanding of fictional characters as representatives of social and ideological points of view: 'Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a person in his own right, but a person who is precisely the *image of a language*' ('Discourse in the Novel', 149 [336]). Also, however, by shifting from consciousness to language Bakhtin is able vastly to expand the field of application of his incarnational principle. Its function, however, as we shall see, remains the same.

Of course, reflecting a tendency in Bakhtin's work generally, the essay 'Discourse in the Novel' is as much about discourse in life. As such, the incarnational principle applies to all social and historical

manifestations of discourse, right up to the two global linguistic forces. Thus ‘the centripetal forces of the life of language’ are ‘embodied [*voploshchennye*] in a “unitary language”’ (‘Discourse in the Novel’, 85 [271]). The centrifugal forces, likewise, are ‘embodied’ in dialogised heteroglossia (86 [273]):

... at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it is the *embodied coexistence* [*voploshchennoe sosushchestvovanie*] of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth. (104 [291])⁴

The phrase ‘embodied coexistence’ establishes a clear link between the Incarnation motif in *Dostoevsky’s Creative Work* and that of the novel essays: socio-ideological contradictions, since they are embodied in language, are forced to coexist: diversity is guaranteed, the danger of monoglotic reductionism is minimised. Hence the appropriateness for Bakhtin of the myth of the Tower of Babel.

Nevertheless, the dominant ‘unitary language’ still aspires to the destruction of all other languages, all other ‘truths’, and it does this by subscribing to the view that there is a ‘sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought’ which has its roots in the ancient understanding of language as ‘myth, that is, as an absolute form of thought’ (‘Discourse in the Novel’, 179 [367]). This is the myth which first parody in all its forms, and later the novel, parody’s true heir, seeks to destroy, precisely by exposing language as material, by showing that even the dominant language does not enjoy the metaphysical status which it falsely claims:

The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language – that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national, and, more to the point, social languages – all of which are equally capable of being ‘languages of truth’, but, since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life. The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentring of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought. (‘Discourse in the Novel’, 178 [36–7])

Thus the novel recognises that there is not one, but many languages, and consequently not one, but many points of view on the world, each proclaiming its 'truth'.

In bringing this exposition of the Incarnation motif in the novel essays to a close, I should like to consider briefly two more metaphors employed by Bakhtin in 'Discourse in the Novel' and 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', namely those of the 'Ptolemaic' and 'Galilean' language consciousnesses which are applied to poetic and novelistic discourse respectively: 'The language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed' ('Discourse in the Novel', 99 [286]); and by contrast, to repeat the first sentence of a previous quotation, 'The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language – that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world' ('Discourse in the Novel', 178 [366]).⁵ The Galilean metaphor is of course appropriate to the timeframe of one of Bakhtin's favourite periods; the Renaissance debunking of the centralised ideology of the Middle Ages coincides historically with Galileo's discovery that the Earth moves round the Sun. It also succinctly recalls the scandal of that event: the refusal of the church to abandon the old Earth-centred model, the necessity to the church's whole doctrinal structure that the Earth should occupy the central position in the universe, based on its association of a certain discourse (Aristotelian logic) with a certain truth (God as Creator and man as the crown of His creation). In privileging novelistic over poetic language consciousness, Bakhtin unequivocally sides with Galileo, not only accepting the 'verbal and semantic decentring of the ideological world' but heralding it as a liberation from an oppressive monologic discourse/truth.⁶ The Incarnational principle is what, for Bakhtin, grounds this decentring process. However, what are the ramifications of a decentred ideological world for Bakhtin's author, and for the God on whom his author has heretofore been modelled? As in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, in the novel essays 'Incarnation' has proved essential in counteracting 'Fall', but it has created another problem (prefigured in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*): this is the problem of creativity, of authorial discourse and where it can or should be located. It is to an examination of the position of the author in the novel essays which I shall now turn.

FALLING SILENT: THE EXILED AUTHOR

Before considering the implications of the Fall and Incarnation motifs for the author in the essays under discussion, it is worth making a more general point about the relative reduction in the significance attributed to authorial creativity to be found in them. These essays radically transform Bakhtin's earlier theory of discourse, set out in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, by opening up its diachronic and social dimensions. Now literary discourse is discussed not in close connection to an individual author but in the widest possible social, historical, even geographic context, with the result that, in direct contrast to the earlier work, the particular is consistently subordinated to the general, and the personal to the impersonal. A simple illustration of this is found in the opening section of 'Discourse in the Novel', where Bakhtin accuses literary critics of locating style in specific parts of the novel whilst ignoring the stylistic significance of the whole. Having outlined the basic 'stylistic unities' to be found in a novel he states:

These heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it. (75 [262])

As to its structure, this statement clearly echoes the Bakhtinian description of the polyphonic novel given in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, but close comparison reveals the content to be significantly altered:

In actual fact, the utterly incompatible elements comprising Dostoevsky's material are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous *consciousnesses*; they are presented not within a single *field of vision* but within several fields of vision, each full and of equal worth; and it is not the material directly but these worlds, their consciousnesses with their *individual* fields of vision that combine in a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of a polyphonic novel. (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 24 [16], my emphasis)

The 'elements' of which Bakhtin writes here are essentially none other than a multitude of different stylistic unities (the passage quoted occurs in the middle of a discussion of the '*multi-styled*' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 23 [15]) character of the Dostoevskian novel), but it is notable that the 'higher unity' of the earlier text is a unity of consciousnesses first and foremost; the discursive 'material' is emphatically the means to its end. In the later text, style as style

predominates, and the humanising language of 'consciousnesses' and 'individual fields of vision' is dropped.

Inevitably, the expansion of the territory appropriated for discourse forces a revision of Bakhtin's previous conception of aesthetic activity in the verbal arts, in particular the author/hero relation. The author loses a great deal of the creative initiative credited to him even in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, and appears in places to become merely the channel, if active in an organising capacity, for the prior and primary global cultural forces of language, whilst these forces are often described as an end in themselves and are accredited with a kind of will of their own, becoming in a sense, as heteroglossia, the true 'hero' of the novel, whilst the characters become in the first instance mere vessels for a multitude of socio-historically typical discourses. There follow a number of quotations from 'Discourse in the Novel' which illustrate this point in various ways:

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel. (76 [263])

True, even in the novel heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in *social* heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it. (139 [326])

Thus heteroglossia either enters the novel in person (so to speak) and assumes material form within it in the images of speaking persons, or it determines, as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse. (145 [332])

Individual character and individual fates – and the individual discourse that is determined by these and only these – are in themselves of no concern for the novel. The distinctive qualities of a character's discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breadth; such discourses are always potential languages. Therefore a character's discourse may also be a factor stratifying language, introducing heteroglossia into it. (146 [333])

The author, in 'Discourse in the Novel', is the creative consciousness in which the languages of heteroglossia most truly meet and with the help of which they can be brought together on one level (in the novel) (105 [292]); the author's role consists in organising them

into an 'artistic system'. This would seem to leave little room for creative originality. It is true that this system 'orchestrates the intentional theme of the author' (112 [299]). In other words Bakhtin continues to maintain that the author makes his will and his style felt, retaining the power to choose and the skill to manipulate the languages with which he works. This is amply demonstrated by his analysis of specific examples of novelistic discourse in the chapter 'Heteroglossia in the Novel'. Nevertheless the aesthetic event of 'Author and Hero' and *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* receives a fundamental qualification in 'Discourse in the Novel'. There is a certain 'always already' quality about the world of discourse which limits the true creativity of expression of every concrete individual (see the section where Bakhtin asserts that half of our words are quotations of the words of others, 150-1 [338-9]), including that of the verbal artist:

Just as the poetic image seems to have been born out of language itself, to have sprung organically from it, to have been preformed in it, so also novelistic images seem to be grafted organically on to their own double-voiced language, preformed, as it were, within it, in the innards of the distinctive multi-speechedness organic to that language. In the novel, the 'already bespoke quality' [*ogovorennost'*] of the world is woven together with the 'already uttered' quality [*peregovorennost'*] of language, into the unitary event of the world's heteroglot becoming, in both social consciousness and language. ('Discourse in the Novel', 143-4 [330-1])

The direct, or authoritative, word

One may formulate the dilemma of the novel writer composing fiction under the cultural conditions of heteroglossia as a crisis of direct discourse. However, the theme of the exiled author, the author no longer able to speak with authority, is present in Bakhtin's work from the very beginning, although the philosophical approach of the early essays (synchronic phenomenological analysis) did not permit its full development. In 'Author and Hero' we find that: 'A crisis in authorship may also take another direction. The very position of outsidership is shattered and appears insubstantial, the author's right to stand outside of life and complete it comes under dispute. There commences the degeneration of all stable transgredient forms' (176). By the time of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the same idea is already being discussed in terms of discourse, as a crisis of the

authorial word, although in the context of this work also it remains an anomaly, since the 1929 version of the text explicitly confines itself to a synchronic analysis of Dostoevsky's poetics (see the original Introduction). Two passages in particular attempt to explain the emergence of the polyphonic novel in the history of culture:

Direct authorial discourse is not possible in every epoch, nor can every epoch command a style – for style presupposes the presence of authoritative points of view and authoritative, stabilised ideological value judgements . . . Where there is no adequate form for the unmediated expression of an author's thoughts, he must resort to refracting them in someone else's discourse. (116 [192])

By no means all historical situations permit the ultimate semantic authority of the creator to be expressed without mediation in direct, unrefracted, unconditional authorial discourse. When there is no access to one's own personal 'ultimate' word, then every thought, feeling, experience must be refracted through the medium of someone else's discourse, someone else's style, someone else's manner, with which it cannot immediately be merged without reservation, without distance, without refraction. (132 [202])

We have seen (in the previous chapter) how Bakhtin struggles in this book to define the position of the polyphonic author.

'Discourse in the Novel', and its sister essays 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' and 'Epic and Novel', advance the problem of the direct, or authoritative word to centre stage. The end of the Classical era and the Renaissance are isolated as paradigmatic examples of epochs in which all forms of authoritative discourse are undermined by ridicule from the 'low', parodic genres and folk laughter during intense phases of intermixing of national and social languages, and the novel, especially the 'heteroglotic' novel of the second line of development isolated by Bakhtin in 'Discourse in the Novel', is shown to be the child and the true inheritor of the linguistic consciousness of those epochs, a consciousness which can recognise no word (and therefore no truth) as absolutely authoritative.

With his emphatic insistence on the relativity of languages and a corresponding ideological relativity, Bakhtin is forced to take his reconceptualisation of authorial transgression, begun in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, further. In 'Author and Hero' God is described as the ultimate guarantee of creative endeavour, a model of responsible aesthetic authority; the essay presupposes a (Judaeo-Christian, it may be surmised) cultural climate in which authors may confidently

assert their benevolent authority over their creations. Once Bakhtin has recognised that in the era of the novel no such climate exists, his author is left exposed, unable confidently to assert himself in direct, monologic discourse. Rather than being totally identified with his word, as is the God of John's Gospel, the prose author now, on the contrary, cannot (or will not) bind himself to any word:

Thus a prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work, while at the same time distancing himself, in varying degrees, from the different layers and aspects of the work. He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as semi-alien or completely alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions. The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, *through* language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates. ('Discourse in the Novel', 112 [299])

It is as if the author has no language of his own, but does possess his own style, his own organic and unitary law governing the way he plays with languages and the way his own real semantic and expressive intentions are refracted within them. ('Discourse in the Novel', 124-5 [311])

The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator, not in the normal literary language to which the story opposes itself . . . but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them. ('Discourse in the Novel', 128 [314])

Whilst the author remains in control of the work, then, he, or his own discourse, is now absent. In the essays on the novel the author goes into exile. In a very real sense, he falls silent.

What prompts the author to surrender his own discourse completely? The relativising of linguistic consciousness in itself does not seem adequately to account for this. But in Bakhtin an undisguised celebration of the liberating effects of prose discourse, its destruction of epic distance, its exposure of the myth of an absolute language, is accompanied by a more modest but persistent motif in a minor key, the consequent distrust of discourse as such. For insofar as all languages lay claim to truth, all are open to the charge of authoritarianism. If in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the emphasis is on the right of each voice to its own truth, in the novel essays the converse of this maxim is underlined, the monologising potential of asserting your truth given the total relative picture of things. In 'Discourse in the

Novel' this receives specific expression in two places in particular. In his discussion of Rabelais, Bakhtin writes:

In Rabelais, whose influence on all novelistic prose . . . was very great, a parodic attitude toward almost all forms of ideological discourse . . . was intensified to the point where it became a parody of the very act of conceptualizing anything in language . . . Turning away from language (by means of language of course), discrediting any direct or unmediated intentionality and expressive excess . . . that might adhere in ideological discourse, presuming that all language is conventional and false [*lzhivyi*], maliciously inadequate to reality – all this achieves in Rabelais almost the maximum purity possible in prose. But the truth that might oppose such falsity receives almost no direct intentional and verbal expression in Rabelais, it does not receive its *own* word – it reverberates only in the parodic and unmasking accents in which the lie is present. Truth is restored by reducing the lie to an absurdity, but truth itself does not seek words; she is afraid to entangle herself in the word, to soil herself in verbal pathos. (122–3 [309])

The same idea is at work in the section of 'Discourse in the Novel' which discusses the popular roots of the second-line, heteroglottic novel:

The feeling for language at the heart of these [low parodic] genres is shot through with a profound distrust of human discourse as such. When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions – this is the false [*lzhivyi*] front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested *use* to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker . . . *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning. All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions. (212 [401])

Thus the author comes to mistrust language as such, and prefers to play one language off against the other rather than attempt a 'truth' of his or her own, for in the very act of articulation the word becomes soiled; 'the spoken thought is a lie', as Bakhtin quotes from Tyutchev as early as 'Author and Hero'. Since the novel is a descendant of the parodic genres, we may say that the author takes over the role of the medieval clown, donning various linguistic masks but hiding his true face, parodying the language of others by means of others' languages, withholding his authority, keeping his peace. This is why Bakhtin can speak of laughter, or its 'reduced' equivalent, irony, as a form of silence.

Bakhtin's concern with the potential of discourse to deceive and manipulate is evident also in notes made in his exercise books during his years in exile. Notes from 1943, contained in the recent publication, 'From Draft Exercise Books' (1992), offer us some particularly illuminating material in this regard. 'The lie is the most contemporary and topical form of evil,' he states (155):

The element of violence in knowledge and artistic form. Directly proportional to violence is the element of falsehood. The word frightens, promises, raises hopes, praises or blames (the fusion of praise and blame neutralises the lie). (153)

The speaking (creating) person is serious; he does not smile. Seriousness implicitly contains demand, threat, pressure. Be who you ought to be (obligation imposed from without). (153)

This word-violence (and lie) is linked up with thousands of personal motives in the creator, muddying the purity of his thirst for success, influence, recognition (not of the word, but of the creator), with the striving to become an oppressing and consuming force. (153)

The genuinely good, impartial and loving person has not yet spoken, he has realised himself in the spheres of everyday life, he has not touched the official word, infected with violence and falsehood, he does not become a writer. (154)

Here we gain a clear picture of human discourse in its entirety being riddled not only with deceit but also violence. There is an unmistakeable implication that the rot starts in the human heart (ambition, the desire to impress). In a world where the use of language and the will to power are synonymous, Bakhtin even suggests (in the last of the above quotations) that goodness and literary activity are mutually exclusive. I believe that these notes, written shortly after the completion of the cycle of essays on the novel, support the case for linking the novelist's refusal to employ direct discourse with a concept of discourse as fallen, and human culture as endemically corrupt. If so, the thirties and the forties may be said to mark a nadir in Bakhtin's thinking about human creativity, indeed human activity in general.

The connection between silence, laughter and indirect speech is explicitly made in Bakhtin's later writings, specifically in 'From Notes Made in 1970-71'. They begin with the reaffirmation that the modern age has no room for the direct word: 'Irony has entered all

the languages of modern times . . . has entered all words and forms. Modern man does not proclaim, but speaks, that is to say speaks with reservations' (336). Further on he states: 'Irony as a form of silence. Irony (and laughter) as a means of overcoming a situation, of rising above it' (338); still further: 'Irony as a special kind of exchange for silence. The word taken out of life: that of the idiot, the holy fool, the madman, the child, the dying person, in part that of a woman' (353). In his discussion of the primary and secondary author (to which I shall return later), he specifically links up irony and silence with the problem of creative writing:

If the primary author comes forward with a direct word, he cannot be simply *a writer*; it is impossible for a writer to say anything from himself personally [*ot litsa*] (the writer is transformed into a publicist, moralist, scholar etc.) For this reason the primary author wraps himself in *silence*. But this silence may take on various forms of expression, various forms of reduced laughter (irony), allegory, and so on. (353-4)

The evidence of these late notes enables us to conclude that for Bakhtin, after the essays of the thirties the author remains in exile.

One's own word

Insofar as authorship is a form of self-expression, in Bakhtin's work the problem of discourse is ultimately bound up with the issue of human individuality, of personhood. To be an individual is synonymous for Bakhtin with having one's own voice, or discourse, but the individual finds him- or herself compromised at every step: on the one hand, there is the problem of ascribing one's individuality any real value when one's consciousness is but a conglomeration, however thoroughly assimilated and refined, of other people's discourses which precede and surround one's own; on the other, there is the equally fundamental problem of living with integrity if every act of self-assertion, including every discursive act, is necessarily an act of violence and deceit, and thus a threat to the right of others to their own word. If one has no access to an authoritative word, how may one have any word of one's own at all? The dilemma of the author, as everywhere in Bakhtin, is but a specific example of the dilemma of every human agent operating in a crowded world.

The theme of 'one's own word' has a long history in Bakhtin. Before his interest in discourse it is expressed in terms of responsible

activity ('Philosophy of the Act'). Highly pertinent to the above-outlined problematic is his association of the truly responsible, that is, morally most irreprehensible, act of self-projection into the world with self-sacrifice; self-assertion through self-denial. In 'Author and Hero' the aesthetic act is also able to have moral integrity because the author sacrifices his place in being, absents himself from being, in order that his heroes might enjoy aesthetic completeness. As we have seen, from *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* onwards the finalising activity initially preferred by Bakhtin is radically reassessed; the polyphonic author now safeguards his integrity by abstaining completely from asserting his presence at the expense of the right to self-assertion of his characters. But at this point Bakhtin is for the first time brought up against a contradiction in terms – the impossibility of saying anything about a person that does not simultaneously determine, or reify him or her.

Thus in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the problem of selfhood becomes explicit. The Dostoevskian hero's right to his own voice is also a struggle for his own voice, putting up a fight, as it were, against stronger voices who are laying claim to your image. Bakhtin uses the Underground Man as an extreme example of this power struggle: 'The destruction of one's own image in another's eyes, the sully of that image in another's eyes as an ultimate desperate effort to free oneself from the power of the other's consciousness, and to break through to one's self for the self alone – this, in fact, is the orientation of the Underground Man's entire confession' (180 [232]). The condition of having successfully broken through to one's own self is described by Bakhtin as 'spiritual sobriety'. It is significant that Dostoevsky's most spiritually sober heroes, who are also figures of integrity and authority, do not participate in the power struggle, or participate in a different way. The discourse of Alexei Karamazov, of Myshkin, Zosima and Tikhon, as described by Bakhtin, is an example of self-assertion through self-denial. They are bearers of the penetrative word, a word which abstains from the projection of self, from any explicit ideology of its own, but seeks to help the other's word to greater clarity. These figures are models of 'an active (not a duplicative) understanding' ('Reworking of Dostoevsky', 325 [299]), speech born of listening and therefore most truly response, speech born out of silence.

One will recall the role of Christ in Dostoevsky's ideology as Bakhtin understood it, the 'highest voice', who 'must crown the

world of voices, must organise and subdue it' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 89 [97]). Yet the most famous Dostoevskian image of Christ, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, shows him as completely silent. Towards the end of his life Bakhtin alludes to this strange contradiction in his notebooks, having refrained from picking it up in either edition of the Dostoevsky book: 'The unspoken truth in Dostoevsky (Christ's kiss). The problem of silence' ('Notes of 1970-71', 353). In the light of Bakhtin's increasing concern with the corruption of discourse we are justified in hazarding how he might have understood that phenomenon: in a world where a lie in the interest of power occupies the ideological centre (the Grand Inquisitor's lie to the people) Christ's only alternative is to refrain from speech, since to speak would be to participate in the conspiracy. Moreover, Christ is the most truly 'spiritually sober' figure of all; he does not need to speak to assert his individuality, for he knows who he is, nor does he need to command authority, for his self-assured presence speaks for itself.

The higher word

There is a further, perhaps final, dimension in Bakhtin to the problem of speech versus silence, one which penetrates beyond questions of selfhood and the right to self-determination. It is the deepest and most spiritual level of all in Bakhtin's work, present in it from the beginning but most succinctly articulated in 'Notes of 1970-71': 'The search for one's own word is in fact the search precisely not for one's own word, but for a word which is greater than oneself; this is the striving to get away from one's own word, with whose help it is impossible to say anything essential. I myself may only be a character, but not the primary author' (354). On the surface this statement appears to contradict what Bakhtin is elsewhere at pains to point out and what has been examined at length above, namely the human desire to establish oneself in discourse, to carve out a unique place for oneself. Here, on the contrary, is the desire to renounce one's own discourse in favour of a discourse which we can acknowledge as superior. This is not the irresponsible denial of one's 'non-alibi in being', the failure to meet one's obligation to realise one's unique place in the universe through self-asserting action condemned by Bakhtin in 'Philosophy of the Act', but an attitude of a different, more mature order, an attitude

characterised by a deep humility. The subject realises the bankruptcy of his own discourse, and seeks renewal in another's.

Looking at the spread of Bakhtin's writings in the light of this remark, one quickly finds articulations of its sentiment everywhere. Taken together, they strongly indicate that despite his serious engagement with a cultural climate inimical to absolutes, Bakhtin does not find it within himself to renounce the idea of an ultimate authority to which one may choose to subordinate oneself, however hidden or silent that authority may be. In 'Author and Hero', of course, there is the motif of the fragmented self who expresses himself in 'tones of repentance', acknowledges his aesthetic bankruptcy and surrenders himself to the loving affirmation of another being external and superior to himself; in surrender he finds peace and joy. The bearers of the penetrative word in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* are not engaged in the business of self-assertion because they all (with the partial exception of Myshkin) have surrendered themselves to the higher authority of God. In a real sense they have no discourse and no authority of their own (they are in this way 'silent'), although paradoxically they command more authority than most other characters, and are least open to being 'defined' by others' discourse. Their discourse approximates what Bakhtin terms 'hagiographic' discourse, 'a word without a sideward glance, calmly adequate to itself and its referential object' (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 208 [248]).

The discussion of 'authoritative' and 'inwardly persuasive' discourse in 'Discourse in the Novel' (154 [342–8]) can be looked at as the same phenomenon of being won over by another's word, and of making it your own. Dostoevsky's Christian figures may be seen as examples of the, to Bakhtin's mind, rare occurrence when

Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word – one that is *simultaneously* authoritative and inwardly persuasive – despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. (154 [342])

But internally persuasive discourse more than authoritative discourse acts seductively; one surrenders to it gradually, so that it is eventually indistinguishable from one's own. In Bakhtin's notes of 1943 the 'Author and Hero' motif reappears stripped once more of its discursive context:

The inner axiological infinity of man and the utter insignificance and closedness of his external image in the other, formed behind his back; in

between these two, a small image of oneself. Laying oneself down into the image formed of one behind one's back, extinguishing the infinity of one's axiological self-consciousness in it, dying in it and becoming an object for swallowing up and consuming. Faith in a love adequate to that inner infinity. ('Exercise Books', 155)

Faith in an adequate reflection of oneself in a higher other, God is at one and the same time both inside me and outside of me. My inner infinity and incompleteness are fully reflected in the image of me, and its outsideness [*znenakhodimost'*] is likewise fully realised in it. ('Exercise Books', 155)⁷

It should again be stressed that as far as human or authorial finalisation is concerned, Bakhtin is its resolved opponent after 'Author and Hero'. However, he clearly reserves a space, his 'loop-hole', as it were, for surrender to the loving authority of an absolute Other, a peculiarly spiritual, and radical, solution, to an otherwise apparently hopeless existential situation.

The image of the author

Writing in obscurity from his place of exile, Bakhtin outlines a philosophy of the exiled author, the exiled self. On the one hand he takes account of the temporal and spatial delimitation of creative (articulate) man, and the extent to which his discourse is predetermined by prior and primary sociolinguistic forces. The author loses the ahistorical position of Bakhtin's pre-exilic phenomenological analyses, and with it the kind of unfettered creativity which lent itself to comparison with the divine model of 'authorship'; moreover, he now *writes*, that is to say, expresses his artistic intentions through a medium, and is consequently distanced behind language which conceals as much as it reveals. At the same time, Bakhtin argues for the relative authority and the corruption of any given discourse, exploring the implications of this for authorship and selfhood. The author, deprived both of the possibility and of the right to speak out directly, becomes the world's court jester, using languages as masks, not showing his face, shunning direct discourse which can only be violent and false: his irony is described as a kind of silence; he has gone into exile.

It is in this context that Bakhtin's late references to the 'image of the author' must be understood, to be found in 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and Other Human Sciences'

(1959–61), ‘Notes of 1970–71’, and ‘Towards a Methodology of the Human Sciences’ (1974). In the first of these Bakhtin states:

We find the author . . . in every work of art . . . but we never *see* him as we see the images he depicts. We feel him in everything as the pure representing origin (the representing subject), but not as the represented (visible) image . . . We may speak of the *pure* author in contradistinction to the author who is partially represented, shown, who partly enters the work as one of its constituents . . . This is not *natura creata* and not *natura naturata et creans*, but pure *natura creans et non creata*. (‘Problem of the Text’, 287–8)

The ‘pure author’ is thus omnipresent in the work and yet invisible; to transfer Bakhtin’s visual imagery to aural, he makes himself heard everywhere whilst remaining silent. Further, Bakhtin unmistakably allies his status with respect to the work of art with God’s status with respect to the Creation. In 1970–1 Bakhtin revises his terms but not his presentation:

The primary (uncreated) and the secondary author (the image of the author, created by the primary author). The primary author is *natura non creata quae creat*; the secondary author is *natura creata quae creat*. The image of the hero is *natura creata quae non creat*. It is impossible for the primary author to be an image; he slips out of any figurative representation . . . The discourse of the primary author cannot be *his own* discourse: it requires illumination by something higher and impersonal (scientific arguments, experiment, objective facts, inspiration, power etc.). (‘Notes of 1970–71’, 353)

This passage, like the last, explicitly applies theological terminology to the question of authorial status (Bakhtin’s editors inform us that the Latin is taken from Duns Scotus’ *De Deivisione Naturae*⁸). Like God, the primary author is himself uncreated but creating. However, Bakhtin now conceives of the creator as silent (see the quotation on p. 119 above), given a cultural climate in which serious, direct discourse is uncreditable. This we must take to be his final position on the existence and activity of God, a God who cannot be known directly, to whom we have no access and about whom we may not speculate, but whose existence is nevertheless felt in the world, particularly in the human world, since man is His partial image. Still more particularly He is felt in man as creator (speaking, writing man), the investigation of whom Bakhtin has not hesitated to ‘use’ in the development of his world-view from the earliest to the latest of his writings.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that Bakhtin reinscribes his understanding of 'fallenness' into his theory of discourse and literary genre. On one level, it is monoglossia, or the dominant language of an era or society which strives for hegemony, for ideological closure, with opposition being put up by the multiple ideological languages which make up heteroglossia. The possibility of ideological plurality is guaranteed by the incarnation of ideologies in discourse. On another level, in this period Bakhtin comes to suspect that all forms of discourse have pretensions of grandeur: this is inherent in every, essentially violent, act of self-assertion, on whatever level. Thus the novelist goes into exile, refraining from the direct speech which would implicate him (or her) in violence and deceit. The late essays continue this theme, and re-establish the connection between authorial activity and divine creativity, leading to the conclusion that God, also, for Bakhtin, retreats into silence from the thirties onwards. In the following chapter, I shall examine some of the same issues from the point of view of Bakhtin's theory of carnival, which, on the surface, appears to be the least 'religious' of all his writings.

CHAPTER 7

Christian motifs in Bakhtin's carnival writings

In a recent article, Turbin reports that Bakhtin once remarked to him, 'The gospel, too, is carnival' (1990, 25). The aim of this chapter is, in brief, to examine that remark with reference to Bakhtin's carnival writings. In so doing I shall allow myself a certain licence to meditate on how the Christian motifs which, as I hope I have established in the foregoing chapters, permeate Bakhtin's work, knit with a certain reading of the New Testament. The validity of this approach, of course, stands or falls on the extent to which you, the reader, have been persuaded by the argument so far. Insofar as fall and incarnation, creativity and aesthetic love inform Bakhtin's discourse, my meditations will not be found to be entirely speculative. As to the purpose of such an exercise, I believe that a circumspect inclusion of the gospels in a 'dialogue' with Bakhtin can ultimately help us to take an investigation of the Christian dimension to his theories further in a fruitful, and, I trust, legitimate way.¹ An examination of the anti-ecclesiastical bias of Bakhtin's *The Work of François Rabelais and Popular Culture of the Middle Ages*² and its implications for such a project is followed by a discussion of certain central features of carnival with a view to gaining a picture of the kind of spirituality Bakhtin might have endorsed in his work under different political conditions. *Rabelais* is commonly held to be on one level a carefully constructed critique of the Stalinist regime. This chapter begins from the hypothesis that, on another, it is conducting a dialogue with the Christian world-view as part of a continuing attempt to recuperate some part of this as a meaningful resource for life in a particularly dark twentieth-century context.

BAKHTIN, CHRISTIANITY AND RABELAIS

It is important to be accurate about what is under attack in *Rabelais*, especially since Bakhtin's style of circular argument, his frequent

reiterations of basically the same point directed at a variety of related objects using a spectrum of different terms, makes imprecision easy and attractive. The primary target of carnival, and by implication that of its eulogist Bakhtin, is arguably not so much the feudal system or the Catholic (or Protestant) Church, nor is it the more basic ideologies of class society or religion; rather it is the captivity of the human spirit as such, its enslavement to fear:

It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed medieval man. It was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by the forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden ('mana' and 'taboo'). It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than the earth itself. (*Rabelais*, 101–2 [90–1])

In other words, carnival is seen by Bakhtin to address a primarily existential state of humankind, and the liberation it brings about is in the first instance a liberation of the spirit. Thus it is universally directed and does not isolate specific objects:

Medieval parody, especially before the twelfth century, was not concerned with the negative, the imperfections of specific cults, ecclesiastic orders, or scholars which could be the object of derision and destruction. For the medieval parodist everything without exception was comic. Laughter was as universal as seriousness; it was directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology. (*Rabelais*, 94 [84])

This is not to imply that Bakhtin is not deeply persuaded that fear is provoked and perpetuated in the interests of power by identifiable ideologies embodied in concrete institutions. Such were the Catholic Church and the feudal regime of the Middle Ages. But the oppressive strategies of these institutions, Bakhtin makes clear, are inherent in all power structures, whatever their ideological peculiarities (for this reason his work can so easily be read as a veiled critique of his own political culture). His deeper concern is to expose the logic of power and authority and its relation to truth, and to present laughter as a means to counteract it. Thus whilst one would be justified in concluding from *Rabelais* that Bakhtin must have had strong reservations about the church (any church) as an institution wielding power, it would be wrong to categorise him as necessarily anti-Christian on those grounds.³

This is well illustrated in Bakhtin's presentation of Rabelais

himself. Whilst there is no doubt that Bakhtin believes Rabelais to be subjecting the medieval religious outlook to mockery in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, he is careful not to describe him as an atheist in our contemporary sense of the word. Indeed, he is said to have a religion of his own: 'Rabelais' artistic thought fits neither rationalist atheism nor a religious faith, no matter whether Catholic, Protestant, or the 'religion of Christ' of Erasmus. Rabelais' religion is wider and deeper-rooted. It ignores all intolerant seriousness, all dogmatism. His view of the world is neither pure negation nor pure affirmation' (145 [132]). Bakhtin interprets Rabelais' parody of biblical texts not as 'abstract rationalist atheism' but as 'a humorous corrective of all unilateral seriousness' (412 [379]); as artist he is the celebrant of the most universal sacrament of laughter, the catalyst of change and renewal outlasting all faiths. Indeed, there are indications that in Bakhtin's view Rabelais intends no disrespect for Christ in his gospel travesties, as for example when he combines Christ's image with that of excrement: Bakhtin writes that he 'saw no sacrilege in doing so' (161 [149]). We are even occasionally shown a picture of Rabelais as one who does not so much dismiss the Christian picture of reality as promote an alternative, but not necessarily superior, way of interpreting human experience. I refer in particular to Bakhtin's discussion of Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel, during which he states: 'Rabelais does not openly contest the eternal life of the soul outside the body, which he accepts as self-evident. But he is interested in the related idea: immortality linked with the body, with earthly life, accessible to living experience' (440 [405]). Thus Rabelais is portrayed by Bakhtin as a writer whose goal is ultimately not to subject individual targets to ridicule in a narrow or tendentious way, but to promote the spirit of carnival in general, to bathe the whole cosmos in the tonic of laughter.

One might summarise Bakhtin's understanding of the relationship of power to truth as consisting in the appropriation of truth by the powers that be from the people (understood in its broadest sense), and the imposition of it in its subsequently inevitably distorted and alien form 'from above'. According to Bakhtin, truth is placed in a timeless metaphysical zone and presented in abstract discourse, and often in a foreign tongue; it derives its power to terrify and oppress precisely from this distancing process. Moreover, by divorcing truth from history it is given an absolute status, and becomes untouchable, as do in consequence the institutions which mediate that truth.

The hierarchical structure of such 'official' bodies serves to reinforce the image of distant, lofty truth which they project. This kind of truth must of necessity be presented seriously, since laughter would bring the whole precarious edifice down; hence Bakhtin characterises the tone in which it is delivered as 'official seriousness'. Bakhtin opposes another kind of truth to this one, a truth encapsulated by the grotesque image of popular folk humour. In contrast to 'official' truth it is of the people, material rather than metaphysical, familiar rather than alien, sensuous rather than abstract. Its primary medium is not even discourse, but gesture (the deed rather than the word). Like the grotesque image, it is ambivalent, containing in itself both poles of being, birth and death. The qualities of this kind of truth not only militate against fear in those who embrace it, but liberate from the fear induced by its serious counterpart. From the point of view of this essay, it is necessary to establish whether the gospels demand an interpretation of Christian truth along the metaphysical lines adopted by the medieval church, or whether they are open to the diametrically opposite, Bakhtinian/Rabelaisian understanding of a 'liberating' carnival truth. This will be explored below in a series of meditations on various aspects of Bakhtin's theory of carnival viewed in juxtaposition to certain motifs from the New Testament.

Apart from the question as to how far Christianity, or 'religion', is compatible with carnival truth, however, there is another angle from which the matter may be approached. Once again, Bakhtin's portrait of Rabelais provides an illustration for this. In the passage, cited above, concerning Rabelais' 'religion', Bakhtin is careful to refer to Rabelais' 'artistic thought', which is said to go beyond all one-sided points of view on the world. Elsewhere Bakhtin makes clear that Rabelais was himself a humanist and a political progressive by ideological persuasion. He points to passages in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* whose discourse comprises an 'almost entirely serious speech': 'It is a new form of speech, a progressive speech, the last word of the epoch and at the same time Rabelais' completely sincere opinion' (493 [453]). Rabelais' non-artistic world outlook, according to which it is possible to have beliefs, no doubt has a place also for religious beliefs.⁴

More importantly, it seems possible that the ideological views of Rabelais, respected by Bakhtin, would in his eyes come within what he defines as 'unofficial seriousness'. In Bakhtin's mind this kind of

seriousness, whilst in some ways standing in a relationship of tension to laughter, nevertheless is laughter's companion in its shared opposition to official seriousness. Far from being inimical to laughter, it may coexist with it, even be 'purified' and 'completed' by it (134 [123]), since it contains no trace of dogmatism and therefore fears no ridicule. This form of seriousness complies with Horace's dictum (quoted by Viret in a passage cited by Bakhtin): 'What prevents him who says the truth from laughing?' (111 [100]). Bakhtin writes of a 'new bold and sober *human* seriousness' alien to official medieval culture (413 [380]). As historical examples of such seriousness he cites the investigative science of modern times, the kind of critical philosophy founded by Socrates, and 'tragic seriousness', epitomised by Greek tragedy (133 [121]), but present also in Shakespeare, Pushkin, and others.

The recently published set of notes, 'Additions and Changes to *Rabelais*', which were written in 1944, supplements what we know from his published work of Bakhtin's thoughts on unofficial seriousness (he quickly moves off the subject in *Rabelais*, remarking that it is 'somewhat outside the framework of the present study' (134 [123])). In these notes unofficial seriousness is associated with the suffering of the individual who finds himself as a mortal in a cosmos which is subject to the cycle of death and renewal, and who must come to terms with his own inevitable supersession:

Apart from official seriousness, the seriousness of power, terrifying and intimidating seriousness, there is also an unofficial seriousness of suffering, fear, cowedness and weakness, the seriousness of the slave and the sacrificial victim . . . This is an extreme form of the protest of individuality (physical and spiritual), thirsty for immortality, against change and absolute renewal, the protest of the part against dissolution into the whole. It is the greatest and best-founded claim there can be to eternity and the indestructibility of everything which has once existed (the refusal to accept becoming). ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 135)

It is concerned therefore with an aspect of being which laughter, as the champion of both change and the collective, cannot comprehend and does not address. Unofficial seriousness stands in relation to carnival laughter as the classic forms of human representation to the grotesque. When drawing this latter comparison in *Rabelais* Bakhtin dismisses the classic canon from his study in the same way he dismisses the topic of unofficial seriousness, that is, not as inadmissible but as irrelevant to his undertaking:

In this introduction as in the following chapters of our work (especially in Chapter 5), while contrasting the grotesque and the classic canon we will not assert the superiority of the one over the other. We will merely establish their basic differences. But the grotesque concept will of course be foremost in our study, since it determined the images of the culture of folk humour and of Rabelais. (*Rabelais*, 35–6 [29])

This is a tacit admission that the world is in a profound sense dual-aspected. There is a tension between laughter and unofficial seriousness that Bakhtin is aware of but regards as a complicating factor best left out of his analysis of Rabelais, but which he tentatively explores in ‘Changes to *Rabelais*’.⁵ It may be that certain aspects of the Christian world-view may be reconcilable with carnival laughter as manifestations of unofficial seriousness: this will also be a matter for consideration in the sections that follow. In positing a connection between Bakhtin’s writings on carnival and aspects of the Christian gospel, certain pressing questions immediately arise. Is not the very concept of God (understood monotheistically) irredeemably metaphysical and as such bound to stand in opposition to the materiality of carnival? How can one call the gospels carnivalesque when they lack the central element of laughter? What exactly is the utopian nature of carnival? Finally, does not the essential ambivalence of the carnival philosophy render it irreconcilable with Christian values, indeed, with any values whatsoever? In what follows I shall approach my discussion through precisely these questions.

THE DEBASEMENT OF METAPHYSICS

Bakhtin’s life-long concern to counter abstract approaches to phenomena with a sense of the world as material and historically concrete (the phenomenon I have been referring to as the Incarnational motif in his work) achieves its apotheosis in his writings on carnival, which according to him draws on a bottomless fund of grotesque realistic images for the express purpose of concretising the abstract: ‘The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity’ (*Rabelais*, 25 [19–20]). In Bakhtin’s mind there is an inevitable connection between abstract truths and ideological despotism (‘monologism’ as it is labelled in *Dostoevsky’s Poetics*), a partnership that particularly characterises medieval ecclesiastical

and feudal culture. He calls it 'the spirit of the Gothic age, with its one-sided seriousness based on fear and coercion – a seriousness which considered everything *sub specie aeternitatis*, outside real time' (*Rabelais*, 291–2 [268]). An exact parallel to this is found, as I argued in the previous chapter, in Bakhtin's essays on the theory of the novel, and his interpretation of monoglossia, or the dominant ideological discourse of an era, as possessing a malevolent centralising tendency. Just as heteroglossia, as a host of embodied languages, counteracts this tendency, so carnival, in Bakhtin's interpretation, is an intrinsically democratic and material mode of experience uniquely capable of providing a counterfoil to the dictatorial power of any monolithic, monologic, 'official' world-view. Carnival is thus a clear manifestation of the Incarnational motif in Bakhtin's work.

In light of his unqualified celebration of grotesque materialism at the expense of the 'spiritual', it might well seem that there is no way of reconciling religious values of any kind with carnival. But we should remember first of all that in his Introduction to *Rabelais* Bakhtin explicitly ascribes non-material, philosophical value to carnival festivity:

The feast had always an essential, meaningful philosophical content. No rest period or breathing spell can be rendered festive per se; something must be added from the spiritual and ideological dimension. They must be sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human existence, that is, by the world of ideals. Without this sanction there can be no festivity. (11–12 [8–9])

Carnival, it appears, *is* a philosophy, but of a peculiar, experiential kind: 'Carnivalistic thought . . . lives in the realm of ultimate questions, but it gives them no abstractly philosophical or religiously dogmatic solution; it plays them out in the concretely sensuous form of carnivalistic acts and images' (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 179 [134]). Again, the carnival philosophy of death and renewal 'is not an abstract thought but a living sense of the world' (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 166 [124]⁶). But we really begin to get a sense of why Bakhtin might have associated himself with what he described to Turbin as Gospel carnival when we also take into account the wider contextual significance of the vocabulary chosen for assertions such as 'all . . . forms of grotesque realism degrade, *bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh*' (*Rabelais*, 25–6 [20], my emphasis), and 'If the image [the

scatological image in Rabelais] is applied to the gloomy, *disincarnated* medieval truth, it symbolises *bringing it "down to earth"* through laughter' (*Rabelais*, 190 [176], my emphasis). Phrases such as these clearly connote the Incarnation in a very specific way.

Indeed, Christianity, at its inception, may be viewed as nothing other than a materialisation of God, and a degradation, a debasement of the entire Jewish/Old Testament world-view, a literal turning of its subject into flesh in order to overthrow its elitism, with respect both to the common Jew and to the Gentile, once and for all. In the Incarnation, heaven is brought down to earth; ahistorical, metaphysical truths enter into the realm of chronotopic (spatial and temporal) limitation and possibility and are thereby divested of their power to distance and to terrify the believer. Jesus is 'Immanuel, God with us' (Isaiah 7.14; Matthew 1.23). Bakhtin was certainly aware of this aspect of the Incarnation and placed a positive interpretation upon it. As I noted in Chapter 3, he saw Christ as the means by which God ceases to be an abstract principle: 'even God had to be incarnated in order to show mercy, to suffer and forgive, to come down, as it were, from the abstract viewpoint of justice' ('Author and Hero', 113). Many aspects of Jesus' ministry reflect and carry forward the materialising and familiarising principle inherent in the act of Incarnation itself.⁷ It may be suggested that the materialising principle that informs the gospels and is epitomised by the Incarnation overthrows a religion based on absence and fear in favour of a familiar God expressed in material terms in Christ's teaching and, paradigmatically, in his physical person. The 'high, spiritual, ideal, abstract' philosophy of late Temple Judaism is transformed by Christ into a carnivalesque, experiential philosophy.

A further application of the Incarnation motif in the carnival writings is Bakhtin's vigorous crusade against negative attitudes to the body generally. In 'Chronotope' (1937-8) the scourge of 'anti-physis' and its correction through the grotesque imagery of folk humour is a major theme of Bakhtin's discussion of the Rabelaisian chronotope; here special emphasis is laid on the medieval relationship between the word and the body: 'The reigning ideology served neither to enlighten nor to make sense out of the life of the body, rather it rejected such life; therefore, denied both words and sense, the life of the body could only be licentious, crude, dirty and self-destructive. Between the word and the body there was an immeasur-

able abyss' (320 [171]). According to Bakhtin, Rabelais wants 'to return both a language and a meaning to the body' (320 [171]), to 'demonstrate the whole remarkable complexity and depth of the human body and its life, to uncover a new meaning, a new place for human corporeality in the real spatial-temporal world' (320 [170]). In this leitmotif we detect the pathos of a man struggling to accept his own ailing body in a society where millions of bodies were being destroyed as worthless in the name of an ideology which had completely lost touch with reality. It is possible to oppose to this a gospel 'chronotope', whose organising centre is the 'Word made flesh' dwelling among us. Jesus may be said to represent the perfect reconciliation of language with the body; he is the Word of life whom the first epistle of John describes as 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (I John 1.1). Such a reading would seem to be in tune with Bakhtin's advocacy of the materiality of discourse in 'Discourse in the Novel'. It is not difficult to see how Bakhtin's antipathy to disembodied metaphysical world-views and advocacy of the sensual philosophy of carnival, far from alienating him from Christianity, may actually be informed by certain aspects of it, aspects which offer a compelling model for combining ideology with physicality, and discourse (the word) with the deed.⁸

OF LOVE AND LAUGHTER

Absolutely central to Bakhtin's notion of carnival is the principle of laughter; for this very reason Jones tempers his enthusiasm for the potential of a Bakhtinian analysis of the gospels from the point of view of carnival with the reservation that 'the fundamental ethos of the gospels is not one of Rabelaisian carnival' (1991, 17).⁹ Indeed, it is hard to see how one might cast the gospels in the form of the humorous without making a mockery of their self-evidently serious tone. How then, can Bakhtin nevertheless maintain that the gospels are carnival? I believe that the answer to this question lies in the existence of a strong conceptual bond in Bakhtin between laughter and the motif, already remarked upon in earlier chapters, of Christian love, or *agape*. For in the New Testament the liberating, fear-destroying principle is love: 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The

man who fears is not made perfect in love' (I John 4.18). One might thus speak of a 'carnival love' of the gospels. In what follows I shall explore the link between the motif of Christian love and carnival laughter in Bakhtin's work.

In the first chapter of *Rabelais*, 'Rabelais in the History of Laughter', Bakhtin gives us a thorough characterisation of carnival laughter. His discussion of it is characteristically unsystematic, but certain recurring motifs can be grouped together for the purposes of my argument. Laughter is firstly an alternative way of seeing the world which has as great a claim to philosophical value as its 'serious' counterparts; 'it is one of the essential forms of truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man' (75 [66]). This truth is universal, as suggested by the quotation. It is also 'unfinished and open' (94 [83]) by nature and therefore opposed to all forms of truth expressed in dogmatism or closure. As such it has a 'positive, regenerating, creative function' (80 [71]) and bears an 'indissoluble and essential relation to freedom' (99 [89]), both freedom of the spirit and of speech (79 [70]). Finally, to the matrix laughter-truth-freedom must be added its relationship to fear, which Bakhtin sees as the fruit of medieval seriousness and a form of enslavement more profound than any external force of oppression because of its ability to invade man's soul. For this reason he describes laughter as 'essentially not an external but an interior form of truth' and declares that 'laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great *interior censor*; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power' (105 [94]). These properties of laughter are neatly summed up in Bakhtin's well-known and poignant assertion: 'Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter . . . Complete liberty is possible only in the completely fearless world' (54 [47]).

Turning to the gospels with the above in mind, one is forcibly struck by the dominating presence of three out of the four elements of the laughter-truth-freedom-fearlessness matrix; only laughter is missing. Jesus' radical message of liberty and truth – 'You will know the truth – and the truth will set you free' (John 8.32) – is underpinned by his own astounding fearlessness in the face of opposition. It appears he has no inner censor, and thus neither religious nor political hierarchies have power to oppress him: like Bakhtin's

people, he is immortal and invincible. Christ's fearlessness and concomitant authority flows from a steady inner conviction of his own relationship to truth (his teaching is punctuated with the declaration 'I tell you the truth', the phrase which accounts for the overwhelming majority of instances of the word 'truth' in the gospels according to the New International Version concordance).¹⁰ This is made particularly clear in John's gospel, in which Jesus is introduced as the one who is 'full of grace and truth' (John 1.14), where he is portrayed as claiming personally to embody truth ('I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14.6)), and which contains Pilate's famous question – put in response to Jesus' assertion that his mission has been to 'testify to the truth' – 'What is truth?' (John 18.38). It is also John who spells out truth's relationship to freedom, both in 8.32, quoted above, and later in the same chapter, when Jesus says 'if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8.36). The fourth element in the gospels, however, is love.

There are significant conceptual connections between love and laughter in Bakhtin's work as a whole; moreover, his 'carnival' texts indicate in two places that Bakhtin was aware of their points of contact. I shall start my discussion of these connections with one of these and end with the other.

Chapter 3 of *Rabelais* contains a key section on the 'basic philosophic meaning of the folk carnival' (265 [244]), which Bakhtin chooses to present through an analysis of Goethe's thought on the subject. He concludes it with this quotation from Goethe's poem in prose 'Nature': 'Its crown is *love*. Only through love can we draw near to it. *It has placed abysses between creatures, and all creatures long to merge in the universal embrace. It divides them, in order to bring them together. It atones for a whole life of suffering, by the mere pressing of lips to the cup of life*' (278 [256]). Bakhtin is interested here in Goethe's, and carnival's, perception of life as a unity in the process of becoming,¹¹ a unity which precludes fear, for, as he says in the preamble to the quotation, 'In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole, the dying link torn from the link that is born' (278 [256]). What is particularly striking for my purposes is that Bakhtin is happy to substitute, through Goethe, love for laughter as the unifying principle guaranteeing fearlessness. Furthermore (although we should bear in mind the pantheistic sentiment informing the poem), the notion of love is allied with that of atonement. The

atonement of the New Testament is gospel carnival love at its most extreme point of expression, and its result is of the same kind (although embodied in a different theological structure) as Goethe's. As John writes 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins' (I John 4.10). Therefore 'we love because he first loved us' (I John 4.19). The community of believers, set free from the power of sin by the atonement, is able to find an unprecedented unity in love which defeats death (I John 3.14) and the fear of what lies beyond it. The 'abysses between creatures' are overcome in love as they are in laughter.

The kind of love at work in the Gospels is *agape*, self-giving and self-emptying in the sense given to it by the Incarnation; that is to say, it is kenotic.¹² It requires a voluntary surrender of oneself for the sake of others: 'Greater love has no-one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends' (John 18.13). To put this in Bakhtinian terms, *agape* represents a refusal to claim one's own 'givenness', or closure, within the event of being. According to him, such a claim leads to spiritual death ('Author and Hero', 109). Jesus puts this in another way: 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it' (Matthew 16.25). This is the necessary 'positedness' of the subject, the 'I-for-myself', as described by Bakhtin in 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', which alone enables responsible, in 'Author and Hero' loving, action. Both early essays insist that the freedom of the subject to act beneficially in the world is contingent upon one's willingness to sacrifice oneself. However, as we have seen, such self-effacement does not mean that one makes no impact upon the world; as proof of the contrary Bakhtin cites Jesus' life and its effects. *Agape* is thus a powerful force that liberates the lover, since he (or she) overcomes a soul-destroying tendency to live for himself and retains his openness to the other, and to being in general.

When we come to look at the effect of *agape* on the beloved we are confronted with an aspect of Bakhtin's thinking that was very much in the process of development at the time he wrote *Rabelais*. Aesthetic love in 'Author and Hero' is very much a finalising force, albeit benign, whereby the other is given form by authorial (sacrificial and loving) action, 'saved', as it were, from the more terrifying aspects of his or her experience as a 'posited' subject. In an earlier chapter we have seen how Bakhtin uses kenotic, divine love as a model for this

kind of finalising activity. At this early point in his output nothing seems less plausible than a comparison between love and laughter, the force inimical to closure. However, by 1963 Bakhtin is describing laughter, also, as 'a specific aesthetic relationship to reality' (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 220 [164]), but one which in direct contradiction to the aesthetic love of 'Author and Hero' undermines closure formally in carnivalised texts. In *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* of 1929 it is apparent that Bakhtin is already rethinking his understanding of authorial activity, reinterpreting its kenotic (self-effacing) dimension in such a way as to minimise authorial finalisation. A more radical form of aesthetic love, a more radical kenoticism now becomes the ideal: the other/hero is set free to be a subject on equal terms with his or her creator. Thus Bakhtin comes to understand love as the enemy of closure not only for the lover but also for the beloved.

The affinity between love and laughter now becomes clear. In the gospels, as in medieval carnival, hierarchies and barriers are broken down as people are 'reborn for new, purely human relations' (*Rabelais*, 13 [10]), in the first case through love, in the second, laughter. The two principles share the subversively open, non-official quality belonging to the realm of subjective (*zadannyi*) experience. I have already mentioned the unity of the community of believers brought about by the atonement. A frequent biblical image for such unity is 'the body of Christ', a picture of collective subjectivity strikingly similar to Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival crowd: 'The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body. In this whole the individual ceases to a certain extent to be itself . . . At the same time the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community' (*Rabelais*, 277 [255]). The connection is decisively reinforced by Bakhtin himself in a comment in 'Changes to *Rabelais*': 'The social character of laughter, communal [*sobornyi*]¹³ laughter (akin to the prayer of the whole church)' (155). The unity brought about by love and laughter is *the* effective protection against all forms of official coercion and closure.

The reference to *sobornyi* laughter is not the only insight into Bakhtin's 'unofficial' views on carnival afforded us by this recently published set of notes; here we are shown the dark side of the carnival moon, the reverse face of Rabelais whose pessimism, never voiced publicly by Bakhtin, provides a hidden counter-weight to its utopian optimism (there is a certain, rather appropriate, ambiva-

lence about the tragi-comic nature of carnival). Whereas in *Rabelais* popular festivity and 'official' seriousness are set against each other as two mutually antagonistic, separate phenomena, 'Changes to *Rabelais*' explores the relationship between the two poles of the popular world-view; carnival laughter and unofficial seriousness: 'Tragedy plus satyric drama restores the ambivalence and integrity of the popular image' ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 135). In these notes Bakhtin presents unofficial seriousness, the seriousness of tragedy, as the individual's protest against personal extinction in the carnival process of death and renewal (see p. 130). Tragedy arises out of the hopeless attempt of the individual to thwart the cycle of death and renewal by taking control of it through self-assertive action. Bakhtin's meditations on this through an analysis of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* lead him into a deep and gloomy pessimism: 'self-assertion is inseparable from the destruction of one's enemies; self-aggrandisement is inseparable from the depreciation of all other people' (137); 'The prolongation of life (beyond its set limit) and its immortalisation is only possible at the price of murder (in its extreme form, the murder of a son, children . . .)' (137); 'Cruelty and bloodshed as a constitutive feature of strength and life' (137). Thus *Macbeth* finds himself in the existential trap of individual existence; he is not primarily a criminal, according to Bakhtin, but one who crowns himself in order to preserve his life. *Lear* renounces his crown prematurely in the belief that his children will honour the gesture out of filial piety, described by Bakhtin as 'the official lie of the world' (139), only to come up against the 'genuine reality of the world', namely its innate treacherousness. Eventually Bakhtin concludes:

Such is life. It is criminal by its very nature. If one affirms it, if one raises oneself up in it, if one carries out its bloody tasks and insists on one's rights, one would be bound to commit suicide, but even death is doubtful. Yet even here, from time to time the liberating tones of Saturnalia and carnival sound forth. (140)

Rather than the up-beat carnival joyfully overcoming official oppression, here we have carnival in a minor key, providing a temporary reprieve from the human condition. It is in this context that Christian carnival love most realises its profound liberating potential. Jesus subverts, and thus overcomes, the criminal logic of individual existence by consistently practising self-negation, from the

renunciation of his heavenly crown through his ministry based on service (epitomised by the washing of his disciples' feet) to his sacrificial death; he embodies the unofficial seriousness of the slave and the sacrificial victim mentioned above. The thrust of his teaching is that self-assertive action leads to spiritual destruction, whereas a life of service, embracing from the outset its logical extreme of voluntary death, leads to fullness of life. This is linked to the motifs of 'positedness' and closure; in seeking to retain his own crown Macbeth performs an act of self-closure; having eliminated father and children, he then 'suffices unto himself' ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 139). His counterpart Jesus accepts to be the victim rather than the perpetrator of a violent decrowning by remaining open and vulnerable to the world, but in doing so receives his crown back again, and with it both father and spiritual children. Thus he plays Abel to Macbeth's Cain; he is the second Adam, who, rather than overriding God's command in a bid for autonomy (but to his own spiritual detriment), acknowledges his dependency and defers to God.

If laughter through its strategy of negation challenges the cosmic order, *agape* (sacrificial love) represents a radical alternative to being in its existential state of fallenness with the potential to overturn the logic of destructive self-assertion. Meditating on the mad Lear, Bakhtin posits 'a simple and simply loving soul, uninfected by the sophisms of theodicy, which in minutes of absolute disinterestedness and impartiality lifts itself up to a position of judgement on the world, on being and the architect of being' ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 152). This soul represents 'a new aspect of truth' which does not use its position of judgement for the purposes of judgement: 'It [he?] judges no one, unmasks no one, debases no one, takes from no one, belittles no one; it demands nothing, in it there is not a trace of violence and seriousness, it merely shines and smiles, although it is also full of loving pity. It is absolute goodness' (152). With the introduction of love into the picture, he asserts, 'Physical life . . . enters a new sphere of being. Life gains recognition from without, outside of itself,' concluding that 'Hell [is] life outside of love' (152). Jesus Christ fulfils this role of unsophisticated goodness lifting life out of its rut into a sphere of being not prey to a constant and destructive power struggle. The kind of love first prioritised by him is laughter's cousin and coalition partner in opposition to the governing forces of the cosmic order.

UTOPIA

'Not a place' (Greek)

'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18.36)

Hitherto I have deliberately omitted the set of associations that surrounds the utopian element of Bakhtinian carnival from the discussion, since these raise complex interrelated questions about Bakhtin's world-view. What kind of status does carnival laughter enjoy in his work? Is it a means to an end or an end in itself? Does it have real revolutionary potential, is it merely therapeutic, or is its value of a symbolic nature only? Does it constitute a manifesto for moral and intellectual relativism, or is ambivalence itself raised in the celebration of carnival to a kind of absolute? These issues form the subject of the following part of the chapter.

Real and ideal

According to Bakhtin, medieval carnival culture 'belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play' (*Rabelais*, 10 [7]). 'The utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance' which carnival creates is thus a curious hybrid of the real and ideal, neither an ineffective fantasy about a better world nor an actual political programme or historical force for change. Bakhtin's eulogistic rhetoric on the subject of carnival utopia tends to result in a, possibly deliberate, downplaying of its temporary and ineffectual nature, in spite of the fact that this is acknowledged from time to time (*Rabelais* 11 [8], 106 [94-5]). It is as though he wants to include the reader in, and perhaps also abandon himself to, the pageant without footlights, with a curious disregard for critical distance at odds with his stated views on the role of the author-contemplator ('Author and Hero').¹⁴ Umberto Eco, in his essay 'The Frames of Comic "Freedom"', also understands Bakhtin's reading of carnival in Rabelais to imply 'actual liberation' (1984, 3) and takes issue with it, maintaining that the apparent subversiveness of carnival (and the comic in general) is dependent on the continuing existence of the present but unstated law which it breaks. 'Carnival can exist only as an *authorised* transgression' (1984, 6), he concludes, or else it becomes plain revolution. 'In this sense, comedy and carnival are not instances of

real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule' (1984, 6). Bakhtin is not, I believe, ignorant of this, as his melancholy meditation on the 'rule' in 'Changes to *Rabelais*', as well as his acknowledgement of the temporal restrictions on medieval carnival, amply demonstrate. He seems rather to be looking for a way of releasing laughter from a trap of which he is all too aware and finding a form for it which would enable it to provide a constant challenge to the centripetal forces of the world and at the same time enjoy a measure of independence from those forces. In other words, he wants carnival to be in the world but not of it.

If carnival could be said to have some sort of permanent presence in the world it would then transcend the parameters that Eco's law sets for it. It would cease to be a sham and become a viable and indestructible alternative to the status quo, because the status quo, being neither prior nor posterior to it, would have no power over it (there would be a kind of dualism of law and laughter). Bakhtin sees this permanent presence in the figure of the medieval clown and fool. They were 'the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season' (*Rabelais*, 11 [8]), who 'represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time'. The fool was never required to take off his mask and be reabsorbed into the world but enjoyed 'the right to be "other" in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that makes life available . . .; the clown and the fool are "not of this world" and therefore possess their own rights and privileges' ('Chronotope', 309 [159]). The fool is the closest Bakhtin can get to a totally detached critical figure such as the 'simple and simply loving soul' of 'Changes to *Rabelais*' without placing him in a metaphysical realm; the fool uses his mask to gain an external standpoint on the world whilst remaining physically in it.

According to Bakhtin's analysis, the novelist eventually takes over the role of the fool, at first existing alongside his or her carnival counterpart, but later becoming a substitute as the clown-figure fades out of history. In the fool the novelist finds a form 'to portray the mode of existence of a man who is *in life, but not of it*, life's perpetual spy and reflector' ('Chronotope', 311 [161], my emphasis). The novelist's task, as it was the fool's before him, is 'the laying-bare of any sort of conventionality, the exposure of all that is vulgar and

falsely stereotyped in human relationships' ('Chronotope', 311 [161]). Bakhtin understands such conventionality to be intrinsic to human existence (compare, the 'lie' of 'Changes to *Rabelais*'), hence the need for the healthy negating strategies of the rogue-clown-fool masks, the only effective form of protest available to one living under such conditions. These masks

grant the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolise life; the right to parody others while talking, the right not to be taken literally, not 'to be oneself'; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage – and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets. ('Chronotope', 312 [163])

In the novelist Bakhtin finds a historically concrete person who can carry the carnival banner into the twentieth century. Furthermore, the 'carnivalised' novel (equivalent to the heteroglotic novel of the second line of development outlined in 'Discourse in the Novel') lifts carnival laughter, if not out of history altogether, at least onto another historical plane, the plane of the literary work and its reception, on which the permanent influence of carnival forms on the world (through its readership) is assured. The novel occupies a chronotope all of its own. Like the clown, it is 'in' but not 'of' the world; in the world as text being recreated through the act of reading in an infinite variety of historical times and spaces, but not of it, since it transcends any particular concrete manifestation of itself whilst never actually leaving the material for the metaphysical realm (it is not a spiritual entity). Bakhtin feels understandably ambiguous about the absorption of laughter into the novel, since it corresponds historically to the decline of truly democratic, culturally specific, street carnival; from being a wondrous hybrid of art and life, it becomes all art, its relation to life being recast into the more distanced relation of the aesthetic to the real. Something is lost as gesture is transposed into discourse. However, he feels he can claim an affinity between carnival and verbal art:

[Carnival's language of symbolic and sensuous forms] cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its

concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 163 [122])

Although carnival can no longer be directly enacted, it can be embodied in discourse, and its new kind of materiality, its new reality, releases it from its previous temporal and spatial limitations and guarantees it a more enduring influence in the world.

In his discussion of the rogue, the clown and the fool, Bakhtin consciously borrows (consciously because he sets the phrase in quotation marks ('Chronotope', 309 [159])) from a motif found in Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper as related by John. This is the motif of the chronotopic, as it were, situatedness of Christ and his followers in the world relative to non-believers, their state of being 'in', but not 'of', the world. Jesus prays 'they are not of the world any more than I am of the world . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world' (John 17.14, 18). Later, before Pilate, he reiterates his claim to belong 'elsewhere', to be alien ('other' – 'Chronotope', 309 [159]): 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18.36). Bakhtin further reveals a link in his own mind between the fool and Jesus Christ when writing of the 'allegorical state' of the clown figure: 'The clown and the fool represent a metamorphosis of tsar and god – but the transformed figures are located in the nether world, in death (cf., in Roman Saturnalia and in Christ's passion the analogous feature of the metamorphosis of god or ruler into slave, criminal or fool)' ('Chronotope', 311 [161–2]). Jesus is the incarnated (debased) god who, finding himself in the corrupted world,¹⁵ is obliged, like the fool and the novelist after him, to don a mask in order to confound the status quo whilst himself remaining untainted by it. During the course of his ministry he is accused of both madness and folly, and eventually he is convicted as a rogue. His parables resemble the riddles of the fool, opaque to all but initiates into the kingdom governed by an alternative logic; his 'naive' claims and his demands, rendered more lunatic by their unabashed radicalness, by not bowing to the present order, are exercises in 'not understanding' it. As the carnival king he dwells in a realm at once real and ideal, like the rogue, clown and fool creating his 'own special little world', his own chronotope, around him ('Chronotope', 309 [159]). His real/ideal status is reflected in his teaching about the 'kingdom of heaven', which he proclaims to be both 'among you' (Luke 17.21) and 'not yet'. In fact, the utopia he creates, with all its

material abundance and physical wellbeing, is, in the same way as medieval carnival, simultaneously a realisation of pre-lapsarian paradise in the here-and-now (just as the Saturnalia recalled the Golden Age of Saturn) and an expression of faith and real optimism for the possibility of better times in a future age, in which the effects of the Fall will be erased for ever. It is worth pointing out, too, in light of Eco's critique, that, although Jesus' carnival utopia is tolerated for a while, it is not sanctioned by the authorities, and is therefore crushed from without as a rebellion rather than ceding of its own accord to an appointed limit: it has more of the character of a revolution than medieval carnival, whilst retaining carnival's productive, regenerating tone.

It is possible to extend the analogy between Christ and the fool to the fate of Christianity after the gospel period. With the execution of its king, the gospel carnival chronotope is destroyed, and the forces of reaction ostensibly reassert themselves in the persecution of the early church in Jerusalem. However, although Jesus' utopia can no longer be found in real historical time and space, its influence continues to be felt in the world by virtue of the transformation, not unlike the process of carnivalisation, which it undergoes. Jesus' carnivalesque embodiment of subversive principles in life is transposed into the discourse of the New Testament, a new kind of embodiment that allows his spiritual revolution to transcend any specific limitations of time and space and at the same time provides for the potential recreation of the gospel ethos in any and every historical situation. Bakhtin understands the rogue, clown and fool to influence the novel in two ways: by providing a model for the authorial position, and by their appearance in a given work as its major protagonist. Clearly Jesus is the fool-protagonist of the gospels and the physically absent yet all-pervasive organising idea of the Epistles that exercises an enormous influence over the Bible's readership. According to Christian doctrine he is also the 'author' of the New Testament, the Word of God speaking to the world in the Bible through the Holy Spirit. Like Bakhtin's carnivalesque novelist, he hides himself behind the discourse of others whilst at the same time revealing himself in it.

There is a strong sense in which the gospels' carnival utopia goes beyond medieval carnival and its successor, carnivalised literature, however. We have seen how the real/ideal status enjoyed by folk humour in its directly historical manifestation is modified when it

enters the realm of the aesthetic. Bakhtin is silent on the question of whether laughter in its literary form can be said to have any actually liberating impact on the world. We are left to surmise whether he understands it to be merely a monument to an earlier, more concrete revolutionary spirit, whether perhaps it effects internal liberation on the level of the reading individual (contrast with this bourgeois interpretation the collective nature and thoroughgoing externality of medieval street carnival), or if there might not be some way in which the very existence of a given novel as an ideological product alters (subverts?) the official order.

An early idea of Bakhtin's may productively be applied to this question. In 'Philosophy of the Act', as we have seen, the responsible individual makes abstract truths material by embodying them in action. In the same way an individual, or group of like-minded individuals, may be said to transpose the truths (perhaps the prosaic images) of literary discourse back into 'life' by consciously appropriating them for responsible re-enactment:

The responsible deed alone overcomes every kind of hypotheticalness, for the responsible deed is the actualisation of a decision – inescapably, unalterably, and irreversibly; the deed is the final total, the all-round definitive conclusion; the deed pulls together, relates and resolves in one single and *already final context* both meaning and fact, the general and the individual, the real and the ideal, for everything enters into its responsible motivation; in the deed there lies the way out of mere possibility into singularity once and for all. ('Philosophy of the Act', 103)

Christian practice provides a very good model for precisely this; insofar as each believer makes the image of Christ his or her own role model, and puts his radical alternative values into practice ('fleshes them out'), they realise a utopia in a specific social and historical context. When many do this together their collective impact on their surroundings can be great; the whole exceeds the sum of its parts. Bakhtin is conscious of this analogy. One example of the individual image-bearer of Christ cited by him is St. Francis of Assisi: 'Francis called himself and his companions "God's jugglers" (*ioculatores Domini*). Francis' peculiar world outlook, his "spiritual joy" (*laetitia spiritualis*), his blessing of the material bodily principle, and its typically Franciscan degradations and profanation can be defined, with some exaggeration, as a carnivalised Catholicism' (*Rabelais*, 66 [57]). The most extreme instance of a carnivalesque believer is of course the 'holy fool', a figure with a long Russian pedigree

undoubtedly familiar to Bakhtin and alluded to by him in his discussion of the fool-protagonist ('Chronotope', 315 [166]). With respect to collective Christianity one must recall his remark in 'Changes to *Rabelais*', cited above: 'the social character of laughter, *sobornyi* laughter (akin to the prayer of the whole church)' (155). The church, understood in its biblical sense as the community of believers, represents a permanent and concrete embodiment of the radical subversive principle of love. This kind of Christian practice cannot be equated with the church as an institution in Bakhtin's mind, since the latter has become a paramount example of 'official' seriousness, having been 'won over by being' ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 152) in its endemic state of corruption, and is bound as a consequence to oppose any liberating impulse, including that inspired by Christ. But as a communal human incarnation of gospel values it constitutes a genuine model for a utopia which is both real (historically concrete) and ideal (a mode of being irreconcilably opposed to the universal order of things).

Means and ends. Is ambivalence absolute?

There is a further question attached to the status of carnival in Bakhtin's work, namely: how are we to understand carnival ambivalence? For Bakhtin this is one of the three defining characteristics of carnival laughter, equalled in importance only by its popular character and universal scope. Carnival was originally associated with times of crisis, such as the changing of the seasons or critical events in the human life cycle (birth, marriage and death), and its imagery reflects the essential ambivalence of being:

[The carnival] experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. (*Rabelais*, 14 [11])

As a result, carnival laughter 'is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives' (14 [11]). Bakhtin clearly understands such ambivalence to deconstruct the great enemy, variously defined in his work as monologism, 'official' seriousness, or the centripetal forces of reigning ideologies.

But it is less clear whether he sees carnival ambivalence as a means to an end or as an end in itself. Is its anarchic relativity supposed to clear the way for a better culture, characterised by an acceptable, non-official seriousness (and is this culture not then the true utopia motivating Bakhtin's thinking?), or is ambivalence raised by him to the status of an absolute value, permanently relativising all others (and thus rendering carnival's ongoing subversion itself the utopian ideal)?

Morson and Emerson have pointed out that carnival is presented in two markedly different guises in 'Chronotope' and *Rabelais*, which they label the humanistic/chronotopic and the antihumanistic/antichronotopic (1990, 441), but which might also be summarised as carnival as means and carnival as ends respectively. In the chronotope essay, according to them, 'Carnival . . . is directed toward affirmative, positive, and humanist action to be undertaken within the historical process' (1990, 437). The grotesque is 'a temporary means to a new world, whose matrices would not themselves turn out to be grotesque' (1990, 437). In short, carnival ambivalence is said to be used by Rabelais as a necessary tool for the destruction of an obsolete and restrictive world outlook, a tool which will itself become obsolete once it has achieved its end, whereupon the new harmonious culture will take over. By contrast, in the later work *Rabelais* 'idealises the brawling, spitting, medieval body – which is granted no special historical task, nor any "historical momentum" towards a more harmonious and articulate form' (1990, 439). Carnival becomes an end in itself, and ambivalence is simultaneously absolutised over and above any particular cultural paradigm, whatever its nature. Chapter 7 of *Rabelais* states Bakhtin's altered position unambiguously:

The last word of the epoch, sincerely and seriously asserted, was not Rabelais' last word. However progressive, our author knew the limits of this progressiveness. And although he spoke seriously of such things, he knew the limit of this seriousness. Rabelais' own last word is the gay, free, absolutely sober word of the people, which cannot be bribed with the help of the limited progressiveness accessible to the men of his time. This gay word of the people opened far wider future perspectives, even though the positive outlines of this future were still dimly utopian. All that was definite and completed within the epoch was in some way comic, insofar as it was limited. But laughter was gay, while all that was determined and finite was about to die and to open new possibilities. (493–4 [453–4])

Morson and Emerson attempt to account for the shift in Bakhtin's understanding of carnival as an adjustment in the balance of power among his three global concepts (defined by them) of 'prosaics', 'dialogue' and 'unfinalisability'. Certain necessary features of the former two concepts come to be experienced in their limiting aspect, thus in *Rabelais* 'it is as if Bakhtin recognised shortcomings in those two global concepts and used the third as a way of reexamining them in a questioning spirit' (1990, 469). While their analysis of the two presentations is clear and persuasive, their explanation for the inconsistency is unsatisfying. However, 'Changes to *Rabelais*' (published after Morson and Emerson's book) sheds invaluable light on the matter, interestingly in a direction which Morson and Emerson anticipate when they write:

The most vulnerable side of dialogue, Bakhtin may have sensed, is its benevolence . . . Except for the occasional reference to hell as the 'absolute lack of being heard' ('Problem of the Text', p. 126), Bakhtin does not investigate life's terrors. Carnival, however, does address them, if only to banish them in a new way. Carnival laughter provides a mode of inner adjustment that does not depend upon the benign dialogic scenario of 'talking it out'. (1990, 469–70)

'Changes to *Rabelais*' goes a long way towards redressing the balance weighted so prominently in favour of cosmic optimism in the bulk of Bakhtin's published work, as I have remarked above. The notes vindicate Morson and Emerson's understanding of carnival as a response to 'life's terrors'. They also lay to rest any notion that Bakhtin believed in the possibility of establishing a social order free from tyranny in real time and space, whether through carnival laughter or by any other means. Instead, they enable us to understand how a thinker who attributes so much importance to the evaluative dimension of human existence could embrace the relativism that inevitably inheres in a celebration of carnival ambivalence: for him it is the only way of breathing in the corrupt air of being. Still more importantly in terms of the religious dimension of Bakhtin's world-view, 'Changes to *Rabelais*' provides an insight into his attitude to metaphysics, and in particular the Christian concept of life after death, which in turn can help us set his pessimistic relativism into its widest context.

Death for Bakhtin is 'doubtful' (*somnitel'na* – 'Changes to *Rabelais*', 140):

'May you rest in eternal peace'. Conception of the world, eternity, non-being and destruction. The arbitrariness, the insignificance of destruction and death; it is impossible to say anything; death is something transitory and essentially having nothing to say, there are no grounds for its absolutisation; in making it absolute we transform non-being into an evil form of being, absence into an evil form of presence; death is in and of time, for we know its action only on the smallest segment of time and space. . . . (136)

He further writes, 'One of the greatest and least remarked upon themes of world utterances and images is doubt in death; this theme has been veiled by the reactive and substitutionary theme of hope in immortality' (155). Bakhtin is seeking to loosen the grip that death has on the human imagination by refusing to posit what comes after death in terms which can only be applied to our present experience, characterised by being and presence. Evidencing a radical apophaticism, he will not talk about life after death, but only about non-being (*nebytie*): 'another life, eternal life, we do not know and only postulate, and must of necessity postulate it' (138).

At the same time, because life appears to him in these notes in its aspect of irredeemable corruption, he sets non-being against being as the ideal state out of which being has fallen:

But being, once it has arisen, is irredeemable, ineffaceable, indestructible: the absolute purity and peace of non-being, now destroyed, can never be restored again. Neither by redemption nor by nirvana. (152)

The battle of non-being with being (with its coming into existence, with the destruction of the silence and integrity, the completeness of non-being) . . . The irreparability of being . . . It is impossible to tear oneself out of being. Being has no way out. (155)

From comments like these it appears clear that both carnival laughter and Christ-like (*agape*) love were for Bakhtin at this stage in his life and work a way of introducing some of the qualities of non-being into being. The relativising ambivalence of carnival creates a space for truth, and therefore for judgement, in the absence of any known metaphysical realm which might have fulfilled this function. Laughter and its relative, love, by refusing to buy into the lie of official discourse, are in the final analysis a kind of silence. In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin outlines the evolution of folk-humorous genres into novelistic discourse and the latter's relation to official 'truth'. I quote the relevant passage in full:

The feeling for language at the heart of these genres is shot through with a profound distrust of human discourse as such. When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions – this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested *use* to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning. All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions.

We see the ground being prepared here for a radical scepticism toward any unmediated discourse and any straightforward seriousness, a scepticism bordering on rejection of the very possibility of having a straightforward discourse at all that would not be false. This finds its profoundest expression in works by (among others) Villon, Rabelais, Sorel and Scarron. (212 [401])

Hence the novelist's fool-ish resort to 'gay deception'. A similar sentiment informs Bakhtin's description of the 'simple and simply loving soul' mentioned above:

The goodness of this judging soul is devoid of any positive content, it is completely reduced to the judgement of being, to aversion. It is the voice of non-being judging being. There isn't a trace of being in itself, for being has been completely poisoned by a lie. ('Changes to *Rabelais*', 152)

CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussion I conclude that Bakhtin comes to understand carnival primarily as a strategy of negation whose presence in the world, under whatever form, guarantees that the centripetal forces of being should never gain outright victory over the beleaguered human spirit, whilst he remains deeply pessimistic about the possibility of transforming being completely by its influence. It also seems clear that he now refuses to resort to metaphysics to rescue the world from its distress, although equally he will not dismiss the possibility of another mode of existence which does not require ambivalence as a defence against deceit; rather, he advocates silence as the best approach to everything that is necessarily unknown. As to what indeed can be known of that ultimate utopia, and the possibilities for giving it serious, but not official, expression in the world, I suggest that Bakhtin finds it modelled in the gospels, and particularly in the life and discourse of Jesus Christ, the universe's prime fool and its carnival king.

The fate of Christian motifs in Bakhtin's work

The third chapter of this study drew attention to and analysed the Christian motifs which organise the discourse on aesthetics in 'Author and Hero'. These motifs were seen to gravitate towards the most indispensable aspects of the Christian credo: the absolute transcendence and primacy of God the Creator; humankind created in His image and likeness, existing separately from God but not autonomously, dependent upon Him for its continuing existence and value; the fallen state of humankind, and with it the whole of being, its denial of God and destructive bid for autonomy; the grace and condescension of God in His work of forgiveness (justification) and restoration to eternal life, above all manifest in the literal, sacrificial condescension of the Incarnation; finally, the love of God and the responsive emotional range of His subjects in their relationship with Him: repentance, humility, faith, hope, love, peace and joy. The consistency and coherency of this Christian framework compelled the question as to what happens to Bakhtin's Christian world-view in the following phases of his intellectual development, when for concrete political reasons any overt expression of earlier motifs became impossible, and when there would have been every good reason for him to abandon his beliefs.

Subsequent chapters dealt with different aspects of this issue. Chapter 4 posed the unavoidable question about the extent and nature of Bakhtin's Marxist convictions as they were supposedly formulated during the first decade of Soviet power, based on the publications, under his own name and others', of the 1920s. Chapter 5 comprised an analysis of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* (1929) with a view to demonstrating the early Christian framework to be under a process of radical revision, whilst Chapter 6 examined the continuation and culmination of this process in Bakhtin's further work on discourse and the theory and history of the novel (the essays of the

1930s and notes from later periods). Chapter 7 focused on essentially the same problematic, but through the prism of carnival (*Rabelais* and related texts from the thirties and forties).

This, the eighth and concluding chapter, may perhaps be read as a parallel essay to Chapter 3, since it returns to a thematic treatment of Christian motifs in Bakhtin's work, and thereby aims to draw together the somewhat disparate arguments of the intermediary chapters (disparate of necessity due to their chronological approach and the restricted number of the texts discussed in each) into a more easily comprehensible whole. It is hoped that by broadly reproducing the structure of the third chapter, the lines of continuity and development of, as well as departure from, Bakhtin's original Christian philosophical basis will become sufficiently clear to allow the formulation of certain conclusions as to the ultimate fate of Christianity in Bakhtin's work. To this end particular emphasis will be laid in this chapter on the final phase of Bakhtin's career, the period of the late essays. The structure is 'broadly' reproduced because some of the original headings have fallen away to reflect what I believe to be the case: namely that of the motifs discussed in Chapter 3, four in particular (God, the Fall, Incarnation and love) prove to have been sufficiently durable and flexible to survive the cultural and political pressures exerted on Bakhtin (not only from Soviet ideology but from wider cultural forces also) during his writing 'career', and sufficiently profound to develop into indispensable elements of his mature philosophy.

GOD

Early in his writing Bakhtin establishes a link between the concept of God and that of the author. God/the author is conceived as personal, transcendent, active-creative, and good. His personality is manifested in his capacity for relation; Bakhtin's aesthetics (and his ethics also) spring from an understanding of being as a relational event, or interaction of consciousnesses. The aesthetic relation is asymmetrical, that is, contains an unequal balance of power, almost all of which is lodged in God/the author, who initiates, determines and sustains the relation. This inequality is indelible, being the result of the transcendence of God/the author, who exists in a superior dimension to the human being/hero, enveloping his or her consciousness with his or her own, all-embracing consciousness: to

this phenomenon Bakhtin assigns the term *vnenakhodimost'*, or 'outsidedness'. The relation of the superior to the inferior consciousness is productive and creative, affirming and enriching being: in the aesthetic relation it brings to incoherent content the 'gift' of form. In 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin conceives the creative act to be simultaneously redemptive, since it brings to the human soul/hero absolute affirmation from without, a sense of ultimate value which the hero is unable to generate immanently. In this lies the goodness of the Creator, whose creative and redemptive act is an act of love, requiring sacrifice (a self-emptying of the creator as he or she goes forth from him- or herself in the creative act, together with the self-effacement involved in withdrawing from being in order to affirm it from a position of outsidedness), and performed without any prospect of requital, that is to say, unselfishly, as an act of grace.

This harmonious picture of divine/authorial activity holds through 'Content, Material and Form' (1924), which is essentially an application of the 'Author and Hero' scheme to a critique of the Russian Formal School of criticism. This essay re-emphasises the intensely active, intensely personal nature of the creative process and declares the work of art to be the result of 'free' and 'loving' authorial activity ('Content, Material and Form', 70). *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* (1929), however, shows evidence of serious tensions and even contradictions around the question of the author, whose role Bakhtin is resolved upon recasting in such a way as to release the hero from his or her hitherto passive role and redefine authorial activity as participatory, or dialogic. Authorial goodness now consists in allowing the hero to define him- or herself; form now must no longer finalise (*zavershit'*) but liberate. It is notable that from *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* onwards authorial goodness is no longer self-evident; rather a space is opened up for tyrannical, 'monologic' authorial activity. The idea of aesthetic love is nevertheless retained as an ideal to be striven for and a quality present in the greatest works of art as Bakhtin defines them. The challenge *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* poses to the traditional authorial position, the logical conclusion of which, as Kristeva (1973) points out, is the disappearance of both author and work, is, however, strangely counterpointed by the subtle interrelationship of Bakhtin with his 'hero' Dostoevsky and with Dostoevsky's 'hero' Christianity, in which Bakhtin's undisguised admiration, even reverence, for Dostoevsky as an artist works powerfully against the destructive potential inhering in his new

theoretical position. Moreover, the tacit affirmation of Dostoevsky's Christian world-view conveyed by Bakhtin's general alignment of his voice (*so-glasié*) with that of the subject of his study militates against the conclusion that Bakhtin's faith in God is disappearing along with his early model of authorship. In *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* Bakhtin is already exploring ways of accommodating the author in the new cultural paradigm which is compelling the revision of his more traditional model, much as Dostoevsky before him sought ways of understanding God in the face of the same cultural shift. On the one hand, the authorial presence is conceived as an integral position between consciousnesses, an 'ultimate semantic authority' in the work, present everywhere but explicit nowhere:¹ this is the first step towards an understanding of divine/authorial hiddenness which comes to dominate Bakhtin's concept of God/the author in his later work. On the other, the concept of incarnation is emphasised as a way of maximally personalising and, as it were, democratising truth, stripping it of metaphysical privilege and allowing it to take its place in the struggle of voices for supremacy (see below). Thus *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* intensely registers, but does not finally capitulate to, the decentring, antitheological forces of the twentieth century.

After 1929 and with the exception of his very last published pieces Bakhtin does not overtly refer to the early divine/authorial model, nor does he resort to the strategy of indirect reference adopted in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, by means of the association of himself with his subject; the ideological conditions of the time simply did not permit such allusions. His literal exile is accompanied by a long period of authorial exile in which he effectively maintains silence on matters of theology and the ways in which his view of God is affected by the further development of his understanding of creative prose. If, by extension, one continues to consider the author as an image of the Creator, then Bakhtin's work on novelistic discourse ('Discourse in the Novel', 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', 'Epic and Novel') may be said to mark a nadir for the concept of God, since authorial transcendence and personhood are undermined in these essays by the privileging of language over consciousness, on the one hand (making the author into a kind of linguistic crossroads, and the hero into a linguistic microcosm of a larger social whole), and the sheer impact of Bakhtin's new geographical and historical reach (with its inevitable diminishment of the transcendental dimension of authorship), on the other. The author becomes a chooser and user of

others' languages, his or her creative work merely crystallising in a condensed and intense form a large-scale linguistic struggle for supremacy which leaves little room for an intimate relationship of authorial and heroic consciousnesses. In this way, despite Bakhtin's assertions to the contrary, even the creativity of the author seems diminished. Least of all is there any mention of authorial goodness. In these essays, particularly in 'Discourse in the Novel', the author begins to conceal him- or herself behind language:

The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, *through* language, a language that has somehow become more or less materialised, become objectivised, that he merely ventriloquates. ('Discourse in the Novel', 112 [299])

In particular, the favoured author of the 'heteroglotic' novel (or novel of the second line of development) takes full account of the linguistic pluralism of culture and submits, shunning his own word, taking on linguistic masks which conceal his true face. As we have seen, this is a form of silence.

The carnival texts, in particular *Rabelais*, at first sight appear to invalidate any religious reading of Bakhtin, and not only by omission (the absence of discussion) but by commission also, since, according to Bakhtin's interpretation, the entire orientation of medieval folk humour (the true 'hero' of the work on *Rabelais*) is towards the 'debasement' of the church and its oppressive metaphysic. Nevertheless, as I argued in Chapter 7, God, and faith, remain strangely untouched by the paean to folk humour, for which the carnivalisation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the day is in reality a means to the end of liberation from fear, oppression and authoritarianism in general. Many commentators on *Rabelais* have pointed out the political subtext at work here, for which the Catholic Church provides a convenient and ideologically favourable mask. But on another level the work's anti-ecclesiastical bias masks a more profound apology for spiritual values which draws on gospel motifs and shares the vision of freedom and true humanity of Christianity at its inception. Whilst there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Bakhtin has a quarrel with the church, it is impossible to infer from this an automatic rejection of the faith it represents. As for the role of the author in the carnival writings, it undergoes a development closely aligned with that of the author in the essays on novelistic

discourse. The 'author' of carnival is, of course, the people, and the writer of novels becomes its true representative, taking on the role of the rogue-clown-fool figure whose task it was to carry the democratic spirit of carnival through those times of the year when the world was given over to the authoritarian ideology of officialdom; in the same way the author of literary prose carries the banner of freedom through the centuries of cultural oppression. For the author inherits the role of the fool and the clown, using their comic conventions as a weapon against the corrupt forces of the official order (primarily, of course, official discourse) and a means of avoiding self-compromise by resorting to the language of seriousness ('Chronotope', 310 [130]). This self-concealment of the author in the interests of truth and freedom, prepared for in the Dostoevsky book of 1929, forms a common bond between Bakhtin's writings on discourse and laughter.

In recent years various notes and sketches made during the period of Bakhtin's exile have been published in two lots ('Changes to *Rabelais*' and 'Exercise Books'). These notes take on a significance disproportionate to their length in light of the self-censorship imposed by Bakhtin upon his completed essays on the novel and his dissertation on *Rabelais*, especially given the fact that they contain unmistakable and enlightening references to religious themes. With respect to the association of the author with God, 'Exercise Books' provides us with the unexpected evidence that throughout the thirties and into the forties Bakhtin has retained for himself and continued to meditate upon the phenomenological dimension of authorship as relation, with its conceptual pillars of transcendence and goodness (love). This he applies to both God and the author. 'Faith in an adequate reflection of oneself in a higher other, God at once within me and outside of me' ('Exercise Books', 155); only love, Bakhtin states, can provide such an adequate reflection. And several years later in the same notebooks he writes: 'Such is the relationship of the artist to his hero, he lives both within him and outside of him, combining these two aspects in the higher unity of the image' (161).

The notes and essays produced in the last period of Bakhtin's career, after his re-entry into public intellectual circulation in the early 1960s, bring the divinity theme to the surface once more, although in quiet, contemplative tones that contrast markedly to the confident mood of 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero', and testify to the impact of the intervening decades not only on the

content of Bakhtin's thought but also on the mode of its expression. In particular no attempt is made to systematise his later philosophical insights, still less to 'organise' his discourse round Christian figures. An explicit association of the author with God, for example, is found only in 'Reworking of Dostoevsky'. Nevertheless these late essays, returning as they do to a philosophical approach to texts and the creation of texts, constantly take up the motifs of personality, transcendence and creativity with which the author/God is consistently associated in Bakhtin's pre-exilic work. Indeed, these motifs prove to have lost none of their centrality and even to have gained in weightiness, since now, in contrast to the early philosophical essays, each is heavily invested with the value of 'freedom', the most significant, perhaps indeed the only truly new god to join Bakhtin's pantheon as a result of his years of exile. Thus though the referent (God) of these motifs is often only implicit in the late work, he is suggested everywhere.

The general concept of transcendence continues to play a vital role in Bakhtin's thought. 'Problem of the Text' (1959-61) restates the distinction between the text as a linguistic entity and the text as utterance which Bakhtin developed in 'Speech Genres' (1952-3), but expands upon the more generally philosophical implications of the distinction. Whereas the text as an organised system of signs is reproducible, repeatable, and axiologically neutral, the text as utterance is individual and unique, and bears relation to value ('Problem of the Text', 283); as utterance the text transcends its own boundaries and enters into relation with other texts, other utterances. 'Every word (every sign) of the text oversteps its limits' ('Methodology of the Human Sciences', 364). In the same way culture may be approached both as a closed system and as an organic whole, 'open, becoming, undecided and undetermined, capable of death and renewal, transcending itself (that is, overstepping its own limits)' ('Notes of 1970-71', 339). Bakhtin's main objection to structuralism's approach to culture, for example, is its 'enclosure within the text' ('Methodology of the Human Sciences', 372). Bakhtin himself has preferred a view of man and culture as self-transcending from his very earliest work ('Philosophy of the Act'), arguing insistently for the possibility and desirability of overcoming personal and cultural boundaries in order to achieve a 'higher', more complex and more vital unity.

'Outsidedness' (*vnenakhodimost'*), comprises the other face of the

transcendence coin as it were, for the movement 'beyond' outlined above is always a movement 'towards' a person or entity with a separate physical and spiritual existence from without; it is that which at once enables (in the sense that it is the precondition for) and necessitates the crossing of boundaries. This concept is fully reinstated in the late essays. In 'Notes of 1970-71', as in 'Author and Hero' many years before, the mutual transcendence of consciousnesses, genuine otherness, is unreservedly evaluated as positive: 'The fundamental advantages of outsideness (spatial, temporal and national)' ('Notes of 1970-71', 346). In 'Methodology of the Human Sciences', outsideness is discussed as the prerequisite for the interrelationship of equal subjects in dialogue (371). In 'Reworking of Dostoevsky' the context of its discussion is, as of old, the author/hero relation (324-5); here Bakhtin reasserts the laudable failure of Dostoevsky to exploit his authorial outsideness to reifying, depersonalising ends. Might this late admission to the lasting asymmetry of the author/hero relation not mean that Bakhtin still has a place for divine transcendence?

There is in fact a specific indication that the later Bakhtin has not given up hope that there is, as he states in 'Author and Hero', a 'higher authority [*instantsiya*] blessing culture' (179). (Indeed, the very persistence of his optimism, the unconditional affirmation of human creativity despite the understanding of cultural corruption he developed over the years of his exile, gestures towards this, suggesting that Bakhtin continued to breathe the air of faith which in 'Author and Hero' he had declared to be indispensable to human existence.) The hint is contained in his discussion of the 'super-addressee' (*nadadresat*), the third party in every dialogue who offers 'absolutely just responsive understanding' ('Problem of the Text', 305) to the speaker who fears being misconstrued by his or her immediate addressee:

The author can never yield all of himself and his entire speech composition up to the complete and *final* will of his present or close addressees (after all, even one's closest descendants can make mistakes), and always presupposes (with a greater or lesser degree of awareness) some particular higher instance [*instantsiya*] of responsive understanding, which may move off in various directions. ('Problem of the Text', 306)

Bakhtin is careful to point out that the super-addressee need not be God, or even metaphysical in nature, suggesting science, the judgement of history and absolute truth, among others, as alternatives.

Nevertheless there are two compelling reasons to suggest that Bakhtin's own super-addressee would reasonably have to be God: firstly, his choice of terminology (*vysshaya instantsiya*), which is directly taken up from 'Author and Hero' (166, 179) and 'Exercise Books' (155), both of which place the designation in a theological context; secondly, and still more convincingly, Bakhtin's undoubted personalism precludes the possibility of assigning him any of his own alternatives, which being less than personal must be considered unworthy, not to say incapable, of the ultimate understanding ascribed to the super-addressee.

If for Bakhtin transcendence is important as a means, then personality is the end it serves. Even freedom is for him ultimately that which allows the full unfolding and self-expression of personality. After the exposition of these principles in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the personal dimension to transcendence and freedom was suppressed in Bakhtin's writing, the emphasis shifting to an apology for cultural and ideological plurality on a broad social and historical scale. In the late essays, however, the focus is again narrowed and, indeed, contrary to what one might expect from the work of the intervening years, even intensified. For Bakhtin personality in relation has become the essence of human culture, with understanding as its highest goal. The latter is a significant development: in 'Author and Hero' the imbalance of the author/hero relation precluded mutual understanding, whilst in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the most important aspect of personality was its right to strive for self-determination and self-expression over against other, intruding personalities. In the late essays the role of the other is played by the conversation partner, the reader, the receiver of texts, who, unlike the hero, is not epistemologically disadvantaged. Every text has an author ('Problem of the Text', 282) and 'every truly creative text is always to some extent the free revelation of a personality, unpre-determined by empirical necessity' ('Problem of the Text', 285). The relation between texts is personal in nature ('Notes of 1970-71', 340), since they come together as two subjects ('Problem of the Text', 285): the author (with his or her completed utterance), and the reader (with his or her responding utterance). Both the word ('Notes of 1970-71', 353) and meaning ('Methodology of the Human Sciences', 372) are personal. But the moment of understanding does not involve the obliteration of either of the participating consciousnesses; they retain their essential outsidedness, but both are enriched and

changed by the experience ('Notes of 1970-71', 346-7). Finally, the phenomenon of meeting comes to occupy a privileged place in Bakhtin's late thought: 'Meeting with a great person as something determining, obligating and binding – this is the highest moment of understanding' ('Notes of 1970-71', 347).

But can one meet with God? What relation does the Creator ultimately bear to his Creation? The clearest indication of Bakhtin's final position on this question is afforded by his discussion of the concept of the image of the author, found in three of the late essays, in 'Problem of the Text' (287-8), 'Notes of 1970-71' (353-4), and 'Methodology of the Human Sciences' (362-3). The Scotian terminology used in all three instances leaves no doubt that Bakhtin is consciously drawing on a theological model of creation to elucidate a literary phenomenon.² Each time he rejects the idea that the author may be present in the work as an image on the grounds that that which represents (the author is described as the 'representing origin' ('Problem of the Text', 287)) *ipso facto* cannot be also represented. The distinction is made between the pure and the partially represented author ('Problem of the Text'), or (in 'Notes of 1970-71') the primary and secondary authors. The pure or primary author is invisible ('Problem of the Text') and silent ('Notes of 1970-71'), existing beyond the work, but unavailable to the reader. It seems likely that Bakhtin conceives the ultimate primary author in the same way, the *natura non creata* with whom his creation can have no direct relation, and of whom, essentially, it cannot be spoken.

Nevertheless, Bakhtin remains insistent that the author *is* present in the work as a whole: 'he is present in that moment [of the work] which is impossible to isolate, where content and form merge indissolubly, and above all we sense his presence in form' ('Methodology of the Human Sciences', 362). The same idea had already been expressed in 'Content, Material and Form' (see note 1) and, although somewhat differently, in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*: 'Ultimate semantic authority – the author's intention – is realized not in his direct discourse but with the help of other people's words, created and distributed specifically as the words of others' (109 [188]). The 'artistic system' of languages which 'orchestrates the intentional theme of the author' ('Discourse in the Novel', 112 [299]) is a variation on the same theme in the essays on novelistic discourse. Lastly, one recalls that Bakhtin considered every creative work to be the revelation of a personality (see above). Yet all these expressions

of the mode of the artist's presence in his or her work hold in common that the author's self-revelation is mediated through his or her creation. We may surmise that Bakhtin came to seek God 'in the world', specifically in the world of human culture, that is, the world of personalities, at the points where consciousness comes into contact with consciousness, on the borders where meeting takes place and understanding occurs. Thus the 'assimilation of the riches of human culture' ('Notes of 1970-71', 348) which for Bakhtin is the last stage in a person's life-long quest to orient him- or herself in a world of alien words, is, given the impossibility of knowing God as He exists beyond the world, the best path to understanding, that is, to meeting, the One behind it all.

THE FALL

Bakhtin employs the biblical term 'Fall' (*grekhopadenie*) only once, in 'Author and Hero' (109). The set of terms and concepts associated with the figure, however, have enormous and as yet unrecognised significance for his work, from the earliest to the latest texts. In Chapter 2 it was proposed that in his youth Bakhtin had a vision of a complex yet integral universe, for which he felt the potential yet which he at the same time perceived to be undermined by something approaching an existential flaw in being. The origin of the flaw, or split (Russian: *treshchina*; 'split', 'crack', 'fissure'; 'Philosophy of the Act', 113), is the human being, who, being possessed of free will, may choose to act in such a way as to enrich the event of being or, on the contrary, choose to renounce responsible living and thus contribute to what Bakhtin perceived as a crisis in modern culture ('Philosophy of the Act', 123). This crisis consists in the opening up of a gulf (*bezdna*) between the products of culture and their producers, between all that is closed, abstract, impersonal, repeatable and deaf to value and life itself as a vital, open, unique process charged with values and proceeding from the specific spatial and temporal locatedness of each participating subject. However, this subject, if he or she gives him- or herself up to a committed life of action, constantly actualises, concretises abstract truths by incarnating them in the deed and thus bringing them into the historical process. It is striking how little Bakhtin's understanding of what constitutes a 'healthy' (in the sense of *heil*, 'whole') culture alters over the course of his life's work; although its specific manifestation varies, the enemy,

closure, remains the same, as does the insistence on humanity as the culprit for all that is wrong in the universe.

But the notion of human guilt is not the only echo of the Christian concept of the Fall in 'Philosophy of the Act', as becomes clear from a close examination of the language Bakhtin employs. I argued in Chapter 2 that his terminology strongly evokes also the biblical link between the state of fallenness and the unjustified bid of humanity for autonomy, its prideful self-reliance and egocentric thought and action. The key linguistic markers here were the prefixes *samo-* (self-) and *ot-* (movement away from), the verb *pretendovat'* ('to lay false claim to'), and the Russian adjective for proud, *gordyi*.

Chapter 2 discussed the Fall motif as it is applied in 'Author and Hero' to aesthetic activity. It was seen how the terms *samo-* and *preznyiia* continue to express the same basic ideas. In this essay the Christian source for the motif is made abundantly clear as a result of the other Christian figures which abound around it. In particular, Bakhtin introduces God (variously expressed in addition to the straightforward label as the 'absolute semantic future', the 'supreme outsidedness', the 'higher authority' and the 'Author') as the One before whom the subject is responsible and upon whom he or she is dependent; thus a rejection of that dependence is more closely akin to sin, traditionally the rejection of a relationship with a personal being, one's Creator to whom one owes allegiance. The essay also takes this theme of dependence further, exhaustively describing the subject's perceptual limitations and introducing the motifs of need and penitence as the signs of a healthy openness to others and to God. Autonomy in 'Author and Hero' is axiological autonomy, the claim to be in possession of aesthetic value, the claim to formal self-sufficiency, as it were, which Bakhtin maintains is unjustified. This formal self-sufficiency is, of course, another manifestation of closure, which is described as 'spiritual death' (109). In 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin extends the scope of the Fall, which in 'Philosophy of the Act' had been seen to infect the world of culture, to include the whole of being. For him everything 'given' and defined in the world, not only objects and persons but also such phenomena as the past and, significantly, language, now becomes an affront to the only legitimate source of closure, lying beyond history in the absolute future (116–17). 'Author and Hero' stresses the significance of alterity as such for the aesthetic relation, and rejects as 'impoverishing' aesthetic theories which tend to reduce it to one consciousness. In

particular he attacks at great length (55–81) the concept of empathy by demonstrating that if taken to its logical conclusion it entails the merging of the contemplator with what is contemplated. The object of contemplation is impoverished by such a union since the contemplator is no longer able to enrich it by the gift of form, a gift which can be made only from a position of outsideness.

By the time of *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* Bakhtin has brought together his objections to 'Philosophy of the Act's 'world of theory' and 'Author and Hero's 'impoverishing theories' ('Author and Hero', 78) into a coherent position against a manner of thinking about the world which he now labels 'monologic'. Monologic discourse is that discourse which refuses to recognise the validity of consciousnesses other than that of the discourses, locating truth in the unity of a single consciousness and rejecting dissenting judgements as error, treating them as dead material, that is, reifying them (*Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 74–5 [80–1]). Bakhtin maintains that 'this faith in the self-sufficiency of a single consciousness . . . is a profound structural characteristic of the creative ideological activity of modern times, determining all its internal and external forms' (79 [82]). To it he opposes the unity of existence, insisting that a unified truth can arise also between consciousness (78–9 [81]) and unconditionally affirming the principle of plurality. It is not difficult to see how his previous positions may be integrated into this one. 'Philosophy of the Act' insists on the 'world of life', as opposed to the 'world of theory', as being the only fully integrated reality, for it can embrace the theoretical world whereas the latter is incapable of embracing the world of life:

Insofar as we tear a judgement away from the unity of the historically real act-deed which brings it into being and ascribe it to one or another theoretical unity there is no way out of its content-semantic aspect into the real, unique event of being. ('Philosophy of the Act', 86)

Moreover, it is individual consciousnesses which bring theory alive in being by realising it in responsible action. In the essay Bakhtin attacks all philosophies with pretensions to be 'primary philosophies' on the grounds that they attempt to reduce life to its abstract theorisation. 'Author and Hero' sees the same reductiveness going on in the theory of empathy. However, *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* does manifest one striking development from the early essays: whereas in 'Author and Hero' the aesthetic relation was held up as immune in

principle from such reductionism, Bakhtin now acknowledges that his own principle of finalisation (*zavershenie*) contains the seeds of a destructive monologism in the area of artistic literature, and frames his whole thesis on Dostoevsky around the opposite conviction that there are exceptions to the monologic rule. This step paves the way for an increasing pessimism in Bakhtin's world-view. If before *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* there were still areas shielded from the rot, now his crusade against closure takes on the tone of a partisan rebellion against an occupying power.

Bakhtin's work of the thirties and forties further extends the reach of the life-destroying principle. His new verbal coinage for monologism, the 'centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life' ('Discourse in the Novel', 83 [271]), expresses a phenomenon which is historically unrestricted (one recalls that in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the emphasis was particularly on developments from the Enlightenment onwards) and present at all levels and in all areas of culture, including philology, politics and religion. These centripetal forces have always been and are all-pervasive. The common denominator for these areas and levels is language, which from now on will command most of Bakhtin's attention: language becomes the concrete embodiment of ideological (human) evil and the front on which the battle against it is fought. These centripetal forces operate in exactly the same way as monologism, 'working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralisation, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralisation' ('Discourse in the Novel', 84 [271]). However, there is also a centrifugal linguistic force present in the world, heteroglossia, or social and geographical linguistic diversity, which by its intrinsic and therefore vital plurality provides a counterbalance to centralising language ('Discourse in the Novel', 85). It is not insignificant that Bakhtin attributes heteroglossia with an innate vitality whilst the centripetal forces of language are presented as purely ideological, and therefore the work of the human mind (the same phenomenon is detectable in 'Philosophy of the Act'): this gestures towards the Christian idea of evil as a parasite on good, perverting it to corrupt ends. Nevertheless the opposition to monoglossia does find conscious expression in the form of a particular kind of artist, from the popular parodist (along with all generators of folk humour) to the author of the heteroglottic novel; the weapon of these artists is laughter, expressed in 'dialogized heteroglossia', or heteroglossia consciously and parodically opposed

to literary language. *Rabelais* essentially applies Bakhtin's idea of laughter as the counter-force to ideological oppression in the analysis of a particular historical epoch understood and exploited by a particular author.

The question one is drawn to ask when reading these works ('Epic and Novel', 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', 'Discourse in the Novel', *Rabelais*) is: where does Bakhtin's peculiar passion come from? Why does he dramatise the conflict so much, why does he so aggressively polarise? The answer, I suggest, lies in the roots of his understanding of good and evil, in the motif of the Fall, the pervasiveness of evil in the world and the capacity of the human being to capitulate or to fight it. Bakhtin's notes of this period ('Changes to *Rabelais*' and 'Exercise Books') strongly support this assumption. They evidence a deeply pessimistic view of culture and the human spirit which indicate that the up-beat tone of the completed essays of the period does not so much represent naive idealism (as has been suggested) as desperate and heroic optimism, even bravado. The content of these notes was discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. In 'Exercise Books' Bakhtin darkly proposes that the artistic image, all knowledge of an object, language itself, is permeated by violence (*nasilié*) and falsehood (*lozh'*) and possessed of a murderous force (*umershchvlyayushchaya sila*) by virtue of the very process of finalisation which he found to be redemptive in 'Author and Hero', which is now said in stronger language than ever to deprive a person of his or her freedom ('Exercise Books', 153-4). Humanity is not an innocent victim in this but the selfishly motivated perpetrator of evil: 'up until now the spoken human word has been exclusively naive, and the speakers vainglorious, self-assured' (154). 'Changes to *Rabelais*' goes still further, declaring that 'self-assertion is inseparable from the destruction of one's enemies' (137); in a certain sense humanity is powerless to extricate itself from the existential situation in which to be is possible only at the expense of others' being, and in which therefore it is impossible not to be implicated in violence and deceit (152). For the first and only time Bakhtin rejects being in favour of 'the quietness and integrity, the thoroughness of non-being' (155): being is 'irreparable'; it is better not to have been born (142, 155).

Against the background of these notes, the subdued tone of the later essays becomes more understandable, as does the reverence in which are held understanding, meeting, and other fundamentally

non-violent forms of relationship that involve a significant degree of humility in relation to one's own self: for Bakhtin these must always be the exception rather than the norm, and a mark of high spirituality. Whilst the Fall motif in this way informs all of Bakhtin's later concerns, its explicit markers (the use of the prefixes *samo-* and *ot-*, the concepts of falsehood and violence, the equation of closure with death) occur most frequently in 'Reworking of Dostoevsky', where Bakhtin insists, just as he did in his earliest work, on the interdependence of subjects as the precondition of spiritual health and vitality: 'Nonself-sufficiency [*nesamodostatochnost'*], the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness . . . Separation [*otryv*], dissociation [*otedinenie*], and enclosure within the self as the main reason for the loss of one's self' (311 [287]). Further on he picks up from 'Author and Hero' the concept of vindication from without: 'Justification cannot be *self*-justification, recognition cannot be *self*-recognition. I receive my name from others, and it exists for others (self-nomination is imposture [*samoimenovanie—samoizvanstvo*])' (312 [287–8]). A person's attempt at self-definition is later described as *lozhno*, 'false' (319). Alongside this implicit appeal to counter the 'Fall experienced in being' by acknowledging one's dependent state in a spirit of humility there is a reiteration of the opposite but related danger of abusing the dependence of others on you. Here the motif of violence recurs. Bakhtin writes, for example, echoing 'Exercise Books', of Dostoevsky's criticism of all external forms of relationship and interaction, from violence to authority: 'artistic finalisation as a variety of violence' (317 [291–2]). Again, one senses Bakhtin's total identification with Dostoevsky's voice when he writes, 'in everything that is dark, secret, mystical, to the extent that it could exert an influence on *personality*, Dostoevsky saw *violence* destroying the individual' (323 [297]). Thus in Bakhtin's later work there remain, developed but essentially unchanged, the twin threats of proud and destructive aloofness, on the one hand, and tyranny, on the other, to the event of being in its ideal form as it is still conceived by Bakhtin, as the free interaction of personalities.

INCARNATION

The motif of incarnation (*voploshchenie*) is one of the leading figures in Bakhtin's work. Its several manifestations and functions have been variously discussed in previous chapters, according to the demands

of the material. Chapters 2 and 3 focused on the role of Christ specifically in Bakhtin's early philosophy, Chapter 4 argued for the pivotal significance of embodiment for the philosophy of dialogue, Chapter 5 considered the increasing importance of incarnation for Bakhtin in the face of pressure to revise, even reject, the concept of the authoritarian author, Chapter 6 examined Bakhtin's understanding of the word as the flesh of ideology, and Chapter 7 attempted an interpretation of the Incarnation as a carnival decrowning, a materialisation of truth.

As a touchstone for the integration of these various insights into Bakhtin's preoccupation with *voploshchenie* the following statement from 'Author and Hero' serves well: 'Every act of evaluation is the adoption of an individual position in being; even God had to be incarnated in order to show mercy, suffer and *forgive*, to come down, as it were, from the abstract view-point of justice' (113). Over the course of his lifetime, as we have seen, one of the constants of Bakhtin's world-view is an emphatically negative evaluation of the abstract and the systematic, which is extended to its limit in the above quotation by the inclusion of God the Father as one of its obvious manifestations. The specific form *voploshchenie* takes mutates in accordance with the numerous cultural hypostases of the abstract which provide Bakhtin's targets, but its function is always to counteract, to guarantee concretion, individuation and thereby meaning (*smysl*, as opposed to axiologically neutral 'signification', *znachenie*) and value.

'Philosophy of the Act' lays a detailed philosophical foundation for this aspect of Bakhtin's thought. Incarnation is presented as an antidote to the split in being, as responsibly active subjects clothe theoretical ethical (and other) positions with the flesh and blood of individuation. This is made possible, the reader will recall, by the subject's own embodied state, his or her concrete, individual existence in time and space

There are also multiple references to *voploshchenie* in 'Author and Hero'. Since this essay is an application of the philosophy of 'Philosophy of the Act' to aesthetics, to the specifically creative act, it is not surprising that one of the manifestations of the incarnation theme is in reference to the temporal and spatial specificity of the author, who takes up a meaningful and responsible position with respect to his heroes (for example, 23, 113). However, as well as being a precondition for responsible activity, incarnation in 'Author and

Hero' is also the result of that activity: the author bestows form upon the fragmented and needy self; he or she embodies the hero in art (for example, 26, 47, 71). As was pointed out in Chapter 3, this act of embodiment is conceived by Bakhtin as redemptory, saving the self from formlessness. Such a conception is an extension of that of 'Philosophy of the Act', where form is given only to theoretical truths, but the extension comes to dog Bakhtin, proving unworkable in its application to free persons. As his work develops, the incarnational idea remains fruitful as a way of combating metaphysical ideologies with their violent pretensions to the custodianship of truth: a thoroughgoing socio-historical approach to truth 'saves' being, or has the potential to save being, from such manifestations of tyranny. A fundamental part of such an approach to truth is the situatedness of persons elaborated in 'Philosophy of the Act', but incarnation is rejected as inappropriate when applied by persons to other persons, since it violates what is for Bakhtin sovereign, freedom of the subject.

As has been noted in Chapters 4 and 5, it is in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* that the rejection of 'Author and Hero's' redemptive incarnation is first manifested, whilst 'Philosophy of the Act's' notion of incarnation based on the individuation of consciousnesses is brought to its point of fullest development; indeed, the latter occurs in reaction to the former. In Chapter 4 it was seen how the incorporation of consciousnesses in bodies militates against 'monologism', or the subjugation of everything to one dominant consciousness. To this Bakhtin opposes a vision of multiple, embodied consciousnesses, each with its own valid, personal truth, which is both arrived at and expressed in dialogue. Chapter 5 rehearsed the difficulties this new artistic paradigm raises with respect to the authorial voice, and suggested that Bakhtin coincides with Dostoevsky in looking to the possibility of one of the incarnated consciousnesses commanding spiritual (ideological) authority of a persuasive kind, of authoring from within the world and in such a way as to preserve the freedom of his or her heroes. For Bakhtin, as for Dostoevsky, Christ is the most convincing historical figure, the apotheosis of compelling personal truth, and those who have been persuaded by him are his truest representatives; they bring God down, as it were, into the world, where He can be encountered as an equal.

After *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the incarnation motif develops in two diverging, but related, directions, becoming incorporated into

Bakhtin's theories of discourse and carnival respectively. Chapter 6 traced the process of redistribution of emphasis from 'consciousness' to 'discourse' in 'Discourse in the Novel'. The result of this for the Incarnation motif is that truths, or ideologies, or world-views, are presented as being embodied in language rather than in persons. In his discussion of artistic literature as text the word becomes the flesh, as it were, of meaning. In 'Discourse in the Novel' and related studies the notion of a unitary novelistic style is replaced by that of a plurality of mutually illuminating styles, or languages, but as ever for Bakhtin art is a microcosm of culture in general, such that his apology for a new stylistics of the novel springs from an understanding of culture as consisting of a multitude of socially and historically determined languages, and, consequently, a multitude of competing ideologies, or truths. Just as a plurality of embodied consciousnesses precluded, at least ideally, a reductive monologic ideology from gaining ascendance, the plurality of languages resists discourses with pretensions to dominance. However, as was observed in Chapter 6, the predominantly positive 'function' of a multilingual world in counterbalancing authoritarian discourse is offset by the inevitable crisis in the position of the author, writing under those cultural conditions. The enlightened, truth-seeking author becomes morally unable to adopt an authoritative discourse of his or her own, and is forced into hiding, or silence: authorial truth is to be sought henceforth in the intonation and points of intersection of the myriad of socially determined discourses which form his or her material ('Discourse in the Novel', 112 [299]). Essentially this process is a development of the authorial crisis present in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* on a broad social and historical scale. But if in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* there is the 'way out' in the form of an authoritative, yet non-authoritarian embodied voice, in 'Discourse in the Novel' there is the concept of 'inwardly persuasive discourse' (154 [342]), a language among many which evokes response from within rather than imposing its truth from without. This is the guise the Christ idea takes in Bakhtin's essays on novelistic discourse.

Rabelais represents the apotheosis of the Incarnation motif, in that it becomes the organising idea for the whole work, as indeed for the very concept of carnival, with its ritual, irreverent, thoroughgoing practice of debasing the abstract and ideal by bringing them down to a material level, represented in grotesque bodily images. For Bakhtin such a practice becomes one more way of counteracting 'fallen'

monopolising ideologies and restoring being to health. Carnival ambivalence is one more way of fighting for an open and developing universe over and against the forces of closure. It is in the carnival writings that these forces are most portrayed as lodged in human institutions of political power, although clearly Bakhtin does not restrict them to such institutions, but sees them as existentially endemic in being, as 'Changes to *Rabelais*', in particular, shows. That carnival as a materialising practice is likewise not restricted to the medieval period is obvious from Bakhtin's interest in Greek and Roman carnival practice and, of course, his conviction that folk humour, of which carnival is the most succinct expression, radically affected the development of artistic prose in the modern period. Indeed, Bakhtin's theories of carnival laughter and discourse are brought together by his linkage of the parodic word, carnival's literary self-manifestation, with heteroglossia: the multitude of hierarchically unprivileged languages contend with the official language of truth by means of parody, both in life and, artistically, in literature. Parody strips official discourse of its pretensions to ideal status by making its materiality plain (highlighting its semantic and formal markers by subjecting them to ridicule): it is exposed as one ideology among many, embodied in one particular set of signs. It may therefore be said that the Incarnation motif in its different manifestations in 'Discourse in the Novel' and *Rabelais* finds common ground in Bakhtin's understanding of the parodic roots of novelistic discourse.

If carnival incarnates the abstract and ideal, the medieval fool incarnates carnival, giving it permanent expression in his own person. The fool, as I have suggested in Chapter 7, is the masked inheritor of the Christ motif in Bakhtin's carnival writings. However, his role here is not so much to proffer an authoritative, inwardly persuasive voice as to represent a bastion of liberty, to stand as an example and a source of hope for the people. This function of the fool echoes the function of Christ as a model and example to emulate which is outlined in 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero'. But in this middle period of Bakhtin's career his work is under the influence of a deep pessimism, with the result that his understanding of what may constitute a paradigm of responsible action has less the character of life-affirming, self-sacrificial living as a positive antidote to disembodied, rootless existence ('Philosophy of the Act'), and more the character of guerilla warfare against a

corrupt world. Finding no discourse and no sign to be uncompromised by deceit and violence, the fool employs a strategy of subversion through laughter, clearing a space for truth by subjecting tyrannous discourse to ridicule. As I argued in Chapter 7, the author of the heteroglotic novel inherits the role of the fool, similarly using a host of corrupt languages to liberating ends whilst reserving his or her own voice for fear of contamination: thus the author and the fool, God the Father and Christ, now find a common bond.

Whilst 'Philosophy of the Act', 'Author and Hero' and *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* explicitly root the notion of *voploshchenie* in the biblical Incarnation and the figure of Christ, references to this source almost completely disappear in the exilic works, although the significance of the figure does not diminish, as we have seen.³ The most obvious explanation for this is the reality of Soviet censorship and the threat of re-arrest (bearing in mind that Bakhtin was originally arrested in connection with alleged underground religious activities). The change of subject matter from philosophy to literary history and the theory of discourse must also play a role. Least likely is any suggestion that Bakhtin may have quietly dismissed his original source in a process of disillusionment with his early Christian outlook. This is borne out not only by the persistence of the motif during his years in exile but also, still more convincingly, by the re-emergence of allusions to Christ in the late essays, including direct references to him in 'Notes of 1970–71'. These references display both a continuity with Bakhtin's early conception of Christ and the marks of the development in his world outlook in the intervening period. The first reference, 'the word as personal. Christ as truth. I ask him' (353), brief though it is, expresses, on the one hand, 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Author and Hero's' notion of Christ as an example to be looked to, and, on the other, the idea in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* of embodied, personal truth, the authoritative, non-authoritarian ('I ask him') voice which organises all others. The second reference, following closely behind the first, is on the contrary saturated with the problematic of Bakhtin's exilic work: 'The unspoken truth in Dostoevsky (Christ's kiss). The problem of silence' (353). Set in the context of a meditation on the modern crisis of the authorial word, these jottings seem to vindicate the link that has been drawn in this study (see Chapter 6) between discourse and corruption, on the one hand, and silence and truth, on the other, together with its theological interpretation of their significance. By

the end of Bakhtin's work Christ most demonstrates his authority in silence, since speech has become impossible. The third and final reference to Christ adds the dimension of freedom to those of truth and purity:

The denial (failure to understand) of the sphere of predetermination through which freedom must pass (both on the historical and on the individual and personal level), the denial of the intermediate sphere lying between the Grand Inquisitor (with his statehood, rhetoric and power) and Christ (with his silence and kiss). (356)

Thus Christ for Bakhtin comes to stand for freedom, a freedom which is ultimately achieved through silence and love.

LOVE

Love is the fourth Christian motif which continues to exercise significant influence on Bakhtin's thought throughout his literary career. Chapter 3 examined in detail the function of love in 'Author and Hero' as the basis for the aesthetic relation, an idea which is further supported in the other essays of the early period, 'Philosophy of the Act' and 'Content, Material and Form'. According to Bakhtin, love is the prerequisite for all creative activity, which is distinctive among other areas of cultural endeavour in its basically affirmative approach to the world, incorporating within art life in all its aspects, emotional and volitional, cognitive and ethical ('Content, Material and Form', 27-30). In contrast to the essentially negative approach of, say, the cognitive disciplines, which strip away from their object everything that is extraneous to their purpose, creative activity incorporates the whole of its object into the artwork, giving it the 'gift' of form. This requires a fundamentally positive attitude, which Bakhtin describes as love: 'through form I express my love, my affirmation, my acceptance' ('Content, Material and Form', 58). In 'Philosophy of the Act' this conviction is described in detail:

In this sense it is possible to speak of objective aesthetic love . . . The axiological multiformity of being as *human* being (in its relation to man) can be given only to loving contemplation. Only love can [support] and strengthen this multi- and pluriformity without letting it slip away and without scattering it in different directions, without retaining merely the bare framework of its basic lines and semantic features. Only unself-interested love, according to the principle 'not loved because good, but good because loved', only lovingly interested attention can develop a

strength which is sufficiently tense to embrace and [enforce] the concrete multiformity of being, without either impoverishing or systematising it. (130)

Bakhtin never renounces the above-elucidated principles. The plurality of the universe remains for him a high value which is difficult to defend, the impoverishment of being by disinterested or, increasingly in his work, self-interested approaches to it always constituting the easier option due to the destructive tendency (discussed above) which he detects in being. Love is one of only two fundamental attitudes to the world which Bakhtin finds to be strong enough to support pluralism (the other is laughter; Chapter 7 investigates the interrelationship between the two).

However, although love remains the motivating force behind creative activity, its means, Bakhtin redefines what constitutes for him the proper ends of love after 'Author and Hero'. In 'Author and Hero', as Chapter 3 attempts to show, the end of authorial love is the salvation of the hero by the drawing of all of his or her multiform features into one integral image. The hero plays no role in this process; all the initiative and activity comes from the author, who gives form to the receptive hero. As we have seen, the model is taken from the Christian doctrine of free grace and is applied on the highly idealistic working assumption that every author, or self, is as pure in his or her loving intentions as is God Himself. But the times eroded Bakhtin's early confidence in humanity, and he came to see this gift (*dar*) as a blow (*udar*): 'The object itself does not co-participate in its own image. In relation to the object itself the image is either a blow [*udar*] from without, or given it in vain [*darom*] from without, an unjustified, hypocritical and crafty gift' ('Exercise Books', 156). From *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* onwards the end of love becomes not the blessedness but the freedom of the hero/other, and the motif of salvation, or grace, as it is understood in 'Author and Hero', drops out of Bakhtin's work, never to be restored. It is replaced by an intense concern for the 'salvation' of being by the promotion and preservation of the 'multiformity' described in the quotation from 'Philosophy of the Act' above, but now Bakhtin argues for such a preservation not by the external imposition of an integral image on the world but by allowing the interaction of its parts (whether voices or discourses) to create its own higher unity. In relation to persons, love meets the end of liberation by a different,

still more radical, form of self-sacrifice from that of 'Author and Hero'. In 'Author and Hero' the self/author renounces his or her part in the flow of life to adopt the detached aesthetic point of view necessary for the creation of a work of art or the bestowal of form; in *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* the self/author takes self-sacrifice a step further: now he or she refrains from exploiting the 'surplus of vision', gained by the act of detachment, in such a way as to violate the freedom of the hero/other. This is made especially clear in 'Reworking of Dostoevsky':

Not merging with another, but preserving one's own position of *outsidedness*⁴ and the *surplus* of vision and understanding connected with it. But the real question is Dostoevsky's use of this surplus. Not for materialisation and finalisation. The most important aspect of this surplus is love . . . This is an open and honest surplus, dialogically revealed to the other person, a surplus expressed by the addressed and not by the secondhand word. (325 [299])

However, 'Reworking of Dostoevsky' makes equally clear that Bakhtin does not throw the baby out with the bath water, as it were, but reconstructs his image of divine creativity to fit the new paradigm. Divine love is now most fully revealed in an ultimate respect for the independent existence of the creature: 'This is, so to speak, the activity of God in His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself. This is activity of a higher quality' (310 [285]).

It would be wrong to assume that this late viewpoint was won easily or quickly and without challenge, or that Bakhtin's faith in love never wavered. The absence of any recourse to the motif of love in the completed works of his exilic years suggests it had become problematic for Bakhtin: there is no place for the intimacy of a love relation between author and hero in the large-scale historical and social surveys of discourse which these works undertake. Nevertheless, in his notes of the period Bakhtin tentatively reaffirms for himself that love is the only safe basis for the aesthetic relation:

Only love can see and represent the inner freedom of an object . . . The absolute unconsumability [*nepotrebitimost'*] of the object is revealed only to love; love leaves it whole and situated outside of itself and side by side with itself (or behind). Love fondles and caresses borders; borders take on a new significance. Love does not speak about an object in its absence, but speaks about it with the object itself. ('Exercise Books', 154)

This can be compared with a remarkable statement from ‘Changes to *Rabelais*’: ‘With love physical life enters a new sphere of being. Life gains recognition from outside of itself . . . Hell as life without love’ (152). These statements recall ‘Author and Hero’ with their emphasis on the recognising and transforming capacities of love, similar to a movement of grace, but equally insist on the regard in which love holds the freedom of its object. But in the notes love appears to be in great isolation and under threat from an impure and unequal world order: ‘The fundamental artistic tonality of the word cannot fail to be love (a certain minimum of love is essential for the artistic approach to the world). But the tones of love are muffled by hierarchical tones: there is no pure tone of love’ (‘Changes to *Rabelais*’, 156). As a result Bakhtin concludes that true goodness in a person cannot find verbal expression; the loving person remains silent for fear of contamination (‘Exercise Books’, 154). Still more pessimistically, when in ‘Changes to *Rabelais*’ Bakhtin speculates upon the emergence of a ‘loving soul’ in a position to judge being in its corruption, he maintains that its goodness can have no positive content and may only express revulsion: ‘it is the voice of non-being, there is not a trace of being in it, for being has been entirely poisoned by lies’ (152).

By the time of the later essays, however, Bakhtin’s faith in the potential of artists and human beings in general to overcome, or at least circumvent, the despotism of the world order appears from the evidence of the texts to be somewhat restored. ‘Pure negation’, he writes, ‘is incapable of giving rise to an image. In even the most negative of images there is always a positive moment (love—admiration)’ (‘Notes of 1970–71’, 360). Moreover, his affirmation of the potential for understanding, meeting and agreement, all of which require love, or the self-sacrificial suspension of one’s power as an observer to define or judge the other, confirms his hope for the world.

Notes

I INTRODUCTION

- 1 I refer to V. S. Bibler, *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin ili poetika kul'tury* (Moscow, Progress, Gnosis, 1991). Since this book takes no account of Christian motifs in Bakhtin's work, I do not include it in my discussion of the secondary literature. In many respects it performs for Russian readers the function of such Western introductory studies as those of Todorov, Clark and Holquist, and Morson and Emerson.
- 2 Gardiner does not include Bakhtin's early and late writings in his discussion. Since these are precisely the texts in which Bakhtin gives most direct expression to his Christian world-view, it is not surprising that Gardiner feels able to dismiss it so lightly.
- 3 I am indebted to Hugh Pyper of Leeds University for directing my attention to White, Reed and Prickett in his paper on 'Bakhtin and the Reading of the Hebrew Bible' delivered in 1993 at the Higher School of Religions and Philosophy in St Petersburg.
- 4 Not only professional theologians have taken an interest in the Bible from a Bakhtinian perspective. See Malcolm Jones, 'A Bachtinian Approach to the Gospels: The Problem of Authority', *Scando-Slavica*, 42 (1996), 58–76. His is the only study I know of to focus exclusively on the New Testament.
- 5 While making the final revisions to this book my attention was drawn to the imminent publication of a book by Alexandar Mihailovic entitled *Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin's Theology of Discourse* (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1997). The advertising material for the book describes it as 'a provocative meditation on Bakhtin's concept of the *Logos*'. It seems certain that this book will adopt a similar viewpoint on Bakhtin to my own. However, I was unable to obtain a copy of Mihailovic's book before submitting my own to print.
- 6 See Harold Stahmer's article, 'Mikhail Bakhtin and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: Speech, the Spirit, and Social Change', *Dialog, karnaval, khronotop*, 2 (1994), 33–54, and Vitaly Makhlin's book of lectures on Rosenzweig, Ebner and Buber in connection with Bakhtin, entitled *Ta i drугоi (istoki filozofii 'dialoga' XX veka)* (St Petersburg, RKhGI, 1995). I am

also aware of an excellent, unfortunately unpublished, dissertation on Bakhtin and Buber by Martin Corner of Sussex University, which, in contrast to Perlina's essay, directly addresses the specifically theological problematic of the two philosophers' theories.

7 See note 5.

8 Kozhinov relates how on their first meeting 'Bakhtin immediately declared that he was not a literary critic, but a philosopher, and that he worked on literature only because he could not publish philosophical works at all, he couldn't even consider the possibility of publication, insofar as they did not correspond to the ruling ideology' ('Kak pishut trudy, ili Proizkhozhdenie nesozdannogo avanyurnogo romana', *Dialog, karnaval, khronotop*, 1 (1992), 113).

2 FALL AND INCARNATION IN 'TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE ACT'

- 1 I do not explore the Neo-Kantian influence on Bakhtin in this book, although clearly it is an area in great need of research. Some scholars are now working in this field. See Michael Bernard-Donals' *Mikhail Bakhtin: Between Phenomenology and Marxism* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 2, and Brian Poole's articles 'Nazad k Kaganu', *Dialog, karnaval, khronotop*, 1 (1995), 38–48, and 'Rol' M. I. Kagana v stanovlenii filosofii M. M. Bakhtina (ot Germana Kogena k Maksu Sheleru)', *Bakhtinskiĭ sbornik*, 3 (1997), 162–82. For a detailed analysis of the philosophical affinities and differences between Bakhtin and Kagan, see my 'Two of a Small Fraternity? Points of Contact and Departure in the Works of Bakhtin and Kagan up to 1924', in David Shepherd (ed.), *The Contexts of Bakhtin* (Harwood Academic Publishers, forthcoming).
- 2 In this chapter, all page references are to 'Philosophy of the Act' unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 See for example Romans 1.18–19: 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them,' and Romans 2.32: 'Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.'
- 4 Genesis 3.2–4: 'The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."'
- 5 For example, Romans 1.21: 'For although they knew God, they neither

glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.’

- 6 See for example Matthew 18.3–4: ‘And he said “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”’
- 7 The motif of finding oneself by first losing oneself is, of course, central to the gospels. For example, Mark 8.35: ‘For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.’
- 8 See ‘Philosophy of the Act’ 86, 104, 108, 114 (multiple references), 117, 118–20 (multiple references), 123, 126, 148, 154, 156.
- 9 It has often been said that Bakhtin’s interest in history in its material aspect was inspired by the work of the (allegedly) Marxist-oriented Bakhtin Circle of the 1920s. In fact, his interest goes right back to ‘Philosophy of the Act’. In these and similar articulations of the phenomenological significance of time and space for human beings lie the roots of Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope. The chronotope may also be viewed as a primary example of the Incarnation motif in Bakhtin’s work.
- 10 In ‘Author and Hero’ Christ combines in himself the two acts of self-effacement described in Russian Orthodox thought as ‘kenotic’: not only does he divest himself of his glory to appear in the world as a sacrifice for sins (the kenotic act traditionally ascribed to the Son), but he also acts out the Father’s kenotic role whereby he effaces himself in the act of Creation. This latter notion finds a clear parallel in Bakhtin’s understanding of the nature of aesthetic activity: ‘This is the external position of the author in relation to the hero, his loving self-elimination from the field of the hero’s life, his clearing of the whole field of life for him and his being, the participatory understanding and completion of the event of his life by a cognitively and ethically impartial observer’ (‘Author and Hero’, 16).

3 THE AESTHETIC GOSPEL OF ‘AUTHOR AND HERO IN AESTHETIC ACTIVITY’

- 1 Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson’s book, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford University Press, 1990), which provides the only other primarily expository overview of Bakhtin’s work to date, despite its great length, gives little attention to ‘Author and Hero’, and barely hints at the role in it of Christian motifs. See pp. 72–7, 179–96.
- 2 References to God in ‘Author and Hero’: 22, 52, 96, 98, 112, 113, 119, 120, 126, 127, 130, 131, 139, 149, 166, 176, 179.
- 3 All page references in this chapter refer to ‘Author and Hero’ unless otherwise indicated.

- 4 Compare a similar passage in ‘Author and Hero’'s sister essay ‘Philosophy of the Act’, p. 138: ‘Of course in no way does it follow that this opposition [of I and the Other] has never been either expressed or uttered; after all, it is the meaning of all Christian morality . . . but this moral principle has not up until now been given adequate academic expression, nor has it been fully and fundamentally thought through.’ ‘Author and Hero’ may legitimately be seen as an attempt to fill that gap.
- 5 Todorov’s translation of Bakhtin’s neologism *vnenakhodimost’*, derived from Greek roots. Literally, the word means ‘finding oneself outside’. See T. Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. by Wlad Godzich (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 99.
- 6 These terms will already be familiar to the reader from ‘Philosophy of the Act’, discussed in the previous chapter.
- 7 But see also, for example, 52, 60, 76, 98.
- 8 For the use of *samo-* in ‘Author and Hero’ see: 42, 61, 62, 75–6, 87, 107, 109, 111.
- 9 References to *pretenziya* and its derivatives in ‘Author and Hero’: 107 (multiple references), 109, 117, 179.
- 10 References to ‘shame’ (*styd*) and its derivatives in ‘Author and Hero’: 98, 105, 109, 117.
- 11 Compare other references to sin in ‘Author and Hero’: 107 (man’s sinful nature), 118, 130, 149.
- 12 References to the penitence-prayer motif in ‘Author and Hero’: 50, 52, 63, 71, 76, 101, 102, 105, 111, 123, 124, 126, 127, 156, 175.
- 13 Instances of ‘grace’ (*blagodat’*) and ‘gift’ (*dar*) in ‘Author and Hero’: 14, 45, 51, 52, 60, 71, 78, 80, 81, 86, 89, 90, 96, 105, 107, 116, 120, 125.
- 14 References in ‘Author and Hero’ to *spasenie*: 52, 65, 104, 112, 125, 165, 174; *iskuplenie*: 52, 65, 104, 107, 125; *otpushchenie*: 52, 71; *proshchenie*: 80, 99, 113, 118, 125, 130; *opravdanie*: 50, 51, 52, 60, 65, 76, 86, 105, 107, 109, 112, 116, 125, 127.
- 15 See Romans 3.23–6: ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.’ It seems needless to point out that these verses display the same matrix of terms (justified, grace, gift, redemption, atonement) as that under discussion in this section.
- 16 For further development of this point, see Chapters 4 and 5.
- 17 References to *voploshchenie* in ‘Author and Hero’: 12, 23, 26, 35, 47, 49, 55, 71, 76, 80, 81, 101, 113, 115, 116.
- 18 References to ‘new birth’ (*novoe rozhdenie*) in ‘Author and Hero’: 16, 34,

39, 80, 91, 107, 112, 166. Bakhtin also makes reference to ‘resurrection in the flesh’ (*voskresenie vo ploti*) on p. 89.

- 19 References to love (*lyubov'*) in ‘Author and Hero’: 13, 16, 19, 39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 67, 68, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 86, 90, 93, 98, 101, 103, 105, 106, 116, 149, 165. I have not taken into account the multiple instances of the verb *milovat'* and its derivatives, which in Russian has a wider meaning than ‘to have mercy’, connoting also love and affection.

4 WAS BAKHTIN A MARXIST? THE WORK OF THE BAKHTIN CIRCLE, 1924–1929

- 1 However, it should be borne in mind that Bakhtin was well aware of the Marxist world-view in the preceding decade also, and that he participated in public debates on Marxism on the anti-Marxist side in the years immediately following the October Revolution (see Chapter 1). My own view is that in these years he became a convinced and resolute opponent of central aspects of Marxist ideology, and that on these fundamental points he never shifted his position.
- 2 Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.
- 3 In the work of the thirties and forties, and especially in the book on Rabelais, Bakhtin does strongly promote the material aspect of culture and ideology. As I shall argue in later chapters, however, this never amounts to a denial of a possible non-material realm, and indeed, I believe his interest in the material aspects of being is motivated by the desire to find ways of combating spiritual evil (see Chapters 6 and 7). Bakhtin’s ‘materialism’ never becomes a materialistic *monism*.
- 4 I refer to the 1929 version of the Dostoevsky book; the additions of 1963, of course, are largely historical in character and reflect Bakhtin’s focus, from the 1930s onward, on the history of the novel.

5 FALLING SILENT: THE CRITICAL AESTHETIC OF PROBLEMS OF DOSTOEVSKY’S CREATIVE WORK

- 1 There is to my knowledge no English translation of the 1929 version of Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky, *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* [*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creative Work*]. Nevertheless the vast majority of this text was retained in the process of revising the book for republication as *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* [*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*] in 1963. I therefore use Caryl Emerson’s translation of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Manchester University Press, 1984) for my citations from the earlier work, and it is to this volume that the page references in square brackets refer. The first sentence of this particular quotation, however, appears only in the 1963 edition, which is why the page references for both originals are given.
- 2 Parallel statements include, ‘the relative freedom and independence

- enjoyed by the hero and his voice under the conditions of polyphonic design' [47]; 'Such is the relative independence of characters within the limits of Dostoevsky's creative design' [64]. Note also the use of the word 'preordained' in the statement: 'Such deliberate lack of [narrative] perspective is preordained by Dostoevsky's entire artistic plan' [226].
- 3 Compare this passage with a similar one in 'Author and Hero': '[Form] is the result of the interaction of author and hero. But the hero is passive in this interaction; he is not the one who *expresses* but the one who *is expressed*, but as such he determines his own form all the same, for it has to answer precisely to him, to complete from without precisely his inner, objective, vital directedness. In this respect the form has to be adequate to him, although in no way as his possible self-expression' (75). It is notable that at this point Bakhtin still categorically rejects the possibility of the hero's active self-definition.
 - 4 This accounts for the fact that theoretical radicals and conservatives alike have been able to claim *Dostoevsky's Creative Work* for their own.
 - 5 In an addition to the second chapter in 1963 a similar idea is expressed: 'We see no special need to point out that the polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism (or with dogmatism). But it should be noted that both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism). Polyphony as an *artistic method* lies in an entirely different plane' [69].
 - 6 On the same subject, see also *Dostoevsky's Creative Work*, 116 [192]; 'Reworking of Dostoevsky', 309 [285].

6 THE EXILED AUTHOR: 'DISCOURSE IN THE NOVEL' AND BEYOND

- 1 The essays 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' (1937–8) and 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism' (1936–8) were written in the same time period, but I omit them from the discussion here. The theory of the chronotope is of a different nature to that elucidated in the essays I have adopted and should be dealt with separately (material from this essay is discussed in the following chapter). The *Bildungsroman* essay has a somewhat narrower focus (to the extent that Bakhtin's focus is ever narrow) and is therefore not central to my argument in this chapter.
- 2 Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist provide a useful glossary of terms in their translation of the novel essays, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981). It is their translations of these terms that I use in this chapter.
- 3 The term Bakhtin actually uses here, as on p. 92, is '*devstvennyi*', 'virginal'. Emerson and Holquist's translation reinforces a connotation which is, nevertheless, present subliminally in the original.

- 4 I have altered Emerson and Holquist's translation to restore the force of the phrase 'embodied coexistence'.
- 5 Other references to the Ptolemy/Galileo distinction: 'Discourse in the Novel', 140 [327], 226 [415]; 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', 429–30 [65].
- 6 In an interesting reference to Galileo in 'Changes to *Rabelais*', Bakhtin notes that he had an exceptional love for the comic and the grotesque, and that he read lectures on the topography of Dante's hell (151). The reference provides further evidence that Galileo was linked in Bakhtin's mind with the 'centrifugal' cultural forces: the comic is the fundament of novelistic prose as Bakhtin understands it.
- 7 To complete the overview, here are two more quotations from 'Notes of 1970–71': 'The *I* hides itself in the *other* and *others*, wants to be only other for others, to enter the world of others to the limit as other, to cast off from oneself the burden of being the only *I* (*I-for-myself*) in the world' (352); 'Searching for one's own (authorial) voice. Being incarnated, becoming more defined, becoming less, more limited, more stupid. Not remaining on a tangent, tearing one's way into the circle of life, becoming a person among people' (352).
- 8 John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308) was a Franciscan Realist philosopher and a Scholastic theologian, one of the leading intellectuals of the Middle Ages. Several facets of his philosophy find an intriguing resonance with Bakhtin's own thought, notably his contention, against Aquinas, that the existence of God could not be proved, nor His nature comprehended (see my discussion in this chapter and in Chapter 8), and his staunch defence of the superiority of the will to the intellect: '*voluntas est superior intellecta*' ('will is higher than thought'). This latter echoes Bakhtin's life-long opposition to abstract systems of thought (see my discussion in Chapter 2). In the translation of the 3rd edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (Collier Macmillan Publishers, London, 1973) the following comment about Duns Scotus can be found: 'His ontology is characterised by the shift of stress from abstract-universal being to individual being as most perfect' (vol. x, p. 34). The same could be said of Bakhtin's early philosophy.

7 CHRISTIAN MOTIFS IN BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL WRITINGS

- 1 To the best of my knowledge, this is not an approach that has been taken before. There is, of course, an extensive body of secondary literature on the subject of Bakhtinian carnival, but relatively little that could be said to comprise a Christian reading of this key concept. One notable exception is Charles Lock's too little known 'Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology' (*Journal of Literature and Theology*, 5:1 (1991), 68–82), to which I shall have recourse later in the chapter. At the opposite extreme, K. G. Isupov, in his article

- ‘Bakhtinskii krizis gumanizma (Materialy k probleme)’ (*Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 2 (1991), 127–55) condemns carnival as a degradation of Bakhtin’s earlier Christian humanist anthropology into a devilish effacement of the personality. For an excellent discussion of the peculiarities of the Russian reception of carnival, see Caryl Emerson’s *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton University Press, 1998), where she argues that there has been in Russia a general tendency, not confined to Christian readings, either to sacralise or to demonise the concept.
- 2 The book under discussion, *The Work of François Rabelais and Popular Culture of the Middle Ages*, was published in 1965. It is, however, a revised version of a much earlier work, ‘Fransua Rable v istorii realizma’ (‘François Rabelais in the history of realism’), which Bakhtin wrote in the 1930s and presented as a doctoral dissertation in 1946.
 - 3 V. M. Boriskin supports the opposing view that ‘atheistic motifs sound through the entire length of the book’. He considers *Rabelais* to be a triumph of free thought. (See V. M. Boriskin, ‘Religiya i svobodomyслиe v sisteme khudozhestvennogo mirovozzreniya F. Rable’, in A. F. Eremeev *et al.* (eds.) *M. M. Bakhtin: Esteticheskoe nasledie i sovremennost’* (Saransk, Izdate’stvo Mordovskogo universiteta, 1992), pp. 311–15, 1992). A rather different viewpoint is taken by Lock, who believes that Bakhtin, coming from an Orthodox perspective, targets the Catholic Church specifically: ‘It should, however, be realized that the church under attack is the Roman Catholic Church, and that what Bakhtin says about its hierarchical authoritarianism is not applicable to the decentralized conciliar organization (*Sobornost*) of the Orthodox Church’ (‘Carnival and Incarnation’, p. 73).
 - 4 One might make the analogy with Dostoevsky, in the treatment of whom Bakhtin is also careful to distinguish clearly between his personal (Christian) world-view and his poetics.
 - 5 Bakhtin’s notorious neglect, not to say rejection, of the poetic genres, much commented upon, could be fruitfully examined in light of the tension which ‘Changes to *Rabelais*’ reveals Bakhtin to have felt between unofficial seriousness and carnival laughter.
 - 6 This motif dominates Bakhtin’s account of carnival and carnivalisation in *Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Chapter 4.
 - 7 It would be too much of a diversion to go into these in the context of this essay. However, such aspects may be said to include: Christ’s ambivalent image as belonging to Judaism and Christianity at the same time; the travesty dimension of his ministry (his ‘comic’ re-enactment of the history of the Jewish nation in its relationship to God); the material and familiar images used in his teaching, and the likening of himself to bread, water and wine; the emphasis in his healing ministry on physical contact, and his use of material elements in his healing. Bakhtin draws attention to this last aspect when he quotes Rabelais’

allusion to John 9.6, where Jesus restores a man's sight by making a paste of mud and his own saliva to put on the man's eyes.

- 8 In 'Carnival and Incarnation' Lock persuasively attributes a specifically Orthodox spirit to Bakhtin's celebration of the material. According to him, Eastern Christianity, unlike its Western counterpart, never adopted Neoplatonic binary oppositions such as mind/body or matter/spirit which have informed (plagued) the Western philosophical tradition ever since. For this reason matter is not considered profane in the Orthodox Church. On the contrary, the Incarnation was the ultimate affirmation, indeed sanctification, of the flesh.
- 9 Averintsev's important article 'Bakhtin, smekh, khristianskaya kul'tura' (*Rossiia-Russia*, 6 (1988), 119–30) carefully explores the implications for Bakhtinian carnival of the deeply rooted suspicion of laughter in the Orthodox tradition as being 'of the devil'. As a direct consequence of this, he points out, the Orthodox hold that Christ never laughed. He attempts to reconcile this with his understanding of Bakhtin (whom he knew personally) as a religious figure, by interpreting laughter as liberation rather than freedom. Since Christ was absolutely free, he had no need to laugh. Thus the seriousness of the gospels does not necessarily preclude a positive evaluation of laughter. My own attempt to reconcile laughter with the gospels is somewhat different, but in no way contradicts that of Averintsev.
- 10 'I tell you the truth' is the New International Version's translation of the Hebrew term 'Amen', meaning 'firm' or 'true'.
- 11 This notion, of course, can be traced in Bakhtin's work right back to 'Philosophy of the Act'.
- 12 Philippians 2.5–8: 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!'
- Note also the renewal consequent to Christ's debasement (verse 9ff.): 'Therefore God exalted him to the highest place . . .'
- See Chapters 2 and 3 for other references to the kenotic motif in Bakhtin's work.
- 13 The adjective '*sobornyi*' itself is taken from a Russian religious philosophical context, where it denotes 'unity in diversity', 'community' rather than 'collective'. It was a favourite term of the Orthodox thinker and Slavophile A. S. Khomyakov, who emphasised it as the principle on which the Orthodox Church's organisation as well as its theology was based.
- 14 Ryklin is inclined to explain this effect along psychological lines and treat *Rabelais* as an exercise in auto-therapy (see 'Tela terrora (tezisy k logike nasiliya)', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1 (1990), 60–1).

- 15 In its Johannine usage, the word ‘world’ is used to denote fallen human society.

8 THE FATE OF CHRISTIAN MOTIFS IN BAKHTIN’S WORK

- 1 This idea is prefigured in ‘Content, Material and Form’: ‘the personality of the creator is both invisible and inaudible, but is experienced and organised from within, as a seeing, hearing, moving, remembering activity, not as an embodied but as an embodying activity, only after that reflected in the shaped object’ (‘Content, Material and Form’, 70).
- 2 See Chapter 6, note 8.
- 3 Direct references to Christ in Bakhtin (discounting the many indirect allusions, related terms and images, etc.): ‘Philosophy of the Act’, 94; ‘Author and Hero’, 51–2; *Dostoevsky’s Creative Work*, 50, 89; ‘Chronotope’, 311; *Rabelais*, 161, 215; ‘Exercise Books’, 164; *Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 180; ‘Notes of 1970–71’, 353, 355, 356.
- 4 Caryl Emerson translates *vnenakhodimost’* as ‘extralocality’. I have substituted my usual translation, ‘outsidedness’, to bring the quotation into line with the rest of the book.

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