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BAKHTIN'S EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH 19TH CENTURY RUSSIAN AND CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHIES ON UNITY AND INDIVIDUALISM

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Отмечается, что творчество М. М. Бахтина обычно изучают и анализируют исключительно в литературоведческом смысле. Действительно, Бахтин являлся одним из ведущих литературоведов XX в., предложил несколько уникальных методов литературного анализа. Он также был глубоким исследователем творчества Ф. М. Достоевского. Многие ученые связывают подход Бахтина с развитием советского литературно-аналитического метода в социалистическо-марксистском искусстве. В последнее время, однако, все больше стали учитывать влияние философских взглядов Бахтина на его литературоведческие работы. В результате было установлено, что диалогизм, гетероглоссия и карнавальные теории Бахтина раскрывают чувство социальной общности, которое вполне соответствует идеологии социализма. Опровергая такой вывод, автор статьи показывает, что чувство коллективности, единства не является специфическим элементом социалисической теории, так как оно всегда было характерно для русской философии, в том числе и для ее досоветского периода. Например, «соборность» А. С. Хомякова и «всеединство» В. С. Соловьева оказывали влияние на русскую мысль XIX–XX вв., а истоки этих идей надо искать в христианстве. Бахтин в ранний период также активно участвовал в религиозной жизни, поэтому велика вероятность того, что его идея единства восходит к этим религиозно-философским истокам. Цель статьи – проанализировать, в какой степени на творчество Бахтина повлияли религиозно-философские идеи и как он применяет их в литературном анализе (от абстрактного до практического), формулируя свою религиозно-философско-литературную теорию.

Ключевые слова: М. М. Бахтин, русская философия, карнавал, диалогизм, полифония.

When studying and analysing the works and ideas of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, most scholars usually do it on a pure literature sense. Indeed, Bakhtin is known as one of the leading figures in the 20th-century literary critic scholarship, he introduced some unique ways of literary analysis, such as dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnivalesque. He was also a deep researcher of the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. As a rule, many scholars associate Bakhtin's approach with the development of the Soviet literary-analytical method in socialist-Marxist art. Recently, however, more and more researchers have begun to take into account the influence of Bakhtin's philosophical views on his literary studies. As a result, it was found that Bakhtin's dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnival theory reveal a sense of social community, which might be considered as a response to the ideology of socialism. While criticizing this conclusion, the author of the article shows that the sense of collectivity, or unity, is not a specific element of socialist theory, since it has always been characteristic of Russian philosophy, including its pre-Soviet period. For example, the concepts "sobornost" introduced by Alexey Khomyakov and "vseedinstvo" elaborated by Vladimir Solovyov greatly influenced Russian thought in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the sources of these ideas must be sought in Christianity. Bakhtin in the early period also actively participated in religious life, so it is most likely that his idea of unity goes back to these religious activities. The purpose of the article is to analyze to what extent religious-philosophical ideas exerted influence on Bakhtin's work and how he applied them in his literary analysis (from abstract to practical), elaborating his unique religious-philosophical-literary theory.

Keywords: M. M. Bakhtin, Russian philosophy, carnival, dialogism, heteroglossia.

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Society is constructed not by a single person, but by the grand unity of all in the community. It is impossible for a person to see the existence of himself if there is no other as a reference [3, p. 88]. An ideology cannot prove its existence without its participation and application in society. Society is made up by humans, and the collection of human activities defines the presence of a community [4, p. 276]. By emphasising these ideas, Bakhtin presents us with his philosophies of "dialogism", "heteroglossia" and "all unity". Bakhtin's interpretation of literary writings, especially Dostoevsky's works, is parallel to his philosophical thoughts. Bakhtin presents his "all unity" idea through his analysis of the relationship between the main character and the author, the main character and other characters and even the main character and himself (which is his "double") in confession and monologue [17, p. 36].

Not only does Bakhtin emphasise "identification through mutual communication" and "all unity" in literary works, he also applies this philosophical approach in presenting his aesthetic and social thoughts [12, p. 663]. Bakhtin does not invent these ideas; they already existed in 19th-century Russian religious thoughts. Bakhtin sometimes even openly introduces Christian theology in his works [2, p. 138–150]. However, the pioneering initiative of Bakhtin is his application of these thoughts to literary analysis. Indeed, driven by the "all unity" idea, Bakhtin aims to merge previous religious thoughts with socialism, apply them to the socialist society and create a new definition of old beliefs in a new era [7, p. 129]. Mainly based on some of Bakhtin's original texts, this article will introduce a comparative study of Bakhtin's philosophy and previous religious views (including Christian theology and 19th-century Russian religious philosophy). In doing so, it will discuss the similarities between Bakhtin's idea and 19th century Russian/Christian philosophies, and it aims to analyse Bakhtin's unique interpretation of these previous religious thoughts.

In Bakhtin's theory, a character is independent from the author. By using Dostoevsky's works as an example, Bakhtin declared, "The author, like Prometheus, creates (or rather re-creates) living beings who are independent of himself and with whom he is on equal terms. He cannot finalise them" [3, p. 284]. If the author controls the character's ideology entirely, the novel is no more than an autobiography of the author, and the book will have lost its artistry [19, p. 43]. Although the author creates the character, however, the character has his free ideology. The author does not determine the development of the character; rather, development is achieved through the main character's interactions with other ideologies in the novel's society [14, p. 41]. The author participates as a special kind of "other" who shapes the main character's development through interactions with him However, it is important to point out that, unlike other minor characters in the novel, the author is invisible and is in charge of the overall situation, from a God's perspective [19, p. 24]. Such invisibility does not mean that the author remains silent or disappears; the authorial point is manifested through dialogism by "questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting" [9, p. 75]. This dialogism is achieved through the main character's interactions with other different characters and the social environment in the novel. The au-

thor is neither entirely a single external character nor the external social context; he is an overall designer and the unity of both elements above [13, p. 128–129], "a single objective world with other consciousnesses" to confront the main character [3, p. 50].

It is possible to understand Bakhtin's "author and character" relationship through the relationship between God and man. Before Dostoevsky, most authors held an "Old Testament" God position, where characters in the novel are merely performers who obediently act out their predetermined roles and the event (plot) is more important than the character himself [13, p. 127]. However, Dostoevsky presents himself more like a "New Testament" God in his relationship with the characters. Dostoevsky does not impose his ideology on the character; rather, the character starts as a free person with an ideology. God grants man the rational mind and freedom of wills; the man's future is not settled, but it depends on his choice and his own path in confronting the external environment [1, p. 71–74]. In an understanding similar to the 'author and character' relationship, the development of the plot (the character's future) is achieved through the clash and confrontation between the ideology of the character and the external others. Thus, the exchange of thoughts between the protagonist and the others through dialogue can enrich the protagonist's original ideology [9, p. 162–164]. The protagonist's freedom of self-development does not mean that this freedom is flourished and out of the author's control. The author is still the God who creates the overall world structure, coordinates all characters' thoughts in the novel and unites them [16, p. 292]. Bakhtin admits that a novel without an authorial position is in general impossible. The author always influences the narration, plot and thoughts of different characters through a special dialogical interaction from a macro level. Bakhtin writes that although different characters in the novel are unique and are not controlled by the author, each serves a specific purpose with a unique role "and becomes a unique artistic system, which orchestrates the intentional theme of the author" [4, p. 299]. Thus, by inserting the protagonist in dialogical confrontations with the others (including the invisible ideology of the author), the author invisibly guides the protagonist to merge with the author's thinking – the perspective of God. However, it is developed naturally and not imposed by the author.

The independence of the characters does not mean that the characters exist on their own. Bakhtin explicitly criticises solipsism through his dialogical approach. Dialogue can exist only if there are at least two voices; otherwise, "a single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing" [3, p. 252]. A character's existence cannot be justified without interaction with others. The existence of an individual is premised on the existence of another person, where an individual's existence is reflected in the others and the existence of the others is presented through the individual's observations. Bakhtin thus constructs a system of mutual observation through dialogues between different characters [19, p. 26]. Crystal Downing assumes that the origin of this thinking is rather in the Orthodox understanding of the Trinity. In the Orthodox Trinitarian structure, "communion underlies being". God is not a single Person, but the mutual communion of the three

"Persons" [10, p. 27]. Without the Father as the source, the Son and Holy Spirit cannot be manifested; without the Son and Holy Spirit, the salvation work of the Father cannot be conducted [15, p. 60–61]. Bakhtin expresses a similar view: "I actively "enter in" to the other's position at every moment... by a return to my own position, the sole place from which I can understand my "obligation" in its relationship to another" [11, p. 412]. My value, meaning and liability[1] are reflected when I understand the other's existence and return to compare with myself. Conversely, the purpose of the other's presence is revealed through me in the same way. Existence requires a mutual dependence between the others and me [19, p. 25–26].

Carol Newsom believes that the book of Job interprets well the Bakhtinian philosophy of existence. Job represents the protagonist, his three friends are the counterparts who intend to make dialogue with Job and God, of course, is the author [16, p. 297]. Job's loyalty to God is not presented as God's intervention; initially, God remains an outsider. However, Job's faith, or truth of God, is introduced through the dialogues between Job and his friends. The justice, faith and truth in Job can be highlighted only in comparison with the dissuasions of his friends or the unjust criticism (Book of Job, *Bible*, 22:1–23:17). Truth cannot prove its existence if there is no counterpart as the 'non-truth'. Indeed, everything's existence follows a parallel dialectic relationship between itself and the others, especially its counterparts [17, p. 36].

However, the further narration shows us that Job – the main character – cannot be the full truth. Job realises his weakness and insignificance only when he confronts God and compares himself with God's magnificence and glory (Book of Job, *Bible*, 42:1–6). Overall, the book of Job can be understood as the idea that "truth is not limited in one person". Each character needs to be compared with his counterpart to highlight the fragment of the full truth within each character. None of these characters is the whole truth; the full truth is the collection of their respective thoughts [6, p. 30]. Expressing, sharing and uniting the fragments of full truth is achieved through communication with the surroundings and the counterparts, which Bakhtin calls "the dialogic truth" [16, p. 293–294].

Here Bakhtin's thoughts are largely parallel to *Sobornost* in Slavophilism. According to Ivan Kireyevsky, *Sobornost* is not a single, supreme truth over every existence; instead, *Sobornost* is constructed by free communication and communion between different individuals. Each has his unique contribution to the construction of the unity, and his uniqueness and value of existence can thus be manifested in unity [22, p. 566]. Unity does not deny the uniqueness of an individual. However, each of us shares equal importance to others in unity. Bakhtin believes that to find the truth, "Everyone gazes not upward, toward heaven, nor forward, at the priest or the altar, but at one another, realising the kenosis of God, on the low horizontal level that is our own" [13, p. 159]. Thus, the truth is the unity of the uniqueness of different individuals. Through communication with others, we are not only helping to construct the all unity, but also, the uniqueness

[1] Here assumes the protagonist as "myself".

and value we see in others can merge with us and enrich our self-development [19, p. 63–64].

However, unlike the Slavophils who deduce that unity is a complete and perfect society, Bakhtin disagrees on "completeness" in dialogism. As discussed above, the dialogical communication between different individuals is the essence of Bakhtin's unity: "When the dialogue ends, everything ends" [3, p. 252]. Because of the endlessness characteristic of dialogue, Bakhtin's united world cannot be achieved. Not a single individual is finalised in this unity; the dialogue between different individuals provides various possible outcomes, which ensure the overall unity's trend of development [16, p. 294]. Perhaps, the open-endlessness not only provides a greater space for both the author and reader's imaginations, but also offers a chance for the character to repent freely for further self-correction and self-improvement [8, p. 72].

Looking back to late 19th-century philosophy, Vladimir Solovyov proposed a similar idea of individuals and unity. An individual without external others as a reference is merely "an infinitely small and disappearing point in the world" [24, p. 119]. However, if an individual completely submits himself to others or if everyone simply follows one identity, then the unity is not a real unity through freedom, but an "individual" on a macro scale – Solovyov describes this "unity without freedom" as "the structure of Roman Catholicism" [20, p. 202]. The ideal unity, according to Solovyov, is not finalised and it features a multi-identity. This unity does not absorb the uniqueness of individuals but acts as a field to allow individuals to exchange their unique identities, to mutually understand and admire each other and thus achieve an "all unity" in harmony [21, p. 246]. Before Bakhtin, the thought on individualism and "all unity" remained abstract philosophical thinking. Bakhtin, however, opposes "philosophy for philosophy's sake" or "art for art's sake"; all should relate themselves to life, society and other spheres. Theories, even any other aspect within the "grand unity", should be mutually communicated and shared [12, p. 663]. This idea is also similar to Solovyov's philosophy, which in Solovyovian terms is called "the integral knowledge" [18, p. 47]. Yet, Bakhtin goes further and applies this idea to literary criticism.

Bakhtin does not limit his "dialogism" to literary criticism; he extends this idea into aesthetical analysis. According to Bakhtin, an aesthetic activity requires the involvement of at least two individuals. One cannot be called 'beauty' if there is no other to endorse him [19, p. 36]. The primary element for aesthetic activity is empathising, which means a person should try to merge with the aesthetic object and experience the aesthetic activity from the position of the object. Otherwise, the aesthetic movement is impossible to achieve on its own without the understanding and feeling of the aesthetic object [5, p. 14–15]. However, empathising is only the first step for an aesthetic activity. Without returning to myself, without the expression of the aesthetic value of the aesthetic object from myself, I simply become the object [5, p. 16–17]. Passive empathising will eliminate the observer; then, the reference of the aesthetic object disappears. Thus, the aesthetic activity cannot be accomplished [19, p. 37]. Again, Bakhtin emphasises the

uniqueness and independence of the individual in a common aesthetic activity. People understand, communicate and admire each other, but none will lose his own identity and "become" the other [5, p. 18].

According to both Bakhtin and Solovyov, the fundamental driving force behind an aesthetic activity is the "love" between the observer and the aesthetic object. Bakhtin clarifies that love is not from "beauty"; however, "beauty" appears only if someone loves and admires the aesthetic object [5, p. 62]. Empathising, in fact, is the expression of "love". As discussed, empathising requires the observer to deny his complete individuality and to admit the value and existence of the aesthetic object. Thus, empathising, which is also 'love', is conducted through a process of "self-denial" [12, p. 667]. Even the Bakhtinian relationship between author and characters can be understood as a "loving relationship". The author allows the protagonist to self-develop, thus presenting his love by giving up the authorial supremacy in controlling the protagonist's fate [17, p. 34]. Through "incarnation", the author "self-denies" the supremacy, enters into the world of the protagonist and becomes his external other. The protagonist realises the "love" from the author by seeking a way to unify both his and the author's ideologies through dialogical communication with the external world created by the author.

Solovyov also believes that "love" is the way of mutual improvement and the integration of a person with the external world [24, p. 322–323]. However, the concepts of "love" and "self-denial" were invented neither by Bakhtin nor by Solovyov; rather, they already existed in Christian doctrine. The most typical example is the incarnation of Christ. Christ adopts humanity through kenosis (Kenosis is explained in Paul's letter to the Philippians, "Philippians", *Bible*, 2:5–2:7), where God takes the form of bond-servant through "self-denial". In doing so, the love of salvation is manifested by the combination of humanity with Divinity (where the Son only has Divinity before incarnation). Thus, Christ becomes a complete man and remains the complete God [23, p. 219]. A Bakhtinian protagonist "incarnates" into the external world and adopts the characteristic of the external world without losing the uniqueness of himself. Similarly, the author "incarnates" and builds the dialogical connection with the protagonist in the same literary world. Thus, the personality of the protagonist can be enriched; the author's thoughts are also reflected in the process of unity with the protagonist [10, p. 26–27].

According to the analysis in this article, Bakhtin's philosophy is mainly constructed around his understanding of "existence", which is about the relationship between "individual" and "all unity". Bakhtin clearly emphasises the impossibility of a solipsist existence and embraces the importance of unity, but in such unity, individuality does not disappear but is enriched by interactions with external others. However, it is not difficult to find similar thoughts in 19th-century Russian philosophy and Christian theology. Bakhtin does quote these thoughts, but he does not simply maintain them as an abstract philosophy. Bakhtin applies these thoughts to his literary criticism to fulfil his idea that different disciplines can learn from each other. This is the "dialogism" of disciplines, and for Bakhtin, this is also the

foundation of "integral knowledge" and "all unity". Christ merges with the world to realise the unity between heaven and earth, but the "dialogue" between God and man is not completed yet [14, p. 57]. The path towards the Kingdom of God is still under construction within the Church, through the active interaction (the dialogue) between man and the Holy Spirit [15, p. 179]. No one knows when the kingdom of heaven will come. Perhaps, God leaves us in an "open-ended" romance of salvation.

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