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Memory and Performance.
Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

Edited by Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino,
and Eugenio Refini

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Bakhtin *vs* Shakespeare?

Abstract

This essay returns to Bakhtin's place in Shakespeare criticism in the light of his relative neglect by Shakespeareans over in the twenty-first century. It asks whether Bakhtin is correct to dismiss the theatre as insufficiently 'dialogical' and offers a critical account of his remarks on Shakespeare in the "Bakhtin on Shakespeare", published in 2014. It argues that Bakhtin's remarks on Shakespeare show his lack of a proper, historical, knowledge of the nature of Shakespeare's theatre and stagecraft, which was much closer to the carnivalesque nature of the marketplace than he understands, and that his denigration of the theatre as such stems from the "theatre with footlights" of his experience in Russia and the Soviet Union. Rather than dismiss Bakhtin, however, the essay argues that a combination of his work on carnival and his broader philosophy of language may be used productively in a new critical reading of Shakespeare. It closes with a brief example from *King John* to illustrate this argument.

Keywords: Bakhtin; Shakespeare; Weimann; Rabelais; carnival; heteroglossia; dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin's star has waned considerably, at least in the Anglosphere, since his relatively brief appearance in the bright firmament of theory in the late-twentieth century. An even greater eclipse has occurred in relation to Bakhtin and Shakespeare. If the 1980s and 1990s saw a general interest in the Bakhtin School (including V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev) that encompassed both linguistic philosophy and the sociology of the carnival, most American and British critics of the time focussed chiefly on the latter: on Shakespeare's relation to the topsy-turvy world of carnival inversion and bodily excess. There was much less interest in what the broader linguistic philosophy of the "Bakhtin School" could contribute to the understanding of Shakespeare.

Interest in Shakespeare's relation to folk festival and carnival has been part of critical literature since at least C.L. Barber's pioneering *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) and especially Robert Weimann's subsequent *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition of the Theatre* (1976). But the discovery of Bakhtin in the West gave this relationship a new, more political twist. In

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Shakespeare studies, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1968) was the almost exclusive point of focus, informing both specific readings of the plays, exemplified by Ronald Knowles' edited collection, *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (1998) and more general studies combining literature, social history and politics, like Peter Stallybrass and Alon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) and Michael D. Bristol's *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (1985).

Bakhtin's role in this exploration of the political aspects of the carnivalesque is uncontested. Stallybrass and White declare: "Undoubtedly it was the translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's monumental study of Rabelais and the carnivalesque which initially catalysed the interest of Western scholars . . . around the notion of carnival, marking it out as a site of special interest for the analysis of literature and symbolic practices", and that under Bakhtin's influence "[t]here is now [1986] a large and increasing body of writing that sees carnival not simply as a ritual feature of European culture but as a *mode of understanding*, a positivity, a cultural analytic" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 6). The "other" Bakhtin – of speech genres, heteroglossia, and chronotopes – received much less attention from Shakespeareans.[1] The only monograph devoted to Bakhtin and Voloshinov's linguistic philosophy is James Siemon's comprehensive study of *Richard II*: *Word Against Word* (2002).

General interest in the Bakhtin School continues in the twenty-first century, but in more attenuated ways: in Graham Pechey's *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Word in the World* (2007), Caryl Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (2018), Kenneth Hirschkop's *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (2021) and Dick McCaw's recent *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Grotowski* (2021). The impetus for this recent resurgence of interest beyond Shakespeare studies has been the publication of extensive new material from the Bakhtin *Nachlass*, which casts new light on Bakhtin's engagement with his Russian contexts and releases material not previously available:

> In 1996, the Russian Academy of Sciences began to publish the Bakhtin *Collected Works*, a properly scholarly edition of everything by Bakhtin that had already been published – the two books, the essays, the notes – and much that was new, including the contents of many of Bakhtin's notebooks. The end result was a sea change in Bakhtin scholarship. (Hirschkop 2021, 7)[2]

But this scholarly collection has also complicated Bakhtin scholarship, rendering it much more complex, difficult, and in some ways intractable, than before. This may account for both the renewed interest in Bakhtin in

[1] See Bakhtin 1982, 1984a, 198b, 1987; Voloshinov 1986.

[2] See also Bakhtin 1996-2012.

general accounts of his work and influence, and a waning interest in his relation to Shakespeare. Few Shakespeare scholars have the patience to wade through the six new volumes of the collected works, and even fewer (including this author) have the Russian that would enable them to read them. Moreover, the topic seems to have induced a certain weariness, as the sociological politics of the carnival has faded with the displacement of theory (and its attendant politics) by the seemingly infinite resources and institutionally rewarded scholarship of archival research. Essays continue to be published on Shakespeare and Bakhtin, mostly in (Eastern) Europe, and with few exceptions they continue to focus on detectable elements of carnival in his plays – chiefly in the comedies, but also in *Hamlet*. There hasn't been a monograph on Shakespeare and Bakhtin since Siemon's *Word Against Word*, published over twenty years ago, in 2002.

1. Bakhtin on Theatre

Is there anything new to say about Shakespeare and Bakhtin? The answer has two aspects. One concerns Bakhtin's notorious denigration of drama in favour of the novel – especially the Dostoevskian novel, which exemplifies Bakhtin's key concept, heteroglossia. In the Dostoevsky book (1984) Bakhtin does acknowledge Shakespeare (along with Cervantes) as a precursor of the kind of mixing of voices that he espouses as the very condition of linguistic interaction, but the concession is somewhat grudging, especially when Shakespeare is compared to Rabelais and Dostoevsky. Bakhtin insists that "carnival knows no footlights" and the sterile "statement and reaction" of drama, in his dogmatic view, cannot come close to the rich, interlinguistic dialogism of the novel. No true polyphony is possible in the theatre:

> To speak of a fully formed and deliberate polyphonic quality in Shakespeare's dramas is in our opinion simply impossible, and for the following reasons: First drama is by its very nature alien to genuine polyphony. Drama may be multi levelled but it cannot contain multiple worlds. It permits only one and not several systems of measurement.
>
> Secondly, if one can speak at all of a plurality of fully valid voices in Shakespeare then it would only apply to the entire body of his work and not to individual plays. In essence each play contains only one fully valid voice, the voice of the hero . . .
>
> Thirdly the voices in Shakespeare are not points of view on the world to the degree they are in Dostoevsky. Shakespearean characters are not ideologists in the full sense of the word. (Bakhtin 1984b, 33)

Bakhtin offers a specific and a general criticism here: of Shakespeare in particular, and of drama in general. Being a species of the genus "drama",

Shakespeare is constrained by the limitations of the genus, no matter how much his work may strive to transcend it.

The chief reason that drama cannot rise to polyphony lies in its generic structure: its DNA, as it were. In theatrical dialogue a single voice responds to another with relatively univocal intonations, without the mixing of voices and intonations that for Bakhtin is the true characteristic of heteroglossia or polyphony. In the novel, the regulatory "character" of the narrator (absent from the theatre) is able not only to control the story, comment on characters, pry into and reveal their motives and souls, but – crucially – to mix his or her voice with theirs, or others not present, in the form of free indirect discourse. This is explained most clearly in Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

> We're dealing here with words reacting on words. However, this phenomenon is distinctly and fundamentally different from dialogue. In dialogue, the lines of the individual participants are grammatically disconnected; they are not integrated into one unified context. Indeed, how could they be? There are no syntactic forms with which to build a unity of dialogue. If, on the other hand a dialogue is presented as embedded in an authorial context, then we have a case of direct discourse, one of the variants of the phenomenon with which we are dealing in this inquiry . . .
>
> The words and expressions, incorporated into indirect discourse with their own specificity detectable are being made strange and made strange precisely in the direction that suits the author's needs: they are particularised, their coloration is heightened, but at the same time they are made to accommodate shadings of the author's attitude – his irony, humour, and so on. (1986, 131)

Two questions: first, is it impossible for a character in a play to offer the kind of polyphony that Voloshinov and Bakhtin find exemplified in the narrator of the novel? I will argue that in Shakespeare it is not only possible but common. The second, weightier, question concerns Bakhtin's knowledge and experience of theatre, especially the early modern theatre that was Shakespeare's formative context and his development. When Bakhtin declares that "carnival knows no footlights", is he thinking only of the naturalistic, proscenium-arch, bourgeois theatre-house of the nineteenth century of his experience? Shakespeare's theatre knew no footlights. It was, at least in the large public arenas, a daylight theatre, in which common theatregoers crowded around a thrust stage in close contact with the actors, and who could, if the play displeased them, boo it off the stage altogether. Better paying classes could also display themselves on the stage in a multiple engagement in the "selfe-resembled show" of the clown (Hall 1597, qtd in Weimann 1978, 191). The house lights did not dim on passive spectators, the footlights did not illuminate actors removed from an audience untouched

by direct address and appeal, and there was no autocratic director to beat recalcitrant players into a predetermined mode of playing, as Stanislavsky notoriously did.[3]

2. Bakhtin on Carnival

In the Rabelais book, Bakhtin often invokes the medieval theatre of the marketplace, but he surprisingly seems to ignore completely (or be unaware of) the dynamic, fluid, popular stages of Shakespeare's Renaissance, which also "knew no footlights". It would help briefly to recapitulate Bakhtin's conception of carnival. It is, above all, political, focused on the dynamics of power between authoritarian imposition of control and censorship and the dispersed, dissident, forces of popular culture. These are respectively centripetal and centrifugal forces – one drawing everything towards its monolithic centre; the other celebrating a dynamic, folk-based movement intent on a literal and symbolic inversion of the imposed hierarchical dichotomies of centralising, controlling and ruling powers. These movements or structures are always in tension, if not in conflict. Their respective *domains* differ, but carnival and fair offer a dialogical space in which hierarchical relations are inverted and parodied: Bakhtin shows "how Rabelais brings the high languages of classical learning, medicine, theology and the Court into a relativizing dialogue with the low languages of the fair and the marketplace" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 60).

Carnival is the zone of what Bakhtin calls the "marketplace" where, in effect, anything can happen. But this concept of the marketplace is untouched in Bakhtin by the proto-capitalist impetus of such 'actual' areas.[4] Unpoliced by the centrifugal forces, it is a 'utopian' space in which every subversive voice can have its say, in which hierarchies can be inverted through the power of free invective, travesty and parody, and in which externally imposed decorum can be flaunted in the elevation of the "lower bodily strata". It is a festival of *laughter*:

> Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not fill permit seriousness to atrophy

[3] "I was saved by the despotism of stage direction that I had learned from the methods of Kronek with the Meiningen Players. I demanded that the actors obey me, and I forced them to do so" (Stanislavski 2016, 247).

[4] For an extensive discussion of the relationship between fairs and the commercial circulation of trade and commodities, see Stallybrass and White 1986.

> and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores the ambivalent wholeness. Such as the function of laughter in the historical development of culture and literature. (Bakhtin 1984a, 123)

This laughter is also fearless – it faces, ridicules and overcomes the imposition of terror by "the official" – it allows people to enter a "second time", of "community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (9). It is also universal, the "laughter of all the people . . . universal in its scope . . . directed at all and everyone . . . it asserts and denies, buries and revives" (11-12). And its literary embodiment is to be found in "grotesque realism", exemplified by Rabelais:

> . . . the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the transfer to the sphere and body in their indissoluble unity . . . Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it is not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one . . . it is always conceiving. (19-21)

The space of the carnival thus subjects the place of official culture to ridicule, degradation and inversion, and crucially, opens up its enclosed, individualised, atomic body to a world of the ceaseless becoming of decay and rebirth.

Like his conception of language, Bakhtin's notion of carnival is both historically specific and timeless, located in particular spaces and beyond geography, realistically hard-headed and sentimentally nostalgic. He locates it historically in a movement from Classical Dionysian festival to medieval "marketplace" release, and then to more restrictive post-Renaissance appropriations in its re-emergence, after Rabelais, in the heteroglossia of Dostoevskian novels. Bakhtin's celebration of carnival laughter and invective attacks the realm of the *serious*: "To make an image serious means to remove its ambivalence and ambiguousness, its unresolvedness, its readiness to change its meaning, to turn itself inside out, it's mystifying carnival essence . . . to declare something stable and unchangeable" (2014, 526). Carnival knows no footlights because, in its essential lack of seriousness in Bakhtin's sense, in its unresolvedness and changeability, it cannot be split into performers and spectators. Everyone in carnival is a participant. This emphasis on egalitarian, universal participation, perhaps above anything else, is what separates the carnival from the theatre.

3. Bakhtin on Shakespeare

In 2014, one of the many texts in Bakhtin's *Nachlass* was published in an English translation in *PMLA*: his notes on Shakespeare (Bakhtin 2014). Although a version of the notes (written while Bakhtin was revising his book on Rabelais in the mid-1940s) was published in Russian in 1992 and 1996, this

is the first English version to have been made available. It therefore appeared long after the initial interest in Shakespeare and Bakhtin had waned, if not disappeared entirely. The notes are remarkable, especially considering their Rabelaisian context. First, unlike most Shakespearean work on Bakhtin, they show little interest in Shakespeare's relation to carnival; second, they focus almost entirely on the tragedies – *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, rather than the comedies and histories, where most Shakespeareans have found Bakhtinian and Rabelaisian echoes. There is only one reference to Shakespeare's material theatre, namely to the metaphorized levels of the heavens, the earthly stage, and the hell below. Bakhtin's discussion of Shakespeare is almost entirely textual, but with a symbolic sense of a cosmic rather than naturalistic theatrical space. It traces, with great acuity, the ways in which Shakespeare's figures work, through the language of his characters, to invoke issues that are central to his own sense of the contradictions and energies of the *carnivalesque*, but which do not directly deal with carnival motifs in Shakespeare.

In Bakhtin's account, Shakespeare appears on the cusp of the transition from the free medieval celebration of carnivalesque inversion exemplified by Rabelais literary representation and the Renaissance constriction and appropriation of popular festivity through, above all, its individualisation of the body:

> The Renaissance saw the body in quite a different light than the Middle Ages, in a different aspect of its life, and a different relation to the exterior nonbodily world. As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; it's protuberances and off-shoots were removed, it's convexities (signs of new sprouts and bud smoothed out, its apertures closed). The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret: conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown . . . Corporal acts were shown only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined. (Bakhtin 1984a, 29)

This is crucial. For precisely what the modern world celebrates about Shakespeare – his "invention of the human", in the form of wholly formed, individualised characters, expressing a modern "interiority" especially in the figures of Hamlet, Richard II and the poet of the sonnets – is what Bakhtin finds problematic in his work:

> The topographic coordinates of action, word, and gesture have faded and rubbed off, they wound up on the dense (impenetrable) ordinary life and abstractly historical plane that the limits and poles of the world could no longer glow through. The remaining topographic elements . . . become a

> relative and conventional unfelt form. Action, word, and gesture acquire an ordinary, pragmatic and story-line-related meaning, one that is abstractly historical (rationalistic), but the main and decisive meaning becomes the expressive one: they become the expression of the *individual* soul, its inner depths . . . now the gesture is read intensively, i.e., only in relation to one point – the speaker himself, as a more or less deep expression of his individual soul; but this point itself – the soul speaking by means of the gesture – cannot be localised in the *whole* of the world for there are no (axial) coordinates to localise it. The only direction of the gesture is to the speaker himself, but the place of the speaker himself in the *ultimate* whole of the world is not *immediately, visibly* determined by the gesture. If this ultimate whole is assumed at all, it is mediated through a complex process of thought. (Bakhtin 2014, 534)

It is worth quoting Bakhtin at length because it brings out both the outlines of his thought in general and his disappointment with Shakespeare in particular. What he favours about the dramatist is not character but image and gesture – ways in which Shakespeare's language in general taps into broader, deeper, indeed more *cosmic* dimensions than the Romantically inflected figuration of the interiority of individual character.

Bakhtin's displays an intense aversion to individuality or individual subjectivity. His idealising discussion of early folk existence extolls its essentially communal nature. He excoriates the negation of folk culture by the focus – from the seventeenth century onwards, and especially in Romanticism – on the representation and exposure of isolated consciousness, "within the limits of the individual and sealed-off progression of a single life" (1981, 200).

This is in line with his pointed lack of interest in the generally celebrated capacity of Shakespeare to body forth individual interiority.

> We should emphasise the fact that in Rabelais life has no absolutely no *individual* aspect. A human being is completely external. The known limits to a man's possible exteriority are achieved. For indeed, there is not a single instance in the entire expanse of Rabelais' huge novel where we are shown what a character is thinking, what he is experiencing, his internal dialogue. In this sense there is in Rabelais' novel no world of interiority. All that a man is finds expression in actions and in dialogue. There is nothing that cannot adequately be made public (outwardly expressed). On the contrary, all that a man is acquires its full significance only in the external expression: only externally does it become associated with authentic life experience and authentic, real time. (1984a, 168)

Bakhtin's aversion to individual interiority is also apparent in his notes on individual Shakespeare plays. He focusses entirely on the central tragedies: *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, but in none is he chiefly interested in

character, which in the plays' very titles invite focus on their protagonists. Nor is he particularly interested in a Materialist historicism. He employs a range of metaphorical antimonies to unveil the characteristics that seem to him to underlie what is noteworthy in Shakespeare: praise vs invective; basic tones vs overtones; architectural vs ornamental; cosmic vs individual. In his discussion of *Macbeth*, he claims that the any reading of the play as a representation of feudal conceptions of the state or of the criminal ambitions of a single human being would be attending merely to its "overtones". The "basic tones" of the play (its architectural structure rather than superficial ornamentation) are more "cosmic" than concerned with Macbeth himself:

> Macbeth is no criminal . . . all Macbeth's deeds are determined by the iron logic of any crowning and any power (hostile to replacement). Its constitutive movement is violence, oppression, lie, trembling, and fear of the underling and the adverse, the reciprocal fear of the ruler before the underling. This is the superjudicial crime of all power . . . Here we already have the iron logic of a crime that is *not contingent* . . . Thus, the tragedy (and crime) of all power (that is, even the most legitimate power) is revealed in the image of the usurper (the criminal ruler). (1984a, 527-8)

Bakhtin sees in *King Lear* "the ambivalent folk wisdom of saturnalia and of carnival" (529), whose images and gestures touch what is "cosmic, liminal and topographic" (528). Furthermore, he claims that "it is deeply naïve" to reduce the collapse of "the whole system of official good, truth, love friendship" in *Hamlet* to "the psychology of a man who is indecisive, eaten by reflection, or overly scrupulous" (529). Shakespeare's images always present "both poles" of a cosmic world – "hell and heaven, angels and demons, earth and sky, life and death, top and bottom . . . they are cosmic; all the elements of the world; the entire universe, are implicated in their play" (530). A major part of this implication lies in the symbolic topography of the Shakespearean theatre, where the represented places (palace, room or street) carry a double, cosmically inflected, meaning: "the action and gesture taking place in the room are at the same time taking place in a topographically understood universe, the hero keeps moving all the time between heaven and hell, between life and death, next to the grave" (532). This topographical richness is echoed in the speeches of the characters, which combine both cosmic elements of the theatrical space with "lowering" images of bodily topography that embody the carnivalesque "logic of oaths, curses, profanities, incantations, blessings" (532).

Shakespeare, then, is "a playwright of the first (but not the fore-most) deep level". He could take any plot, from any time and involving any people. He could "remake any kind of literary work, if only it was at least faintly connected to the main topographic stock of folk images" (528). First, but not fore-most. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque in Shakespeare's plays lies in the

images and gestures of Shakespeare's "architectural" structures, including the multiple resonances of the language and its dramatic spaces.

These resonances resound 'vertically': they are contained within the text in references, upwards and downwards, to the symbolic levels of the actual building: he acknowledges both the material and symbolic levels of Shakespeare's theatre, inherited from medieval stages – of the heavens above, earth at the level of the stage, and hell and the grave below – and explicates metaphorical and literal references to those levels in the text. But he pays no attention to the horizontal relations between the actors on the stage and the surrounding audience watching and to some extent participating in that action. He ignores completely the degree to which – inherited from medieval folk theatre – there is in Shakespeare's theatre a horizontal crossing of the space between actor on the stage and audience in close proximity to the acting space, with its vertical dimensions. Robert Weimann describes this crossing of the horizontal division between spectator and actor especially acutely, in terms of the flexible representational and expressive spaces of *locus* and *platea*. The former is the space of formal representation (of nobles, royalty, and so forth), the latter the area, closer to the audience surrounding the thrust platform, where clowns, comedians, servants could not only engage directly with the audience but also solicit their support in satirical and critical comments (Bakhtin's "inventive") against those occupying the *locus*. This horizontal engagement "results from, and consummates, a theatrical process from the actor (and the citizen) to the role and the spectator and back again to the actor and the citizens in the audience, all participating in a common cultural and social activity" (1967, 223). Weimann demonstrates that "the audience's world is made part of the play and the play is brought into the world of the audience" (83):

> What is involved . . . is not the *confrontation* of the world and time of the play with that of the audience, or any serious *opposition* between representational and non-representable standards of acting, but the most intense *interplay* of both . . . In short, both *platea* and *locus* are related to the specific locations and types of action and acting, but each is meaningless without the functioning assumptions of the other. (87)

This is another form of dialogical interaction that cannot be reduced to mere "statement and response".

4. What Was the Theatre that Bakhtin Knew?

Weimann's perspective contradicts Bakhtin's sense that Shakespeare's text could not cross the footlights. Bakhtin's insistence that carnival "knows no

footlights", while assuming a footlight-like division of audience from actor in Shakespeare's theatre, prompts the question: what kind of theatre did Bakhtin know, and what did he think of it? Dick McCaw speculates that "one might wonder whether this rather quaint nineteenth-century image of theatre was how he actually conceived of the stage" (2015, 76).[5] Furthermore, what did he know of the performance conditions of Shakespeare's theatre, apart from his sense of its architectural and symbolic division of heaven above, earth on the plane of the stage, and hell below? There are very few answers to these questions (published in English at least), apart from McCaw's recent book. McCaw states that "Bakhtin maintained an academic interest in the theatre throughout his career" (2015, 65), but also that Bakhtin never specifies what he means by "drama" or "theatre", and that "his interest extends only in so far as it illuminates, positively or negatively, the nature and function of verbal creation or the novel" (66). We have seen that Bakhtin regarded the dialogue of theatre as essentially monological compared with the heteroglossia of the novel. But Graham Pechey offers a telling corrective to this prejudice by pointing out that Bakhtin's distinctions hold only if drama is "reduced to the text": "Drama is perhaps not so much monological in essence as 'monologised' by being read as 'literature' rather than as theatre" (2001, 61).

This insight is to a large extent what we have been tracing in Bakhtin's notes on Shakespeare and his theatre – the vertical integration of text and acting space, but no attention to the essence of early modern theatre: not footlights themselves (a nineteenth-century innovation that imposed a physical barrier between player and audience), but the very *absence* of a barrier between audience and actors, allowing for a two-way interaction between them – what Weimann describes as "the most intense *interplay* of both" (1967, 87). This reveals Bakhtin's own monologisation of the multiple energies of the theatre. The dynamic, liminal space in which actor and audience could comingle, in which the very carnivalesque energies of a socially multidimensional audience could engage with the multivalent space

[5] The Duvakin interviews of 1973 include an interview (March 1973) which deals with Bakhtin's experience of the theatre (Bakhtin 2019). But, disappointingly, little is said about the structure of history of dramatic art beyond anecdotal accounts of Bakhtin's thoughts and experience of the theatre in his periods of exile and his visits to St. Petersburg and Moscow. They focus on the qualities of specific actors (e.g. Sandro Moisiu) and playwrights like Meyerhold, Ibsen, and Gogol, with some interesting comments of Freud as "a discoverer, and a great discoverer" (186), but little on the nature of theatre as such. In this interview Bakhtin makes some positive remarks about specific performances, but in the course of Bakhtin's earlier, mid-1940s notes on the "architecture" of Shakespeare's plays, he dismissively contrasts Shakespeare's load-bearing structures with the mere "ornament" of modern theatre.

and energy of the stage, is reduced to the theatre of early twentieth century Russia and the Soviet Union with which Bakhtin was directly acquainted, and to the theatre of Ibsen, of which he writes:

> In the new drama, such as Ibsen's plays, the whole matter is in the ornament . . . glued to the carcass of a prop made of cardboard, devoid of any architectural complexity . . . Its emptiness and lack of accents then have to be cluttered with naturalistic decorations, props, accessories. (2014, 528)

Apart from the carboard ornaments of naturalistic plays, Bakhtin nonetheless holds that without an overarching consciousness outside the plot – the narrator able to mix languages in genuine heteroglossia – theatre cannot offer a genuine mixing of languages, intonations and accents:

> In drama there is no all-encompassing language that addresses itself dialogically to separate languages, there is no second all-encompassing plotless (nondramatic) dialogue outside that of the (nondramatic) plot . . . inside this area a dialogue is playing out between the author and his characters – not a dramatic dialogue broken up into statement and response. (1987, 266; 320)

On the face of it, this is a curious restriction. First, as the author of *Speech Genres* should have known, language is not merely a matter of "statement and response" but a huge variety of activities and performatives ("language games" for Ludwig Wittgenstein; "speech acts" for J.L. Austin) that cannot be reduced to "statements". Dramatic dialogue is comprised precisely of the multitude of speech acts and genres that Bakhtin himself discusses in "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1986).

Second, the author of *Discourse in the Novel* makes a point of insisting on the intrinsically heteroglossic nature of *all* utterances: everyone who speaks acts in an arena always already filled with other voices, intonations and evaluations that resonate with their own dialogism. That is the nature of language as utterance, as Bakhtin insists even in the Rabelais book:

> Languages are philosophies – not abstract but concrete, social philosophies, penetrated by a system of values inseparable from living practises and class struggle. This is why every object, every concept, every point of view, as well as every intonation found their place at this intersection of linguistic philosophies and was drawn into an intense ideological struggle. (1984a, 471)

If this is true, then there is no reason whatsoever why the discourses of a variety of characters in drama should not themselves be heteroglossic and not merely "dialogical" in the reduced Bakhtinian sense of drama: containing and responding to intonations and evaluations not only of other characters on the stage but also those in the society as a whole, beyond the fictions of

the theatre. True, there is no overarching narrative voice able to mix these accents in a comprehensive way, but such hegemonic control runs against the very idea of incompleteness, growth and proliferation Bakhtin celebrates as the essence of the carnivalesque.

My point is that drama (certainly Shakespearean drama) is not confined to a merely vertical set of relations within the confines of the stage: "statement and response" between characters trapped in that space. Shakespeare's theatre also acts horizontally, encompassing a whole world of heteroglossia in its utterances, and also in its very eschewal of "footlights" – in the permeable interaction between player and audience and the folk traditions that that mingling encompasses. Weimann once again offers a crucial corrective to Bakhtin's myopia:

> In Shakespeare's youth the popular actor, especially the comedian with his extemporal wit, performed not so much *for* an audience as *with* a community of spectators who provided him with inspiration, and acted, as it were, as a chorus . . . the spectator who challenged the actor has the weight of the audience behind him. (1967, 213)

He argues that this community persisted in various forms well into the development of Shakespeare's mature theatre: "in the way the fictive spectators and the actual audience merged and became a vital link between play and real life" (213) – in the flexibility of the stage, derived from earlier forms of folk theatre and festival, and especially in its flexible and interaction between *locus* and *platea*.

Following Weimann, Chris Fitter argues that the "public theatre offered a reconstituted festive community: and one intrinsically anti-authoritarian, indeed often, like carnival, exuberantly oppositional in its political emotions". Furthermore, this festive community can be discerned not through the text alone, but through attention to Shakespeare's stagecraft: "there can be no accurate assessment of the politics of Shakespearean drama without recapture of the experience designed for players in original performances: and experience in which deixis could unleash tactical surprises central to political fashioning" (Fitter 2022, 16, 31). Fitter's emphasis on Shakespeare's stagecraft is crucial: it highlights the limitations of a largely textual approach to Shakespeare's play, with little concern or knowledge of their dynamic social and political interactions with audiences.

In the opening to the first chapter of *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White ask: "How does one 'think' a marketplace?"

> At once a bounded enclosure and a site of open commerce, it is both the imagined centre of an urban community and its structural interconnection with the network of goods, commodities, markets, sites of commerce and

> places of production which sustain it. A marketplace is the epitome of local identity and the unsettling of that identity by the trade and traffic of goods from elsewhere. (1986, 27)

With a few relatively minor adjustments, this might be an account of the early modern theatre: bounded and yet open, a centre of commercial exchange and creative production, and a site where "goods from elsewhere" (the imagined worlds of the plays) both affirm and unsettle local identities. The representational and spatial flexibility of the early modern English stage, informed by the theatre companies' essentially *collaborative* nature, embodied the social structures and complexities of the society and the performance traditions out of which their theatre emerged:

> As long as the Elizabethan clown continued to carry on a secularized, postcultic element of self-embodiment (what Joseph Hall called his "self-resembled show") the ago-old contradiction between ritual and *mimesis*, which lived on in the contradiction between actor and his role, survived – a survival facilitated by the Elizabethan social context. Thus, a more ancient duality was involved: the tension between imitation and expression, between representation and self-realization, rooted in miming culture since the beginning of the division of labor. This traditional form of dramatic two-dimensionality took on an added strength and realized new possibilities in the Elizabethan period, especially at a time when the national and cultural "mingle-mangle" was about to reach its climax. (Weimann 1967, 246-7)

Weimann's sense of the dynamics of the theatre and its situatedness in particular historical contexts is infinitely more informed, more historical, more able to encompass a plethora of voices and social evaluations (the "mingle-mangle") than Bakhtin's ignorant parody.

I am perhaps being too hard on Bakhtin here. My aim is not to discard him, but to clear a space within his criticism of theatre, and even his qualified appreciation of Shakespeare, in order to apply his most powerful theoretical work in the philosophy of language, on the carnival, and in his later thoughts on "speech genres" and "chronotopes", for a comprehensive application of *all* aspects of his work to Shakespeare and his theatre. His work on Rabelais, heteroglossia and speech genres work together. Carnival is a space for the dynamic dialogism of social accents, intonations and evaluations. But so is the flexible community of Shakespeare's theatre, where the languages of *locus* and *platea* mix and clash in performative speech acts or language-games that far exceed in diversity and effect mere "statement and response".

5. Bakhtin on Language

Let us return to the key aspects of the "Bakhtin School's" philosophy of language that we might use to illuminate Shakespeare's admired linguistic capacities. The first is the sense that language should be approached as "utterance" – words in use – rather than as an abstract and abstracted system, such as proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure and his structuralist followers. This is close to Wittgenstein's insistence that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, and such use always occurs through "language games" embedded in the plethora of human "forms of life" (Wittgenstein 1973). Approaching language as utterance (rather than the abstraction of mere sentences) focusses on the concrete contexts of such uses, their situatedness in human interaction, and the intonations and evaluations they carry into new contexts of use. This means that every utterance is directed towards another utterance – both responding to previous utterance and anticipating a response in return: "when the listener perceives and understands the meaning . . . of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it . . . Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in some form or another. The listener becomes the speaker" (Bakhtin 1987, 68). In this most basic sense of the term, all language use is dialogical. Moreover, every utterance and its response arises out of a context that imbues it with what Bakhtin calls "intonation": "a single concrete utterance is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life. Each separate utterance is alive and has meaning only within these contexts. There are no neutral utterances nor can there be" (Bakhtin 1990, 292). Such contextually determined dialogism will undergo further complications, but let's retain its simplest sense. If we apply this basic sense of dialogism to the theatre and the novel, respectively, a number of issues emerge.

In both genres the represented speech between characters conforms to the interactive, anticipatory and responsive nature of dialogism as such – although on the stage different actors can, through body language, intonation and pauses, find different forms of expression for such interactive relationships, or even highlight the implicit forms of dialogical response. Characters in a novel are tied completely to the reins of the narrator. Furthermore, in the theatre – especially the early modern theatre – there is a triple interaction. The audience anticipates and responds to the dialogical interaction of the characters on stage, but also to each other, in modes that are scarcely controllable and largely unpredictable. There is thus a three-way, multi-logical interaction occurring with every theatrical performance – an interaction that, moreover, changes with every performance. The audiences of Shakespeare's theatre were notoriously unruly, freely and openly

responding to the play and each other in a thousand different unrepeatable utterances, including the power to terminate a play if it disliked them. Compared to the single reader of the novel, the early modern theatre, in its multiple interactivity, its dynamism, its unpredictability and expressivity, is much closer to the actual dynamics of carnival, even as represented in a novel written by Rabelais.

There is one area in which the novel offers a degree of heteroglossia that occurs to a much lesser extent in the theatre: the free indirect discourse of the narrator. For Voloshinov and Bakhtin the novel's mixing of discourses and accents is central to their celebration of novelistic dialogism. Free indirect discourse is the stage, as it were, on which different intonations, those of the reporting and those of the reported speech, can engage in creative friction. The intonation of one can interfere with the other without being entirely obliterated, both being perceived simultaneously in the whole utterance:

> Indirect discourse hears a message differently; it actively receives and brings to bear in transmission different factors, different aspects of the message than do other patterns . . .The words and expressions, incorporated into indirect discourse with their own specificity . . . are particularised, their coloration is heightened, and at the same time they're made to accommodate shadings of the author's attitude – his irony, humour, and so on. (Voloshinov 1986, 129; 131)

There are numerous instances in the theatre (especially Shakespeare's theatre) where characters act as narrators, using quasi-indirect discourse to overlay or inform the reported utterance with their own intonation, exactly as Voloshinov describes the process in the novel.[6] This general point is in effect

[6] See Hirschkop 2023 on the presence of heteroglossia (which he ties to indexicality) in all discourse, although it's more concentrated in the novel: "Time to return to the earlier question: does this only happen in novels? Everyday life is full of ideologies and beliefs that can be mobilized in the pragmatic grasping of an utterance, and we typically encounter utterances in narrative situations with a distinctive physiognomy. But although in everyday contexts we may be aware of indexical features, they're usually something mixed in with the denotational or immediate performative work done by the utterance. Novels, by contrast, focus on indexicality in a more rigorous and thorough fashion, because the point of novels is 'the artistic representation of a language', which means the interrogation of a style's social and historical significance. Unlike scientific, moral, and other practical forms of discourse, in which reference is to objects, people and situations in the world, in novels the object of representation is language itself: they don't claim to represent the world (they are 'fictions'), but our representations of the world, given in language. Indexical relations may be suggested or created anywhere, even in the evanescent discourse of everyday life but they are established on a more lasting basis by the rigour and intensity of public, institutionalised metapragmatic discourse, which Bakhtin called 'novelistic discourse" (8). Hirschkop doesn't discuss drama, but there is no reason to suppose that drama isn't

made in "Discourse in the Novel", in the section on "The Speaking Person in the Novel", in Bakhtin's general argument that, in effect, *all* discourse (beyond the novel) involves both the internalization of ideological systems expressed in particular forms of language (what he calls "authoritative discourse" (345) as "internally persuasive discourse", together with the re-representation of the words (and thus ideological systems and evaluation) of others:

> In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. (Bakhtin 1981, 345-6)

The re-presentation of others' words in our own – in mockery, reconsideration, refutation, irony, and so on, in which their intonations are overlaid with our own – is thus an absolutely central aspect of everyday speech. This is not, however, a form of dialogism, since such representation has, for Bakhtin, a pragmatic and not an artistic purpose: it is concerned primarily with the *transmission* of meaning between two people. The rhetorical representation of another's language has a similar practical purpose: the exposure of contradiction, for example, in order to refute another's argument. (We may point out here the highly traditional, narrow view of language as a mere means of communication [in everyday] discourse, in contrast to Wittgenstein and Austin's demonstration of it manifold performative functions, but I will leave that for a later discussion of the place of speech genres in Bakhtin's later work). For the moment we might restrict ourselves to the observation that if *all* discourse involves the representation and overlay of the discourses of others with a speaker's intonation, then this will clearly be evident in discourses used between characters in the theatre. But Bakhtin has an answer: "Double-voicedness in the novel, as distinct from double-voicedness in rhetorical or other forms, always tends towards double-*languagedness* as its own outside limit. Therefore novelistic double-voicedness cannot be unfolded into logical contradictions or into purely dramatic contrasts" (1981, 356). The hybridization of double-languedness in the novel offers an image of language(s) as forms of social articulation and belief, in order to expose their multiplicity and ideological relativity. But is it not possible that speeches

concerned with either indexicality or "the artistic representation of a language".

of characters in a play may, in addition to performing a pragmatic function within the world of play, act in exactly this "novelistic" way, detectable not only by other characters, but also by the audience? It is not only possible, but highly likely.

Voloshinov (but not Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel") excludes the mixing of intonation for spoken discourse, confining it entirely to the *written* word:

> [I]n that area where quasi direct discourse has become a massively used device – the area of modern prose fiction – transmission by voice of evaluative interference would be impossible. Furthermore the very kind of development quasi-direct discourse has undergone is bound up with the transposition of the larger prose genres into a silent register, i.e. for silent reading. Only this 'silencing' of prose could have made available the multileveldness and voice-defying complexity of intonational structures that are so characteristic for modern literature. (1986, 156)

Here we have the most trenchant reason for excluding the theatre from the "voice-defying complexity of intonational structures" of the modern novel. Like Harry Berger Jr, who holds that in performance the variety of intonations available through the silent reading of a play are reduced to the single choice of a particular actor, Volshinov claims a qualitative change in the intonational complexity through the historical development of the novel and its narrational dynamics compared to the monological voicing to which the theatre (and other genres) are restricted (Berger 1983). The lonely reader encountering an equally isolated author/narrator can therefore silently release and entertain a much greater degree of heteroglossic intonation than a theatrical cast interacting with two thousand actively responsive audience members.

This is a philosophical point rather than an empirical one. It is therefore not affected by my questions about the kind of theatre Bakhtin is considering when he dismisses theatre as an essentially monological genre. We may, nonetheless, ask whether the point is valid. The narrator may overlay the voices of characters with his or her own inflections, intonations and evaluations, but are these themselves open to multiple further, virtual tones in the mind of the reader? And does the narrative overlay not, in its very essence, close down such possibilities for the reported speech? Is the "voice-defying complexity" of modern genres meant for reading not actually a voice-denying narrowing of possibilities through the controlling voice of the narrator, in turn directed by the pen of the author?

However we answer these questions, it does seem that this may be a situation in which what is lost on the swings is gained on the roundabouts. The multiple dimensions of interactive dialogue both on the stage and between the stage and auditorium – flexible, unpredictable, and beyond authorial or narrative control

– is more likely to release a polyphonic and polysemic contrast and mixture of voices than the single author directing his or her written discourse at a single reader. The former is much closer to the cacophonic hurly-burly dynamics of carnival. It is only in the post-Renaissance theatre – with its footlights, its darkened auditorium, its polite bourgeois protocols and dividing proscenium stage of the "dead" theatre, so reviled by playwrights from Berthold Brecht to Jerzy Grotowsky, Anton Artaud and Peter Brook – that the stage becomes a place of mere "statement and response".

Bakhtin offers something of an answer to the acknowledged fact, indicated above, that "the text is always imprisoned in dead material of some sort" (Bakhtin 1981, 253), in his concept of the chronotope:

> But inscriptions and books in any form already lie on the boundary line between culture and nature. And the completely real-life time-space with the work resonates, where we find the inscription and the book, we find as well a real person – one who originates spoken speech as well as the inscription and the book – the real people who are hearing and reading the text… Therefore . . . the real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world set off by a sharp and categorical boundary from the represented world of the text . . . creates the text, for all its aspects – the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, and the performance of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who could recreate and in so doing renew the text – participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text. Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotypes of the world represented in the work in the text. (Ibid.)

Bakhtin's chronotope is not merely the fusion of time and space represented in the text, but also that combination in the world from which the text is forged and the worlds towards which the text moves through history. The chronotope renders nugatory the intense battle between historicists and presentists that occupied so much critical debate in the late twentieth century. The form and meaning of the text is shaped out of the dialogical interaction of its represented world, the world in and from which it was represented by the author, and the worlds on each occasion of its re-representation. Bakhtin acknowledges the "performance of the text" and the "listener" as equal participants in the "creation of the represented world in the text". We may thus figure the chronotopes of a theatrical performance as a five-fold structure: 1) the textual world(s) from which the world of the text is shaped (in the *Henry IV* plays, for example), 2) the historical world of late medieval England in which they are set, 3) the early modern world of the text's production and as Shakespeare reflects and refracts it in his play, 4) the complex combination of time and space in each performance of

the play (touring the provinces, the Theatre, the Globe, the Blackfriars or at Court) in Shakespeare's time, and 5) the worlds of performance, reading and adaptations of the text subsequent to, say, 1616.

To save space, we might concentrate on just a few of the chronotopes that Bakhtin discerns in the development of the novel in his essay, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1981). For early modern theatre, the most significant is his discussion of the ways in which the figures of the clown and the fool in medieval folk festival and tales move into the novel:

> The masks of the clown and the fool come to the aid of the novelist. These masks are not invented: they are rooted deep in the folk. They are linked with the folk through the fool's time-honored privilege not to participate in life, and by the time-honored bluntness of the fool's language; they are linked as well with the chronotope of the public square and with the trappings of the theater . . . At last a form was found to portray the mode of existence of a man who is in life but not of it, life's perpetual spy and reflector; at last specific forms had been found to reflect private life and make it public . . . Opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception we have the rogue's cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool's unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown, a synthetic form for the (parodied) exposure of others. (1981, 161-2)

It is curious that while Bakhtin briefly acknowledges Falstaff in his extensive praise of Rabelais' "tight matrix of death and laughter, with food, with drink, with sexual indecencies" (1981, 198), he denigrates the "masks" of clown and fool to mere "trappings of the theatre". He ignores the essential roles of the "rogue's cheerful deceit" (*The Winter's Tale*), the "fool's unselfish simplicity" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*) and the exposing "clown" (*Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *As You Like It*) in Shakespeare's theatre. These figures do not "come to the aid of" the dramatist as they do the novelist (161). They are an integral part his theatre via its deep roots in the tradition of folk festival, and that continuing relationship extends to the chronotope of theatrical reception, among author, player and (differentiated) audience into an indeterminate future.

6. An Example: Shakespeare's *King John*

I don't have space to demonstrate my project to recover Bakhtin for Shakespeare and his theatre, but I can offer a brief example, from Shakespeare's *King John* – not a play that has been considered especially carnivalesque, even by Shakespeareans who have discerned elements of Bakhtinian carnival in the *Henry* plays, some of the comedies, and *Hamlet* (see Knowles

1998). Here is a fairly long passage, from the opening scene, in which the character referred to as "Bastard" of "Richard Faulconbridge" reflects on his transformation, by King John, from the older, but putative bastard son of Robert Faulconbridge, to the newly knighted bastard son of King Richard the Lionheart. He has now lost, as a result of the king's action, his inheritance of land and income to the younger brother. As a knight now he outranks the younger Robert Faulconbridge: "A foot of honor better than I was, / But many a many foot of land the worse" (1.1.188-9).

The speech hovers between a droll reflection on the implications of his new social status – of what he is now free to do and say in the world, and a direct address from a *platea* position to the surrounding audience:

> Well, now can I make any Joan a lady.
> "Good den, Sir Richard!" "God-a-mercy, fellow!"
> An if his name be George, I'll call him "Peter,"
> For new-made honor doth forget men's names;
> 'Tis too respective and too sociable
> For your conversion. Now your traveler,
> He and his toothpick at my Worship's mess,
> And when my knightly stomach is sufficed,
> Why then I suck my teeth and catechize
> My pickèd man of countries: "My dear sir,"
> Thus leaning on mine elbow I begin,
> "I shall beseech you" – that is Question now,
> And then comes Answer like an absey-book:
> "O, sir," says Answer, "at your best command,
> At your employment, at your service, sir."
> "No, sir," says Question, "I, sweet sir, at yours."
> And so, ere Answer knows what Question would,
> Saving in dialogue of compliment
> And talking of the Alps and Apennines,
> The Pyrenean and the river Po,
> It draws toward supper in conclusion so.
> But this is worshipful society
> And fits the mounting spirit like myself;
> For he is but a bastard to the time
> That doth not smack of observation,
> And so am I whether I smack or no;
> And not alone in habit and device,
> Exterior form, outward accouterment,
> But from the inward motion to deliver
> Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth,
> Which though I will not practice to deceive,
> Yet to avoid deceit I mean to learn,

For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.
(*King John*, 1.1.188-222)[7]

On the surface, the speech expresses the newly dubbed knight's reflection on his transformed behaviour as a member of the aristocracy – his capacity to turn any commoner ("Joan") into a lady through marriage; the new respect he will receive from those below him; his social capacity to pay no attention to the names of commoners; the new language of compliment and worldly wise travels in "worshipful society"; and his Machiavellian capacity, as a "mounting spirit", to use "outward acouterment" to achieve his political and social "rising". As such it acts as a self-revealing soliloquy of personal ambition, like Richard III or Edmund in *King Lear*.

But the speech, and especially its direct engagement with the proximate spectators, contains multiple layers of the "self-resembling show" that Weimann discerns in the stagecraft of the Shakespearean clown. The Bastard is satirising the behaviour, status and language of the nobility, its assumed social superiority, affected insouciance, and empty "habit and device", prompting the common spectators to engage *with* him in carnivalesque laughter *at* the upper classes sitting above them in the galleries. There are multiple layers here: for the actor playing the Bastard is himself a commoner, not a knight, engaging directly with fellow commoners in the pit, splitting and combining the representational *locus* of the upper stage and the margins of the *platea*; his language is similarly subject to a splitting, between real aristocratic discourse and mocking irony in a complex show of heteroglossia. The mocking tenor of the speech aligns the actor with the audience, but also places the character/actor against both the *platea* figure of King John (for example) on the stage and the real high-born spectators who could afford the gallery.

The invocation of speech patterns in his comic presentation of "Question" and "Answer" offers samples of common "speech genres" (discussed by the later Bakhtin) but also reflects on such speech genres as examples of J.L. Austin's performative speech acts: linguistic performances that, given the appropriate social and political authorising context, can change the world and human relations. The Bastard's performative transformation into a knight by King John is one such example; his sardonic reflection on his capacity to "make any Joan a lady" another. And his satirical reference to the "absey-book" suggests the arbitrary, politically haphazard nature of the power of Bakhtin's speech genres or Austin's speech acts.

This brief analysis of a single monologue by Shakespeare brings together the two traditionally separated aspects of Bakhtin's work: on the sociology of the carnival and the philosophy of language. I hope to have shown that

[7] References to *King John* are from Shakespeare 2018.

in the Bastard Shakespeare presents a figure who embodies the folk and theatrical traditions of the clown, working horizontally from the *platea* across the division between actor and audience to parody the discourse and behaviour of the upper classes. That connection with the audience works on two levels – in sympathy with the "groundlings" in close proximity to him, but also laughing with them at the more distant upper classes in the galleries. His parody works in two horizontal directions: towards the gallery, but also towards the upper-class figures embodied on the *locus* of the stage. The parody is made possible not only by his physical swagger but also by his narrator-like incorporation of the habitual language of privileged classes into his own discourse, overlaid with his own "attitude – his irony, humour" and satirical laughter (Voloshinov 1986, 131). The Bastard's language is thus both carnivalesque and an instance of heteroglossia. The two work together through the flexibility of Shakespeare's stage and its nature as an extension of the festive spirit of the marketplace.

I hope that this brief exposition of the dynamics of the Bastard's performance has demonstrated that there is a space in Bakhtin's work for the heteroglossic and performative richness of Shakespeare's stage, and that attention to its fusion of text and stagecraft shows that in some ways the interactive, communal, and multidimensional resonances of his theatre may exceed the linguistic and social power of the text on the page, confined to the enclosed consciousness of a single reader.

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