

# *Dossier of the Muses*

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### **Transcending Monologic Impulses to Write and Read Literature Dialogically: Perspectives from Mikhail Bakhtin.**

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**Abstract:** There seems to be a great urgency and necessity to familiarize ourselves with principles of dialogicality in our understanding of any narrative – be it literary, cultural, or historical texts, as the world is becoming frighteningly rigid and polarized. Literature that once gave deep insights into human condition has already become so politically charged with loud rhetoric, that takes away our ability to appreciate diverse genres that classic literary works deploy. With these observations in mind, this paper gives a broad introduction to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, with a hope of generating deeper interest in his works. There is much to be learnt from the Bakhtinian oeuvre – for it not only shows what a dialogic world looks like with its strong philosophical underpinnings, but also provides us with sharp analytical tools to detect and create dialogical texts. Furthermore, the Bakhtinian concepts allow us to navigate an open-ended and pluralistic world without negating or undermining either the self or the other. Bakhtin's perspectives affirm the potential for growth in a heterogeneous world and that perhaps is the need of the hour.

We must renounce our monologic habits so that we might come to feel at home in the new artistic sphere which Dostoevsky discovered, so that we might orient ourselves in the incomparably more complex *artistic model of the world* which he created.

Mikhail Bakhtin. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

Socrates: Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an orator has to learn the differences of human souls – there are so many and of such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man.

Plato. *Phaedrus*.

The artistic model of the world in Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary works that Mikhail Bakhtin emphasized and celebrated was the ability to find the *man in man* and the differences between *man and man*. Socrates also insists that language – be it spoken or written – must not only enchant the soul, but also fine tune the narrative to showcase differences between human souls. Thus, the function of literary text is to explore the inner landscape of the characters with varied personalities, ideologies, and histories. The fundamental question with respect to literary criticism is, are we dealing with 'Mummified Texts' and 'inert consciousness' or should we treat literature as 'Living Texts' in vibrant

dialogue with evolving consciousness? If we choose the latter, then we must know that the writer cannot be a smug wordsmith without an ethical core or even worse convey the inanest and even unethical actions as desirable virtues, and neither should a reader approach the text mechanically to uncover the facts and not look for the soul of the text and the author. After all, story is the simplest vehicle of truth. In the last few decades, literary criticism has been dominated by the loud politics of the day, so much so that the aesthetic value has been subordinated to ideology. This trend has unfortunately erased the enjoyment, understanding and even critical assessment of literary works, only to embolden our monologic impulses. In the dialogic world as envisioned by Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), literary texts are likened to “life” having their ups and downs – experiencing the multi-faceted nature of life – incorporating comedy, tragedy, parody, irony etc. Furthermore, Bakhtin insists on the *in-between* space between the readers and the text as he says, “The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects.*” (p. 106). Thus, meaning making is a joint enterprise. Furthermore, Bakhtin (1984) takes perhaps a seriously radical position in insisting on plurality of consciousnesses, as he avers,

“No Nirvana is possible for a *single* consciousness. A single consciousness is *contradictio in adjecto*. Consciousness is in essence multiple, *Pluralia tantum.*” (p. 288).

By insisting on the impossibility of *Nirvana* for a single consciousness, Bakhtin is asserting that neither the self, nor the text and the world that both operate in are bound and closed. Instead, the self, texts and culture must remain open and unfinalized so that the possibility of growth is kept alive. Mikhail Bakhtin, although widely recognized as a literary theorist, was in fact much beyond that. In their authoritative biography, Clark and Holquist (1984) claim that Bakhtin really saw himself as a philosophical anthropologist at heart, probing into the interconnections between self, texts, cultures, and histories.

### **Mikhail Bakhtin: A Philosopher of Dialogue under Brutal Monologic Conditions.**

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was born in the town of Orel, that is located south of Moscow on November 16, 1895, and died on March 7, 1975. Thus, he lived through the most tumultuous period in Russian history, where every word a person uttered or wrote was censored and monitored. Open dialogue between divergent ideas was simply too far-fetched and risky. With routine purge of intellects, the conditions for honest and serious scholarship were virtually absent. Even a slight deviation from official position resulted in their works being banned for several decades – long after they were killed by state agencies.

Among the thinkers of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, very few were fascinated by the plenitude of differences in the world as Bakhtin was, and yet the differences he celebrated were not fragmented; instead, he sought to find dialogic connections between them. Bakhtin firmly stands under the banner of one and many – diversity in unity – dialogicality being the link. True to a thinker who gave great depth to “unfinalized” and ‘becoming’ entities, Bakhtin in his life and works remained inconclusive, enigmatic,

and appropriated by diverse schools of thought. Unlike most thinkers, Bakhtin neither openly revolted against the regime, nor did he tacitly approve, or stay indifferent to their heavy-handedness, and yet his writings remain uncompromised. One of the foremost authorities on Mikhail Bakhtin, Caryl Emerson (1997) who brought much of Bakhtin's works to the English-speaking world, captures the enigma of Bakhtin:

“In the place of God, Bakhtin deified the everyday interlocutor. A creature made neither for prayer nor parenting, he reigned in a world of philosophical conversations carried out over endless tea and cigarettes in small rooms in the dead of night. Bakhtin was a *mezhdusoboinik* (a “just-between-you-and-me-nik”). For him, the intimate voice and the chamber space was all.” (p. 5)

I bring these impressions on Bakhtin – his life and works – only to draw attention to how he managed to evade monologism that was all-pervasive to write most eloquently about the depth and dimension of dialogue. The lesson is incredibly instructive and inspiring as the world seems to be enveloped in the darkness of cancel culture, where physical and epistemic violence is a daily occurrence. Therefore, the title of this essay is not some abstract, theoretical construct, but transcending monologism is a lived experience for Bakhtin, and the readers can draw some insights from it. Bakhtin was not some academic empire builder with a political angst to grind, nor did he have some grand plan to solve a philosophical riddle on interpretation once and for all. Such thinkers who invite you into their world for a one-to-one chat provide invaluable insights into literary texts and the readers who engage with them while facing the tides of culture and history.

### **Early Philosophical Works:**

Among the many challenges in reading Russian thinkers who lived through the brutal Stalin era is that the sequence in which they wrote their works and sequence in which they were made public do not synchronize, and this holds so true in case of Bakhtin. Furthermore, Bakhtin's later works – which came into the public domain earlier – and interestingly and relatively more accessible, and literary than his earlier philosophical works. But, the very foundation of literary theory was his early philosophical works, and without getting acquainted with them, understanding the nuances of literary texts is bound to be challenging. Bakhtin's early works include *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) and *Art and Answerability* (1990) along with numerous short essays scattered in various journals and edited books and these works provide sound introduction to the philosophical basis of dialogue. In these works, Bakhtin confronts Immanuel Kant's ethical imperative and transcendental aesthetics head on and argues that highly abstract philosophical systems are detached from the particulars and the concrete ground realities. Furthermore, abstraction manages to erase any trace of the subjective to assert its authority and power. Even so, Bakhtin is not calling for ‘anything goes’ kind of subjective relativism. Instead, he argues that every individual ‘Act’ can become a philosophy only through its answerability to the performed actions. Bakhtin (1993) insists,

“Life can be consciously comprehended only in concrete answerability. A philosophy of life can be only a moral philosophy. Life can be consciously comprehended only as an ongoing event, and not as Being *qua* a given. A life that has fallen away from answerability cannot have a philosophy: it is, in its very principle fortuitous and incapable of being rooted. (p.56)

No entity or concept has a stand-alone or prescriptive status for Bakhtin (1993), and he asserts that there is no “aesthetic ought, scientific ought” or even an “ethical ought” and explains that “the ought gains its validity within the unity of my once-occurrent answerable life.” (p.5). Ideas cannot remain untouched by life and life continually faces the spatial and temporal upheavals of culture and history. In the same spirit about the relationship between art and life, (Bakhtin, 1990) asserts, “Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself – in the unity of my answerability.” (p. 2). The genesis of art is certainly life, and yet they are not identical. By the very act of aestheticizing life experiences, art reaches an exalted status that the humble prose of life can never catch-up, and still art cannot remain high-flown and not hold itself answerable to life’s questions and life in turn cannot remain uninfluenced by art and remain prosaic.

It would be difficult to deploy the categories of literary criticism without understanding how and why Bakhtin set out to *de-transcendentalize* Kant. If Kant’s interest was on the *mind* as an independent entity, Bakhtin interest was in dialogic relations that exist or can be established between competing ideas in the world. For Bakhtin, the Kantian transcendental synthesis does not retain the uniqueness of each entity in the world, thus resulting in stubborn monologism. Whereas the concept of ‘transgression’ that Bakhtin introduces retains the individuality of each element and that opens the possibility for dialogue.

In *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin (1990) introduces two concepts central to any work of art and they are ‘Architectonics’ – that entail grouping of myriad concepts, and ‘Aesthetic Vision’ that requires achieving a consummate whole of these heterogeneous parts. Thus, neither the parts lose their uniqueness, nor do they remain in a fragmented state. If they remain separate, artistic work is bound to slip into relativism and more importantly artwork would never be able to rise to the level of aesthetics. Bakhtin (1990) gives a cogent explanation on how art is elevated to the status of Aesthetic Vision:

Aesthetic activity does not create a reality that is wholly new. Unlike cognition and performed action, which create nature and social humanity, art celebrates, adorns, and recollects this conveniently encountered reality of cognition and action (nature and social humanity). It enriches and completes them, and above all else *it creates the concrete intuitive unity of these two worlds*. It places man in nature, understood as his aesthetic environment; it humanizes nature and naturalizes man.” (p. 278 – 279).

Bakhtin sees immense enrichment in the convergence of the cognitive and the ethical in the process ascending to the level of aesthetics, as it brings in gentle emotional responsiveness and wholesomeness to the activity as he explains:

“In this acceptance of the ethical and cognitive into its proper object resides the distinctive *kindness* of the aesthetic, its *mercifulness*. It does not choose, as it were, anything, it does not divide anything, does

not abolish anything, does not push away and detach itself from anything. These purely negative moments exist in art only in relation to its material. Towards it, the artist is stern and merciless: the poet casts away words, forms, and expressions without pity, and he selects only a few; fragments of marble fly away from beneath the sculptor's chisel. But the inner man in the first case and the corporeal man in the second are only enriched; ethical man is enriched by nature positively affirmed, while natural man is enriched by ethical meaning." (Bakhtin, 1990. P. 279)

The bulk of *Art and Answerability* is devoted to Author-Hero relationship in aesthetic activity. Having created the hero, Bakhtin insists that the author cannot and must exert semantic authority over his creation. The hero is not a mechanical mouthpiece for the author to convey his worldview, for that would turn his hero into a voiceless puppet. Like a growing child, the fictional hero too has an independent soul and finds his identity amidst changing cultural landscape. The relationship between the creator and created is a developing one. At the nascent stage of creation, the author must find ways to give shape to what the mind has conceived, and at this stage there is only one consciousness operating – that of the author – since the stable image of the hero is yet to take shape and the hero's voice is yet to be established. The author, at this stage has the benefit of "surplus of meaning" at his disposal to "carry forward the story" (Bakhtin, 1984. p. 73), and once the hero is endowed with his independent voice, the author must relinquish the surplus vision to enter into a dialogue with his created hero. Bakhtin (1990) observes that the emergence of hero's image is essentially author's struggle with himself, and he explains,

"Before the countenance of the hero finally takes shape as a stable and necessary whole, the hero is going to exhibit a great many grimaces, random masks, wrong gestures, and unexpected actions, depending on all those emotional-volitional reactions and personal whims of the author, through the chaos of which he is compelled to work his way in order to reach an authentic valuational attitude." (p. 6)

The authentic valuational attitude that Bakhtin is referring to is for the author to recognize his created hero as an independent being, with unique personality that is gradually developing in the cultural landscape. The author neither has any control over the hero, nor can he dictate terms to the readers, as to how the hero should be perceived and understood. Any assertion of absolute authority over the hero or readers amount to trespassing into the consciousness of the 'other.' Bakhtin (1986) insists that "True understanding in literature and literary scholarship is always historical and personified." (p. 162). Thus, the task of literary scholarship – be it for the writer or the reader, is to appreciate and understand the *psychology of art* and the *art of psychology*.

### **Bakhtin's Wandering in Dostoevsky's World**

Bakhtin had a lifelong fascination for Dostoevsky, and it is in his works Bakhtin discovered the philosophical depth and dimension of dialogue. Bakhtin's writings on Dostoevsky also had a long and mysterious journey. In the Editor's preface to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Bakhtin, 1984), Caryl Emerson wrote that Bakhtin started his work on Dostoevsky in 1921 and only seven years later, the initial monograph was published in 1929, and in that very year Bakhtin was sent to jail for his activities

in the Russian Orthodox Church and narrowly escaped being sent to death camp due to debilitating bone disease. He was sentenced to exile in Kazakhstan and later worked in Saransk and Moscow in relative obscurity. It was only by chance that the monograph was discovered in Moscow, and it came to light decades later. This curious journey almost stands as an emblem of resurrection of dialogue.

What are the discoveries made by Bakhtin in Dostoevsky's world? First and foremost, it was the polyphony in his novels – that is – every character has his independent voice, and their voices carry as much weight as the author's voice. Nothing is forced into a 'single objective world' with 'single authorial consciousness' and Bakhtin observes that in "none of Dostoevsky's novels is there any evolution of a unified spirit" (p.26), in a Hegelian sense. Dostoevsky never presented a "direct monologic expression," instead we hear "genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." (p. 6). Culture by its very nature is heterogenous and it has never been any other way. Bakhtin, throughout his works repeatedly says that one must *listen* to myriad voices in culture and that *hearing ear* of Dostoevsky contributes immensely to his creation of polyphonic novels. Bakhtin (1984) observes,

*"Subjectively Dostoevsky participated in the contradictory multi-leveledness of his own time: he changed camps, moved from one to another, and in this respect the planes existing in objective social life were for him stages along the path of his own life, stages of his own spiritual evolution."* (p. 27)

Polyphony in literary texts allow us to hear multitude of voices, variations in tones and even absorbing silence is saturated with layers of meaning. The Grand Epic text of India – *The Mahabharata* – is a polyphonic text *par excellence*, and my work – **Dialogics of Self, The Mahabharata and Culture: The History of Understanding and Understanding of History** (Bandlamudi, 2010) was an attempt to hear polyphony of voices in engaging with the epic text. It is the polyphony that gives semantic mobility to any great works of literature. That is the reason it would be a mistake to look for "a *single* word, a *single* voice, a *single* accent" in *The Mahabharata* or Dostoevsky – for these texts carry the "unity of the polyphonic novel – a unity standing above the word, above the voice, above the accent" (p. 43), and hence one must transcend the monologic habits to join the polyphony.

Another important feature of the hero in Dostoevsky's art that Bakhtin observes and celebrates is that the hero as a stable figure with a set of psychological traits, caught up in events, does not interest Dostoevsky: instead, he is interested in how the "world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself." (p. 47). In such a formulation, we see the hero's evolution alongside the changing world. Neither is the image of hero static, nor is the world a static backdrop, and thus, such a dynamic process presents a socio-historical novel.

In Russian literary history and tradition, it is common practice to draw contrast between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Bakhtin (1984) observes that the prose of Tolstoy is clean and structured with great literary flourish, because in Tolstoy's orderly world, "The author neither argues with the hero nor agrees with him. He speaks not with him, but about him." (p. 71). When we move from Tolstoy to Dostoevsky

we see and hear a chaotic world – a creative chaos nevertheless – to hear dialogic interpenetration of multiple voices. Bakhtin's (1984) comparative analysis is instructive to drive home the point.

“Thus, despite multiple levels in Tolstoy's story, it contains neither polyphony, nor (in our sense) counterpoint. It contains only *one cognitive subject*, all else being merely *objects* of its cognition. Here a dialogic relationship of the author to his heroes is impossible, and thus there is no “*great dialogue*” in which characters and author might participate with equal rights; there are only the objectivized dialogue of characters, compositionally expressed within the author's field of vision.” (p. 71).

In a monologic world, there is barely any recognition or respect for another viewpoint. Multiple voices, if they exist at all are in a fragmented state without any reciprocal fair hearing of voices.

In Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin found the finest expression of grounded truth. As discussed earlier, Bakhtin abhorred ideas and philosophies untouched by the concrete. Whereas, in Dostoevsky's works, he found ideas entering life forces and gaining form. Thus, the characters and their actions are never de-contextualized or de-historicized – a hallmark of dialogic world – and Bakhtin (1984) credits Dostoevsky for creating a new kind of literary genre that lives in the present, “but always *remembers* its past, its beginning.” (p. 106). Bakhtin insists that a true artist is careful in picking and constructing genres because the reality is seen through the eyes of genre. Therefore, plots cannot be mechanically squeezed into genres as if they were pre-made and fixed templates. The fundamentals of artistic construction are to understand that “the reality of the genre and the reality accessible to the genre are organically interrelated.” (Bakhtin and Medvedev, 1978. P. 135). Bakhtin explains that Dostoevsky had a deep appreciation for the inseparability of form and content and hence organically connected a variety of genres to present the story. Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978) elucidate rather succinctly that “Genre appraises reality and reality clarifies genre.” (p. 136).

Another important aspect of dialogicality that Bakhtin (1984) emphasizes is that while the dialogic angle may belong to the “realm of the *word*,” (p. 182), texts do not lend themselves to purely linguistic study. Extra-textual materials, human consciousness, cultural scene, and historical forces may either enhance or inhibit dialogic possibilities. Good literature must be open to invite the readers for a dialogue and reader must in turn approach the text with a dialogic consciousness and last, but not least, culture and history must create conditions to make dialogue possible.

### **Burst of Imagination in The Dialogic World**

One of the most read works of Mikhail Bakhtin is his *Dialogic Imagination*, where he clearly establishes the inexhaustibility of the novelistic genre – that stands as an emblem of evolving human consciousness – in real cultural space and historical time. What we find in his discussion of the novel is the very nature of language with its built-in centrifugal and centripetal forces. Thus, one cannot understand and appreciate the novel without understanding the play of language itself. Without

understanding the forces that diversify and cohere in language, it is difficult to appreciate the burst of imagination that language catalyzes.

In order to reveal the versatility of the novel, Bakhtin (1981) first and foremost establishes the break of novelistic genre from the epic genre. In Bakhtin's view the epic is a hardened and completed text, while the novel remains fluid and flexible with immense plastic possibilities. Bakhtin maintains that unlike the novel, the epic fails to touch the present and the epic hero does not enter the zone of familiar contact, because everything that need to be said about the epic is already said and it would be impossible to add new meanings. It must be kept in mind that the epic/novel break that perhaps is pertinent to the western world does not hold true in the Indian scene, where the epic is very much a living text, and the epic heroes and heroines have an immediate presence in the lives of people.

After establishing the break of novelistic genre from the epic, Bakhtin delineates the features of *'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse'* and observes the holistic nature of ancient novel in which there was no clear-cut break between tragedy and comedy. The genre was inseparable as *'tragico-comical'* or *'serio-comic'* and this added to the force and clarity of early novelistic discourse. Furthermore, laughter was far more forceful, liberating and revealing in early history of novel than the modern-day version. More importantly, parody in the earlier version was more stinging than modern-day novel and Bakhtin bemoans that erosion. In Bakhtin's view the modern-day parody is either cruel – mocking and belittling others – or it is a relief from reality, while the earlier period, parody revealed reality.

The most compelling section of *The Dialogic Imagination* is Bakhtin's explanation of forms of time and space in a variety of novelistic genres. The nature of spatiality and temporality constituting and operating in the novel is what Bakhtin refers to as *Chronotope*. Without recognizing the intersection of time and space in narratives, Bakhtin argues that it would be impossible to differentiate the artistic value or the lack of it in a novel. Chronotope is a sharp analytical tool and Bakhtin demonstrates how to deploy this tool to classify literary works in their long history. This analytical tool can be utilized to understand any narrative – be it on culture, history, or art – thus possessing immense trans-disciplinary value. Bakhtin (1981) explains,

“Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.” (p. 84)

Furthermore, the image of the hero in the world that surrounds him can be recognized only when we understand how the chronotope operates in the novel. Bakhtin (1981) states,

“The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.” (p. 85).

This precise analytical tool enables the writer to draw the profile of the hero and the very same tool aids the reader to trace the images of characters in the novel. The three broad categories in the



*Bildungsroman* that Bakhtin defines to classify novels are – (a). Novels without Emergence – where there are no signs of growth of the hero, and he stands against the backdrop of an equally static world. The second type is the – (b). Novels of Emergence – where the image of the person develops, while the surrounding world remains static or even invisible. The third type – (c). Novels of Historical Emergence – are the ones that were of interest to Bakhtin – because the narrative here is charged with temporality, where the hero and the world influence and shape each other. In this rather long chapter, Bakhtin (1981) concludes with an emphatic statement,

“Without such temporal-spatial expression even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of chronotope.” (p. 258).

Since the novel stands as an emblem of human consciousness, Bakhtin asks us to study closely and carefully the discourse in the novel to understand how the human psyche operates and evolves amidst cultural and historical forces.

### **Carnival: A Corrective Measure for Hypocrisy and Falsehood**

At the height of heavy-handed Stalin era in the Soviet Union of 1930's, Bakhtin submitted *Rabelais and his World* as his dissertation thesis – which caused a stir then and continues to do so ever since the work was published in 1965. The world of carnival with its boisterous laughter, salty street language and grotesque body images is fundamentally a philosophy built on the principles of the lower stratum of the body. Carnival is the other lowly side, but a necessary side of the exalted aesthetic vision, and neither can exist without the other.

The world of carnival with its uninhibited laughter, coarse language peppered with profanities, and bold and baring body images, with excessive indulgence in food and liquor, brings wholesomeness to cultural life according to Bakhtin. (1984a). In this topsy-turvy world, our understanding is not through the rational dictates of the mind, but through the functions of the body, especially those that are inevitable and cause revulsion. Built on sex and scatology, it is simultaneously about delight, disgust, and relief. On the surface, the carnival is blatantly vulgar and appear in poor taste. It also appears anti-philosophical and yet it is deeply philosophical. The power of corporeality is brought back into philosophy.

The important lesson of carnival is nothing is as it appears to be. The fool in the carnival knows fully well that he is a fool, and with this meta-awareness he ceases to be a fool. In short, he is the *Wise Fool*, who moves the story ahead. This is the reason carnival is a catalyst for development – a link between heaven and earth, mind and body and truth and story. It reveals hidden and unofficial truths. Social conventions and rules tend to reach a feverish pitch, losing their value and validity and when that happens – one must enter the special carnival space and time – to correct the course, Otherwise, sanctimoniousness will be mistaken for sanctity. Bakhtin (1984a) says, “Laughter purifies the

consciousness of men from false seriousness, from dogmatism, from all confusing emotions,” (p. 141), and it must be noted that the purification is that of falsehood and not seriousness, and not from valuable and necessary structures of society, but from dogmas, and not from tender and genuine emotions, but from confusing ones.

The world of folk is committed not to polish and décor, but to unvarnished truth, and hence carnival is much needed to keep the mind and society open.

### **Few Momentary Rhythmic Closures...**

In his early philosophical works, Bakhtin emphasizes two concepts that help us navigate an open and free world – one is *Loopholes* that is needed for free and fearless wandering, and the other is *Rhythm* – which is also needed as a protective measure so that we are not lost in the wandering. Rhythm also prevents identity from becoming amorphous. The borders – be it between self and other or between nations can neither be open and unguarded, nor should they be closed; instead, Bakhtin recommends benevolent borders with momentary rhythmic closure when danger becomes imminent. Hence the concepts must be studied in detail to address local concerns in a globalized setting, while being faithful to both.

Some important lessons to be gained by entering the Bakhtinian world, is that the self needs the other, for it is an epistemological necessity and the past needs the present because we simply do not have the categories in mind for pure recovery of the past, and one culture needs other cultures to reveal the depth of hidden codes and customs. The following passage encapsulates the open-ended world that Bakhtin (1986) envisioned:

“At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of *great time*.” (p. 170)

The keywords are *renewal* and *invigoration*: neither death finalizes anything, nor can the horrors of the past imprison us forever. That awareness gives us freedom not *from* the world, but *in* the world to be human and humane...

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