

# A Feeling for History? Bakhtin and 'The Problem of *Great Time*'

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THE question of time was, for Bakhtin, an abiding concern. It loomed large in his early, but only posthumously published, philosophical works. Thus, in his challenge to 'theoreticist' conceptions of ethical conduct, he claimed that, 'The abstract moment of truth's extra-temporal validity can be contraposed to the equally abstract moment of the temporality of the object of historical cognition', while central to his aesthetic model of author–hero relations are the 'temporal whole of the hero' and a conception of the soul 'as an inner whole that is becoming in *time*'.<sup>1</sup> In the period of his preoccupation with the novel, a focus on time–space relations in narrative as expressed in a historically developing series of chronotopes in fact tended to give precedence to the temporal dimension over the spatial. And time continued to preoccupy him as, in his mature years, perspectives still determinedly broad, he mused on matters methodological: a text until recently considered to be his last work ends with the lapidary phrase 'The problem of *great time* [*bol'shogo vremeni*]'.<sup>2</sup> But it does not follow from this that 'time' is simply one more of those difficult topics on which we may

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<sup>1</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'K filosofii postupka', and 'Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti', in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 1, *Filosofskaia estetika 1920-kh godov*, ed. S. G. Bocharov and N. I. Nikolaev, Moscow, 2003, pp. 7–68 (pp. 14–15) and pp. 69–263 (pp. 175, 176); English translations (modified) M. M. Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov, Austin, TX, 1993, p. 10, and M. M. Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov, Austin, TX, 1990, pp. 4–256 (pp. 99, 100).

<sup>2</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk' (hereafter, 'K metodologii'), in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, ed. S. S. Averintsev and S. G. Bocharov, 2nd edn, Moscow, 1986 (hereafter, *Estetika*), pp. 381–93 (p. 393); English translation M. M. Bakhtin, 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences' (hereafter, 'Toward a Methodology'), in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee, Austin, TX, 1986 (hereafter, *Speech Genres*), pp. 159–70 (p. 170).

bring to bear the illuminating insights of the uniquely gifted Bakhtin, that man for all seasons. Time was one of the many problems that Bakhtin addressed continually as his thought developed; it was not a problem for which he offered a straightforward or coherent set of solutions upon which we may unquestioningly rely. Since the mid-1990s at least it has no longer been possible to present Bakhtin's work as a kind of proleptic panacea that can ease contemporary theoretical and cultural-historical enquiry. In the current moment of Bakhtin studies, it is recognized that 'application' of his theories, which once seemed so rewarding, should take second place to careful, and overdue, investigation of their intellectual contexts, their origins, sources and affiliations. This article does not, therefore, set out to present Bakhtin's work as providing definitive answers to any of the myriad questions that the topic 'Time in Russia, Russia in Time' invites us to consider; rather, it seeks to show, through a discussion of the particular case of 'great time', that the most interesting insights into those questions to be derived from Bakhtin's work may be found if we see it, in its contexts, as exemplary of them.

*'I have a term'*

In comments on the current state of Soviet literary scholarship made in 1970, Bakhtin famously castigated the tendency to 'explain a writer and his works with reference precisely to his present moment and the immediate past (usually within the bounds of an epoch as we understand it)', arguing that 'Works break the bounds of their time, they live in the centuries, that is to say, in *great time*; furthermore, they often (in the case of great works, always) live a more intense and fuller life than in their own present moment'.<sup>3</sup> A work that is born entirely of its present moment, and does not contain something of the past, is incapable of living in the future. Truly great works contain a potential that may be realized only in the favourable conditions of subsequent ages. Bakhtin elaborated on this position in an interview of 1971:

I have a term: great time. Now in great time nothing ever loses its significance. Homer, and Aeschylus, and Sophocles, and Socrates, and all the ancient writers and thinkers remain, with equal entitlement, in great time. Dostoevskii too is in this great time. And it is in this sense that I

<sup>3</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Otvét na vopros redaktsii *Novogo mira*', in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 6, 'Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo', 1963; *Raboty 1960-kh–1970-kh gg.*, ed. S. G. Bocharov and L. A. Gogotishvili, Moscow, 2002 (hereafter, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6), pp. 451–57 (p. 454) (hereafter, 'Otvét'); English translation (modified) M. M. Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from the *Novyi mir* Editorial Staff', in *Speech Genres*, pp. 1–9 (pp. 3, 4) (hereafter, 'Response'); original publication M. M. Bakhtin, 'Smelee pol'zovat'sia vozmozhnostiami', *Novyi mir*, 1970, 11, pp. 237–40.

consider that nothing dies, but everything is renewed. With every new step forward our previous steps acquire a new, additional meaning.<sup>4</sup>

The opposite of 'great time' is, predictably enough, 'small time' (*maloe vremia*). The posthumously published 'K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk' ('Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences') contains Bakhtin's complaint that cultural analysis 'usually grubs around in the narrow space of small time, that is to say the present moment and the immediate past and the imaginable — wished for or frightening — future'. In doing so, analysis fails to see 'the infinite and unfinalizable dialogue in which not one meaning [*smysl*] dies'. The work ends with Bakhtin's much-quoted assertion that 'every meaning will have its festival of rebirth', followed immediately by 'The problem of *great time*'.<sup>5</sup>

That these were until recently believed to be the final words of 'Bakhtin's final work'<sup>6</sup> no doubt reinforced the peculiar poignancy lent to 'great time' by its occurrence in works written towards the end of his life; and it was perhaps inevitable that appraisals of Bakhtin should seek to establish the thinker's own place in 'great time', a move in which theoretical rigour is in danger of taking second place to rhetoric or even sentimentality.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, the concept could be called upon in support of particular interpretations of Bakhtin's intellectual trajectory. For example, in their 1990 study *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson refer to the late works in general, and the opposition of 'great time' and 'small time' in particular, to reinforce one of their most contentious and contended arguments, that Bakhtin's mid-career interest in carnival culture was an aberration, a 'theoretician's' departure from his abiding concern with the rhythms and patterns of individual lived experience, the 'prosaics' of everyday life:

Timelessness, the pure presentness celebrated in the work on carnival, is now seen as limiting because it derives from an obsession with 'small time', a present without perspective, that separates us from the resources of real

<sup>4</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'O polifonichnosti romanov Dostoevskogo', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6, pp. 458–65 (p. 461); this interview, conducted by the Polish journalist Zbigniew Podgorzec, was first published in Polish in 1971, and in Russian in 1975; see S. G. Bocharov, '[Commentary on "O polifonichnosti romanov Dostoevskogo"]', in *ibid.*, pp. 728–31.

<sup>5</sup> Bakhtin, 'K metodologii', pp. 390, 392, 393; 'Toward a Methodology', pp. 167, 169, 170. Modifications to the published translation include correction of the inaccurate rendering of 'prazdnik vrozozhdeniia' as 'homecoming festival', which obscures the use of a recurrent and key term.

<sup>6</sup> S. S. Averintsev and S. G. Bocharov, '[Commentary on "K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk"]', in Bakhtin, *Estetika*, pp. 409–12 (p. 409).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, S. S. Averintsev, 'V stikhii "bol'shogo vremeni"', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1995, 46 (15 November), p. 6; it is equally unsurprising that one obituary of Averintsev himself should have associated him with the same category: see Andrei Nemzer, 'Chelovek "bol'shogo vremeni": Pamiati Sergeia Averintseva' (2004), <<http://www.ruthenia.ru/nemzer/averincev.html>> [accessed 11 July 2005].

creativity in the future. Bakhtin returns as well to his earlier ideas about the importance of an individual's separateness, his specific place in time, space, and culture. Not the collective body of the people but the separate body of a person interacting with and shaped by others reemerges as the precondition for all dialogue and creativity.<sup>8</sup>

Bakhtin thus emerges as a critic whose mature thinking lends much-needed rigour to some familiar positions about the enduring value of great works of literature and the role of the individual creative personality. But there are reasons why the matter is not quite as simple as this might suggest. The first is that recently published material from Bakhtin's archive reveals that 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences' was the product of a series of actions by Vadim Kozhinov so questionable that the work's very existence is now 'disavowed' by Bakhtin's editors, and that the conclusion of this 'final work' was in fact contrived (successfully as it turned out) 'for effect'.<sup>9</sup> The second, more important, reason is that although in volume five of Bakhtin's (still incomplete) *Sobranie sochinenii* (*Collected Works*) two of those editors, Sergei Bocharov and Liudmila Gogotishvili, describe 'great time' as 'a

<sup>8</sup> Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford, CA, 1990, pp. 229–30. For an example of the controversy aroused by the approach taken to carnival in this study, see Clive Thomson and Anthony Wall, 'Cleaning up Bakhtin's Carnival Act', *Diacritics*, 23, 1993, 2, pp. 47–70, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, 'Imputations and Amputations: Reply to Wall and Thomson', *Diacritics*, 23, 1993, 4, pp. 93–96, and Clive Thomson and Anthony Wall, 'Chronic Chronotopicity: Reply to Morson and Emerson', *Diacritics*, 24, 1993, 4, pp. 71–77. For a similar contrast between Bakhtin's later and earlier preoccupations, compare Graham Pechey's assertion that by 'great time' Bakhtin 'signifies the immortality of all meanings', and that 'the turn taken by the late Bakhtin is from the grotesque-in-history to the sublime-in-theory': Graham Pechey, 'Eternity and Modernity: Bakhtin and the Epistemological Sublime', *Theoria*, 1993, 81/82, pp. 61–85 (pp. 61, 64).

<sup>9</sup> L. A. Gogotishvili, '[Commentary on "Rabochie zapisi 60-kh-nachala 70-kh godov"]' (hereafter, '[Commentary on "Rabochie zapisi"]'), and 'Obshchaia preambula k "Rabochim zapisiam 60-kh-nachala 70-kh godov"' (hereafter, 'Obshchaia preambula'), in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6, pp. 543–701 (p. 696) and pp. 533–43 (p. 537). Gogotishvili describes how Kozhinov combined, with little regard for the chronological order of their composition, materials taken from various notebooks of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as material dating from the 1940s. He had this typed up, and gave it to Bakhtin in the expectation that the latter would approve it for publication; Bakhtin, however, evidently did not look at the typescript. The text was published in 1975 under the title 'Toward a Methodology for Literary Scholarship' ('K metodologii literaturovedeniia'). Kozhinov then returned the original materials to the archive in a form that suggested that they constituted a single unit. The 1979 publication was purged of Kozhinov's transpositions and interpolations, and the material from the 1940s was published in part, in the editorial commentary, under the correct title of 'K filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk' ('Toward the Philosophical Bases of the Human Sciences', subsequently published in full: see M. M. Bakhtin, 'K filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk', in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 5, *Raboty 1940-kh–1960-kh godov*, ed. S. G. Bocharov and L. A. Gogotishvili, Moscow, 1996 [hereafter, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5], pp. 7–10 [hereafter, 'K filosofskim osnovam']). The new title, 'K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk', was in fact a heading used by Bakhtin for just one section of the notes from which the text was compiled. For full details, see Gogotishvili, 'Obshchaia preambula', pp. 535–37, and Gogotishvili, '[Commentary on "Rabochie zapisi"]', pp. 655–57.

later term of Bakhtin's',<sup>10</sup> a third, while for the most part subscribing to that position, also provides evidence to the contrary. In an article first published in 2001, and later reworked as part of the editorial apparatus of volume six of the *Collected Works*, Irina Popova claims that categories referred to by Bakhtin in works of the 1930s and 1940s, the period of his most intensive work on carnival and the carnivalesque, are 'hermeneutically connected' to 'great time', which itself 'received terminological formulation' only in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> In fact Bakhtin's reference, in the fragmentary 'K stilistike romana' ('Towards a Stylistics of the Novel', late 1944–45), to the 'great destinies of the word and of the image' ('bol'shie sud'by romana i obraza')<sup>12</sup> is too passing and unelaborated for such a connection to be immediately obvious, although, as we shall see, other evidence confirms the link. In the case of the 'great body' (referred to frequently throughout the study of Rabelais, the first version of which was completed by 1940), the associations with 'great time' are more readily discerned: in 'K filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk' ('On the Philosophical Bases of the Human Sciences', written between 1940 and 1943, and combined by Kozhinov with later material to produce the spurious 1975 text 'Toward a Methodology for Literary Scholarship'), Bakhtin discusses the relationship between time and laughter, which 'takes away the burden of the future', and claims that it is 'characteristic of all cultured people' to be drawn to 'become part of the great body'.<sup>13</sup>

But Popova's assertion that 'great time' itself 'received terminological formulation' only in the 1960s is contradicted by evidence that she herself adduces in her editorial capacity. In her commentary on '[K voprosam ob istoricheskoi traditsii i o narodnykh istochnikakh Gogolevskogo smekha]' ('[On Questions of the Historical Tradition and Popular Sources of Gogolian Laughter]', probably dating to the first half of the 1940s), Popova quotes preparatory materials for a study of Menippean satire:

The process of creation does not take place in the head of the creator or on paper. It takes place in the great world and in great time (in the great objective memory of humankind). For centuries this word lay alongside

<sup>10</sup> S. G. Bocharov and L. A. Gogotishvili, '[Commentary on "1961. Zametki"]', in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 647–68 (p. 649). See also, S. G. Bocharov, '[Commentary on *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*]', in M. M. Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 2, '*Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*', 1929. *Stat'i o L. Tolstom*, 1929. *Zapisi kursa lektsii po istorii russkoi literatury, 1922–1927*, ed. S. G. Bocharov and L. S. Melikhova, Moscow, 2000, pp. 431–543 (p. 437).

<sup>11</sup> See I. L. Popova, 'O spiritualakh: K istokam filosofii vrozozhdeniia M. M. Bakhtina', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 2001, 3 (36), pp. 81–98 (hereafter, 'O spiritualakh'); reprinted as I. L. Popova, '[Commentary on "O spiritualakh (k probleme Dostoevskogo)"]', in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6, pp. 519–33.

<sup>12</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'K stilistike romana', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 138–40 (p. 139).

<sup>13</sup> Bakhtin, 'K filosofskim osnovam', p. 10.

(combined with, harmonized with, *responded to*) this word and that, this image comes along with its whole past. This is an objective process in which words and images developed their logic. [. . .] The more original and novel a writer, the more of the past his work will recall and renew (not individual memory). The whole past, the whole history of a genre will be revealed in his creation in renewed form. It is the logic of the genre, in the sense of the *possibility* inherent in it, its plenitude that is actualized in it [his creation]. That which is most original and new bears within it the most memory, renews the maximum of the past, in it is revealed that with which it [the past] was pregnant.<sup>14</sup>

Oleg Osovskii, himself anticipating Popova's approach, has surmised that here Bakhtin was intuitively anticipating, in an isolated reference, a later position.<sup>15</sup> Support is lent to this position by the fact that Bakhtin's fullest account of Menippean satire appears only in the chapter on genre added to the revised study of Dostoevskii (1963), and that his references to Gogol's place in 'great time' may be presumed to be additions made in 1970 to a section omitted from the Rabelais book.<sup>16</sup> In fact, by demonstrating that the term was first used in the 1940s, and by anticipating the phrasing and emphases of its later elaborations, this fragment confirms that 'great time' is not entirely a 'later term' of Bakhtin's, and invites us to examine whether its relationship to other key concepts elaborated in works of the 1930s and 1940s might be more than 'hermeneutic'.

*'Great becoming' or 'the immobility of eternity'?*

For example, Bakhtin's reference to 'great time' as the time in which there takes place an 'objective process in which words and images developed their logic' resonates with his assertion, in 'Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane' ('Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin, archival materials dating from the first half of the 1940s, quoted in I. L. Popova, '[Commentary on "[K voprosam ob istoricheskoi traditsii i o narodnykh istochnikakh gogolevskogo smekha]]', in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 420–24 (pp. 423–24). This discrepancy between sections of the editorial apparatus of volume five written by different scholars, although comparatively minor, is symptomatic of underlying tensions of a potentially more debilitating nature; for a discussion of these tensions, see Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford, 1999 (hereafter, *Mikhail Bakhtin*), pp. 122–24.

<sup>15</sup> See O. E. Osovskii, 'Bol'shoe vremia', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 4, 2000, pp. 94–95.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter four of M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Moscow, 1965; English translation M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Manchester, 1984; M. M. Bakhtin, 'Rable i Gogol' (Iskusstvo slova i narodnaia smekhovaiia kul'tura)', in *Voprosy literatury i estetiki: Issledovaniia raznykh let*, Moscow, 1975 (hereafter, *Voprosy*), pp. 484–95 (p. 495); English translation M. M. Bakhtin, 'The Art of the Word and the Culture of Folk Humor (Rabelais and Gogol)', trans. by Henryk Baran, in Baran (ed.), *Structuralism and Semiotics: Readings from the Soviet Union*, White Plains, NY, 1976, pp. 284–96 (p. 296); and I. L. Popova, '[Commentary on "Dopolneniia i izmeneniia k Rable"]', in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 473–92 (hereafter, '[Commentary on "Dopolneniia"]') (pp. 474, 483).

Novel'), that 'Language is essentially chronotopic as a treasure-house of images'.<sup>17</sup> This condensed characterization of the relationship between language, time, space and imagery occurs not in the main body of the chronotope essay, written in the 1940s, but in the 'Zakliuchitel'nye zamechaniia' ('Concluding Remarks') added by Bakhtin in 1973 as the work was prepared for publication.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore chronologically closer to the reference in 'Response', as part of Bakhtin's sustained elaboration of 'great time', to 'the treasure-houses of meaning' in Shakespeare, built up within language over centuries and even millennia.<sup>19</sup> As Galin Tihanov has pointed out, this is an instance of Bakhtin's now widely recognized indebtedness to the work of Ernst Cassirer (in this case his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*), an indebtedness that did leave its mark in the work on the chronotope and other works of the 1940s, such as 'Epos i roman' ('Epic and Novel', 1941).<sup>20</sup> The association on this point with Cassirer is important not least because the neo-Kantian thinker was one of the principal sources of the Hegelian strand in Bakhtin's thought. And this Hegelianism is visible in Bakhtin's history of chronotopic forms: 'The different value of each particular variety (sub-genre) of the novel is measured by the progression of human consciousness as it gradually moves towards a

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane: Ocherki po istoricheskoi poetike', in *Voprosy*, pp. 234–407 (hereafter, 'Formy vremeni') (p. 399); English translation M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics' (hereafter, 'Forms of Time'), in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, TX, 1981, pp. 84–258 (hereafter, *The Dialogic Imagination*) (p. 251).

<sup>18</sup> What was first published, and has been subsequently interpreted, as a coherent 'essay' on the chronotope is in fact no such thing: Bakhtin was prevailed upon to write his 'Concluding Remarks' for what seems to be material extracted from drafts of a work dealing with the *Bildungsroman* in Germany and the prose of Goethe (see Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 176).

<sup>19</sup> Bakhtin, 'Otvety', p. 351; 'Response', p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> See Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time*, Oxford, 2000 (hereafter, *The Master and the Slave*), p. 156. Tihanov identifies unacknowledged reference to Cassirer in Bakhtin's argument in 'Epic and Novel', 'that the definitions of time and value in the epic are inseparably linked "as they are fused in the ancient semantic layers of languages too"'. The quotation is from M. M. Bakhtin, 'Epos i roman (O metodologii issledovaniia romana)', in *Voprosy*, pp. 447–83 (p. 459); English translation 'Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 3–40 (p. 16; I have amended the English translation which reads, wrongly, 'as they are also fused in the semantic layers of ancient languages', and which Tihanov cites unchanged). On Bakhtin and Cassirer, see especially Craig Brandist, 'Bakhtin, Cassirer and Symbolic Forms', *Radical Philosophy*, 85, 1997, pp. 20–27, and Brian Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 97, 1998, 3/4, pp. 537–78, where Bakhtin's plagiarism of passages from a different work by Cassirer is revealed. As Tihanov points out (Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 157), in the 'Concluding Remarks' Bakhtin does refer openly to Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and its 'analysis, rich in factual material, of the reflection of time in language (the assimilation of time by language)': Bakhtin, 'Formy vremeni', p. 399; 'Forms of Time', p. 251 (translation modified).

recognition of the historical and social nature of time. [...] Bakhtin's description of the different chronotopes appears to be the counterpart of Hegel's exploration of the various stages of the History of Spirit in his *Phenomenology of Mind*.<sup>21</sup>

Barry Sandywell draws a clear connection between this Hegelian historicism and great time: 'Great time is the temporal equivalent of "polyglossia" at the level of cultural traditions, [...] the time of collective, national, and civilizational processes, the time of "human emergence and development" [...] the historicity of culture itself.'<sup>22</sup> The quotation here is from the work that was first published in 1979 as 'Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma' ('The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism'), but is actually taken from the same longer work as 'Forms of Time', where the changes in the nature of the human being as portrayed in literature are traced in relation to succeeding chronotopes. By the time literary history reaches one of the principal denizens of 'great time', Goethe, it offers us a 'novel of becoming' in which 'the becoming of the individual is given in unbreakable connection with the becoming of the world. The becoming of the individual takes place in real historical time with its necessity, its plenitude, its future, its profound chronotopicity'.<sup>23</sup> There is no mention of 'great time' in this text (although references to 'the plenitude of time' [*polnota vremeni*] are frequent, and Bakhtin stresses Goethe's sensitivity to the 'moment of the *connection* between the past and present and the *necessary future*').<sup>24</sup> However, the implicit association between the Hegelian category of 'becoming' and 'great time' is made explicit in the 1965 Rabelais book, where Bakhtin notes the effects of a 'new conception of realism', one that breaks the connection between

<sup>21</sup> Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 157; see pp. 269–70 on the 'process of intense appropriation of Hegel's work' in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, and pp. 271–91 on Hegelian features of Bakhtin's treatment of the body and other aspects of the carnivalesque. On the relationship between the neo-Kantian and Hegelian aspects of Bakhtin's thought, see Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics*, London, 2002, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Barry Sandywell, 'The Shock of the Old: Mikhail Bakhtin's Contributions to the Theory of Time and Alterity', in Michael Bell and Michael Gardiner (eds), *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words*, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998, pp. 196–213 (p. 208). Sandywell was unaware of Bakhtin's use of the term 'great time' in the 1940s.

<sup>23</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma: K istoricheskoi tipologii romana', in *Eстетика*, pp. 199–249 (hereafter, 'Roman vospitaniia') (p. 213); English translation M. M. Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)', in *Speech Genres*, pp. 10–59 (hereafter, 'The *Bildungsroman*') (p. 23). Modifications made here to the published translation include correction of the rendering of *stanovlenie* by 'emergence' (as in the section quoted by Sandywell: see above). This rendering is characteristic of English translations carried out before the significance of Bakhtin's use of the Hegelian term was fully appreciated, and in which *stanovlenie* was frequently translated as, in addition to 'emergence', 'development' or 'formation'. On the *Bildungsroman* text and Hegel, see also Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> Bakhtin, 'Roman vospitaniia', p. 229; 'The *Bildungsroman*', p. 36 (translation modified).



body and world characteristic of 'grotesque and folkloric realism': 'The literature of what is known as "realism of everyday life" [*bytovoi realizm*] in the seventeenth century (Sorel, Scarron, Furetière), alongside genuinely carnivalesque moments, is already replete with such images of the arrested grotesque, that is, a grotesque that is almost removed from great time, from the flow of becoming.'<sup>25</sup>

No less important in relation to his Hegelian affiliations is Bakhtin's reference in the preparatory materials cited by Popova to 'the great objective memory of humankind'. This 'great memory' is also one of Bakhtin's concerns in a piece whose opening words, used by its editors as a title, establish a Hegelian tone: '[K voprosam samosoznaniia i samoosnaniia . . .]' ('[On Questions of Self-Consciousness and Self-Evaluation. . .]'), written between 1943 and 1946) offers a veritable proliferation of great and small as it contrasts the 'great experience of humankind' (*bol'shoi opyt chelovechestva*) embodied and remembered in the symbols of folk culture with the 'small experience' (*malyi opyt*) contained in official culture. The relevant passage, not previously published in English translation, is worth quoting at length, as it offers a remarkable condensation of a number of Bakhtin's principal preoccupations:

The model of the ultimate whole, the model of the world, lying at the basis of every artistic image. This model of the world is reconstructed over the course of centuries (or radically, of millennia). The spatial and temporal notions lying at the basis of this model, its semantic and axiological dimensions and gradations. The intellectual cosiness of a world lived in by

<sup>25</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Rennanssa*, Moscow, 1965 (hereafter, *Tvorchestvo*), p. 61. The published English translation of this section is characteristically elliptical and imprecise, omitting Bakhtin's examples and concealing his use of the term 'great time': 'The literature known as "realism of manners" was already presenting, together with authentic carnival themes, the images of a static grotesque entirely removed from the main flux of time and from the flux of becoming': M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN, 1984 (hereafter, *Rabelais*), p. 53. I have been unable to check whether the reference to 'great time' here is a consequence of the amendments to the text of the Rabelais study made as it was prepared for publication in the 1960s, or is to be found either in the first version of the Rabelais study *Rable v istorii realizma* (*Rabelais in the History of Realism*, completed in 1940 and submitted for the degree of *kandidat nauk* in 1946), or in the second, revised to meet the requirements of the Vysshiaia attestatsionnaia komissiiia (VAK) in 1949–50. Both versions are preserved in Bakhtin's archive, and are scheduled to be published in his *Collected Works*; on the relationship to them of the 1965 publication, see Popova, '[Commentary on "Dopolneniia"]', pp. 474–75. For an exhaustive account of the submission and defence of Bakhtin's dissertation, see Nikolai Pan'kov, "'Everything Else Depends on How this Business Turns Out . . .": The Defence of Mikhail Bakhtin's Dissertation as Real Event, as High Drama and as Academic Comedy', *Dialogism*, 1, 1998, pp. 11–29, and 2, 1999, pp. 7–40. For an acknowledgement of a connection between carnival and 'great time' on the part of a scholar who, as we have seen, had previously considered the two incompatible, see Caryl Emerson, 'Coming to Terms with Bakhtin's Carnival: Ancient, Modern, sub Specie Aeternitatis', in R. Bracht Branham (ed.), *Bakhtin and the Classics*, Evanston, IL, 2002, pp. 5–26, where she refers to 'Bakhtin's carnival of Great Time' (p. 19).

thought that is thousands of years old. The system of folkloric symbols that were composed over thousands of years and that depicted a model of the ultimate whole. They contain the great experience of humanity. The symbols of official culture contain only the small experience of a specific section of humanity (and at a given moment in time to boot, a section with an interest in that moment's stability). These small models, created on the basis of small and partial experience, are characterized by a specific pragmatism and utilitarianism. They serve as a scheme for an individual's practically interested action, in them practice does indeed determine cognition. Therefore they contain deliberate concealment, lies, salutary illusions of every sort, simplicity and mechanicality of scheme, monosemy and one-sidedness of evaluation, uniplanarity and logicity (linear logicity). They have an interest least of all in the truth [*istina*] of the all-embracing whole (this truth of the whole is non-practical and disinterested, it is indifferent towards the passing fortunes of the particular). Great experience has an interest in the succession of great epochs (in great becoming) and in the immobility of eternity, small experience in changes in the limits of the epoch (in small becoming) and in temporary, relative stability. Small experience is constructed on deliberate forgetting and on deliberate non-plenitude. In great experience the world does not coincide with itself (it is not what it is), it is not closed and not finalized. In it there is memory that does not have borders, memory that descends and disappears into the pre-human depths of matter and inorganic life, the experience of the life of worlds and atoms. And for this memory the history of the individual person begins long before the awakening of his consciousness (his conscious I). In what forms and spheres of culture is this great experience, this great memory unlimited by practice, disinterested memory, embodied. Tragedy, Shakespeare — on the level of official culture — have their roots in the extra-official symbols of great popular experience. Language, the unpublishable spheres of discursive life, the symbols of laughter culture. The basis of myth, not reworked or rationalized by official consciousness. One must know how to capture the authentic voice of being, the whole of being, being that is more than human, not of a particular part of it, the voice of the whole and not of one of the parties to it. The memory of the supra-individual body. This memory of contradictory being cannot be expressed in monosemantic concepts or monotonal classical images. Relevant comments by Goethe (à propos of 'The Pariah', I think). Extended critique of how folklorists study this experience (the translation of the logic of the whole into the language of the logic of the particular and so on). This great memory is not memory of the past (in the abstract temporal sense); time is relative in it. That which returns eternally and is at the same time irrevocable. Here time is not a line, but a complex form of a rotating body. The moment of return is captured by Nietzsche, but interpreted by him abstractly and mechanistically. At the same time openness and unfinalizedness [*nezavershennost'*], memory of that which does not coincide with itself. Small experience, practically meaningful and consuming, strives to deaden and reify everything, great experience — to animate everything (to see in everything unfinalizedness and freedom, miracle and revelation). In

small experience there is one cognizer (everything else is an object of cognition), one free subject (everything else is dead things), one who is living and unclosed (everything else is dead and closed), one who speaks (everything else is unresponsively silent). In great experience everything is alive, everything speaks, this experience is profoundly and essentially dialogic. The thought of the world about me as I think, rather I am object-like in a subject-like world. In philosophy, especially in the *Naturphilosophie* of the beginning of the century, all this is nevertheless rationalized and divorced from the thousands-of-years-old systems of popular symbols, all this is given as one's own experience rather than as a passionate interpretation of the experience of humanity over many thousands of years, embodied in extra-official systems of symbols.<sup>26</sup>

The absence of the term 'great time' does not necessarily diminish the relevance of this passage for our understanding of the concept; indeed, it might be said to throw this relevance into sharper relief. The repeated use of other terms is sufficient to confirm Bakhtin's 'loyalty to the author of the *Phenomenology*',<sup>27</sup> the 'Science of the Experience of Consciousness'. The perspective associated here with 'great experience' and 'great memory' is close to that articulated throughout the *Phenomenology*, but particularly with the culmination of the long process of Spirit's movement towards the *telos* of Absolute Knowing. Hence, perhaps, the appositeness in relation to Bakhtin's fragmentary, elliptical thoughts of Judith Shklar's characterization of Hegel's more extensive treatment of recollection and memory: 'Remembering is bringing the past into the present by recreating it. It is drawn out of a general, cultural, not a private consciousness, and made explicit.'<sup>28</sup> That said, it is important to bear in mind that Bakhtin's immediate points of reference, whether proven or reliably surmisable, should not be viewed in isolation from, or as necessarily more important than, affiliations mediated by other sources. In this case, the insistent reference to the symbols of folk culture reminds us yet again of Bakhtin's indebtedness to the Cassirer of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. In 'The Intuition of Time', chapter four of his third volume, *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, Cassirer emphasizes that 'Symbolic representation is no mere looking back on [. . .] reality as something finished, but becomes a factor and motif in its unfolding'. This means that, in historical time, 'Action is determined and guided by the historical consciousness, through recollection of the past, but on the other hand truly historical memory grows from forces that reach forward into the future and help to give it

<sup>26</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, '[K voprosam samosoznaniia i samoosnaki . . .]', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 72–79 (pp. 77–78).

<sup>27</sup> Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 271.

<sup>28</sup> Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne, 1976 (hereafter, *Freedom and Independence*), p. 50.

form. Only to the degree in which the spirit itself “becomes”, to the degree in which it unfolds toward the future, can it see itself in the image of the past’.<sup>29</sup>

Quotation of this passage from Cassirer is not to be read as a suggestion of a direct reference in Bakhtin’s text to a work with which he is known to have been familiar; for one thing, Bakhtin makes no mention in ‘[On Questions of Self-Consciousness]’ of the determining role played by the future (although this is something upon which he insists throughout the Rabelais book, and, as we have seen, in the *Bildungsroman* text). The point is, rather, to draw attention to an important respect in which both Bakhtin and Cassirer might be seen to depart from Hegel, one that is summed up well by Charles W. Hendel in terms of a persisting Kantian problematic:

Cassirer sees the unsolved problem of Kant, that the human understanding is an ‘image-needing one’. Expand ‘understanding’ to ‘spirit’, and it still remains the case in every instance that the human spirit needs images which it uses symbolically to disclose meaning beyond them. There is no leaping clean out of an image-world so that spirit knows ultimately itself. [. . .] To Cassirer there is an ‘endless task’ ahead, and the course for man is one of discovering the inexhaustible possibilities of the formative role of the human spirit in the course of experience and history.<sup>30</sup>

The contrast here appears to be specifically with Hegel’s position at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where he states that ‘Spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled time’.<sup>31</sup> Jon Stewart glosses this statement in the following terms: ‘The Absolute Notion, by contrast, is a conceptual movement that transcends time. Absolute knowing is an understanding not of any particular historical development, but of the necessary categorial movement hidden in history and religion, which is timeless.’<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, Bakhtin’s reference to the interest that ‘great experience’ has in ‘the immobility of eternity’ might seem to suggest a subscription to this association between the end of Spirit’s journey and timelessness, and to invite an interpretation of ‘great time’ as denoting something close to such an overcoming or annulment of time. On the other hand, however, his insistence on ‘openness and unfinalizedness [*nezavershennost’*], memory of that which does not coincide with itself’ offers a more familiar position compatible with, for

<sup>29</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim, 3 vols, New Haven, CT and London, 1953–57, 3: *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, pp. 182, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Charles W. Hendel, ‘Introduction’, in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 1, *Language*, pp. 1–65 (p. 62).

<sup>31</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, 1977, section 801.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’: A Systematic Interpretation*, Evanston, IL, 2000, p. 462.

example, his claim in the *Bildungsroman* piece that 'Everything that [Goethe] saw he saw not *sub specie aeternitatis*, like his teacher Spinoza, but in time and *in the power of time*'.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, what 'great time' overcomes or annuls is precisely, and only, 'small time'. This is not necessarily to cast terminal doubt against the Hegelian connotations of the term, not least since there is no shortage of competing interpretations of Hegel's understanding of the relationship between Absolute Knowing and history. For instance, Judith Shklar offers a reading of the final stages of the *Phenomenology* rather different from Stewart's, one in which what is overcome is not time, but eternity:

Revealed religion [the stage in the development of Spirit immediately preceding Absolute Knowing] did have a consciousness of the history of mankind. That was its great merit. However, it saw that history as a coming from and return to a 'beyond'. Now that we have done with that illusion we have come to the unity of thought and time. This puts an end to eternity. In the Christian view of history, time is always put in counterpoint to eternity. Now there is only time, defined by human development. Only memory contains and halts change. It has thus superseded eternity. This knowledge of our history, the total process of our coming to this present point, is the perfection of knowledge. That is where Hegel has led us.<sup>34</sup>

Whether this might also be the point to which Bakhtin's treatment of great experience, great memory and great time might lead us is a question that needs to be addressed with reference to the relationship between these concepts and the religion against which Hegel's Absolute Knowing is defined.

*'Once sacred, now they profane': philosophy, religion, philosophy of religion*

'Bakhtin rightly sees that every eschatology or anticipation of the end of time will devalue the ethical substance of the present, but he frames the alternative as a different kind of faith rather than as the sceptical refusal of faith', a distinction drawn in the early 1960s that 'reflects an apparently continuing belief that the forward movement of history has to be grounded in an unredeemable anticipation of redemption'.<sup>35</sup> Thus Ken Hirschkop characterizes the consistency with which Bakhtin's successive treatments of history are articulated with an unmistakable religious inflection.<sup>36</sup> This concern with the redemptive ends of history would appear to be an expression of Bakhtin's drawing, along with, if not through the mediation of, Matvei Kagan, on the 'historical

<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin, 'Roman vospitaniia', p. 236; 'The *Bildungsroman*', p. 42 (translation modified).

<sup>34</sup> Shklar, *Freedom and Independence*, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 237.

<sup>36</sup> Hirschkop also notes that the *Bildungsroman* text, with its focus on the high degree of self-reflexiveness developed by narrative concerned with 'the hero of the modern chronotope', is the work 'least inflected by religious terminology' (*ibid.*, p. 178).

messianism' of the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Bakhtin's treatment of the relationship between past, present and future resonates intriguingly with Kagan's own characteristically dense formulation of the problem of 'history as such', which 'presupposes death only in the past, destruction in the past, but in the future life, defending life from death, allowing fate to perish and demanding of itself the eternal contemporaneity of beneficent permanent creativity'.<sup>38</sup> But Bakhtin's oft-quoted reference to 'not faith (in the sense of a particular faith in Orthodoxy, in progress, in man, in revolution, and so on), but a *feeling for faith*, that is, an integral relationship (on the part of the whole person) to a higher and ultimate value',<sup>39</sup> might appear, notwithstanding its qualifications, to support surmisals about possible connections between conceptions advanced by Bakhtin, including 'great time', and positions characteristic of Christianity in general and Orthodoxy in particular. For example, W. D. Lindsey states confidently that 'Bakhtin employs the phrase "great time" to refer to that eschatological plenitude that will occur when the contribution of every discourse to the consummation of history will be apparent', arguing that the concept is an expression of 'the kenotic christology and "radical communality" that figure prominently in Bakhtin's theological thought'.<sup>40</sup> In general such readings of Bakhtin's thought in terms of its relationship to Russian religious philosophy are hampered by the fact that there is significantly less evidence of this relationship than there is of Bakhtin's engagement with the traditions of Western European philosophy; there is thus,

<sup>37</sup> See Brian Poole, '“Nazad k Kaganu”': Marburgskaia shkola v Nevele i filosofiiia M. M. Bakhtina', *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1995, 1, pp. 38–48, and Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 25. Barry Sandywell has explored the similarities between Bakhtin and another messianic thinker, Walter Benjamin (with whom Bakhtin shares a number of common affiliations), arguing that the two 'concur in problematizing the category of redemptive time'. For Benjamin, 'the semantic potential of the past shatters the linear image of a continuous line linking past, present and future', while for Bakhtin (and here Sandywell highlights once again the Hegelian connection), 'the theme of "great time" holds open a promise of spiritual self-recollection (*erinnerungen*)': Barry Sandywell, 'Memories of Nature in Bakhtin and Benjamin', in Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov (eds), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, London and New York, 2000, pp. 94–118 (p. 108).

<sup>38</sup> M. I. Kagan, 'Evreistvo v krizise kul'tury', in *O khode istorii*, ed. V. L. Makhlin, Moscow, 2004, pp. 171–86 (p. 185). On Kagan's role as a mediating figure between major neo-Kantian philosophers with whom he studied and members of the Bakhtin Circle, in whose discussions he played a leading role in its early years, see David Shepherd, 'Re-introducing the Bakhtin Circle', in Craig Brandist, David Shepherd and Galin Tihanov (eds), *The Bakhtin Circle: In the Master's Absence*, Manchester, 2004 (hereafter, *The Bakhtin Circle*), pp. 1–21 (pp. 7–9).

<sup>39</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, '1961 god. Zametki', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 329–60 (p. 352).

<sup>40</sup> W. D. Lindsey, '“The Problem of Great Time”: A Bakhtinian Ethics of Discourse', *Journal of Religion*, 73, 1993, 3, pp. 311–28 (p. 323). See also p. 326: 'With its emphasis on the need for every voice to contribute to the dialogue that makes history and with its protection of suppressed alterity, Bakhtin's notion of great time echoes both the theology of *anakephalosis* of Irenaeus and the *apokatastasis* of Origen, theological concepts that in Western Christian thought have gradually been subsumed into a soteriological framework of forensic justification.'

inevitably, a somewhat speculative character to much work in this area, in which typological similarity is sometimes (mis)represented as evidence of affiliation.<sup>41</sup>

Somewhat less speculative, because based on (admittedly slight) textual evidence, is Irina Popova's hypothesis of a relationship between 'great time' and medieval religious thought in Western Europe. Popova suggests, 'with some caution', that accounts of the thought of medieval mystics (in Russian *spiritually*), and in particular of the 'hermeneutic technique' of the twelfth-century Cistercian monk Joachim of Fiore, may have had some influence on Bakhtin, helping to shape the 'idea and image of rebirth' 'ideia-obraz vozrozhdeniia' in his book on Rabelais, and thereby contributing to the 'conception of history' that, 'In the 1960s [. . .] receives terminological designation in the category of "great time"'.<sup>42</sup> Bakhtin's actual references to Joachim and the *spiritually* are comparatively few and unelaborated, occurring in the Rabelais book and in two fragmentary texts of the 1960s;<sup>43</sup> he says nothing directly about the Joachimite division of time into three eras corresponding to the three hypostases of God, with the Old Testament (the era of God the Father) being succeeded by the New Testament (the era of God the Son), and the future Eternal Gospel (Evangelium aeternum) marking the era of the Holy Spirit. Konrad Burdach's treatment of Joachim and other *spiritually* in his 1918 book *Reformation, Renaissance, Humanism*, to which Bakhtin refers in the Rabelais study, is the only direct source adduced by Popova, although she suggests a 'hypothetical list' of other possibilities, as well as pointing to the 'Third Renaissance' of early twentieth-century Russia as an important influence. Popova's salutary caution extends to her noting Sergei Averintsev's observation about the echoes of Joachim's 'hermeneutic technique' in the philosophy of history advanced by Hegel, Schelling

<sup>41</sup> This is true, for example, of a number of the contributions to Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (eds), *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, Evanston, IL, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Popova, 'O spiritualakh', p. 95; '[Commentary on "O spiritualakh (k probleme Dostoevskogo)"]', p. 532.

<sup>43</sup> See Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo*, pp. 64–66; *Rabelais*, pp. 56–58; M. M. Bakhtin, 'O spiritualakh (k probleme Dostoevskogo)', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6, pp. 369–70; and M. M. Bakhtin, 'Rabochie zapisi 60-kh–nachala 70-kh godov', in *ibid.*, pp. 371–439 (p. 400).

and especially Vladimir Solov'ev, thereby shifting attention back to traditions on which Bakhtin demonstrably drew.<sup>44</sup>

Among the firmly attested sources for the model of cyclical time and rebirth and regeneration proposed in the Rabelais book is work by Ol'ga Freidenberg drawing on Marrist semantic palaeontology in particular, and more generally on a range of anthropological accounts of the origins of popular festivity.<sup>45</sup> Such anthropological accounts are also the subject of a passing reference in a fragmentary text written in 1944–45, and devoted principally to Flaubert:

There are some who presume to get away with explaining things by reducing them to their origin, to ancient ignorance and lack of knowledge. Diametrically opposed evaluation of *origins* (once sacred, now profane). Varying evaluation of *forward movement*: it is now thought of as a pure, infinite, unlimited movement away from origins, as a pure and irreversible departure, a movement away along a straight line. Such was the conception of space too: absolute *straightness*. Relativity theory revealed for the first time the possibility of a different way of thinking space when it assumed its *curvature*, its bending back on itself and, consequently, the possibility of a return to the beginning. The Nietzschean idea of eternal return. The point here is the possibility of a completely different model of movement. But this especially concerns the axiological model of becoming, the *path* taken by the world and humankind, in the axiological-metaphorical sense of the word. The theory of the atom and the relativity of great and small [*bol'shogo i malogo*].<sup>46</sup>

According to Liudmila Gogotishvili, in speaking of the 'diametrically opposed evaluation of *origins*' Bakhtin probably has in mind a contrast between, on the one hand, 'a theory of primitive religion [. . .] going

<sup>44</sup> Popova, 'O spiritualakh', pp. 94, 95; '[Commentary on "O spiritualakh (k probleme Dostoevskogo)"]', pp. 531–32. A recent authoritative study of Joachimism confirms Averintsev's suggestion that, in the Russian context, due weight should be given to the mediating role of Western dialectical philosophy: 'Perhaps some faint echoes of Joachimism reached [Russian visionaries] through Renaissance prophets such as Lichtenberger and Müntzer. Certainly Soloviev's vision of divine Sophia illuminating an ecumenical Church is close to Joachim's *spiritualis intellectus* in the Church of the third *status* to which all peoples would stream. But the alternative sources for this way of interpreting history in three stages are clear: the historic myth of the Third Rome, the importance of the Trinity in the Russian mystical vision, the writings of Leroux and Sand, especially the novel *Spiridion*, and the widespread influence of western dialectical thought, with its resolution of dualisms in a third stage. Unless some positive evidence is forthcoming, we must conclude that the case for direct Joachimist influence in the nineteenth-century Russian prophetic movement is unproven': Warwick Gould and Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 2001, pp. 331–32. On the Bakhtin Circle and the Third Renaissance, see Nikolai Nikolaev, 'Lev Pumpianskii and the Nevel School of Philosophy', in Brandist, Shepherd and Tikanov (eds), *The Bakhtin Circle*, pp. 125–49 (pp. 135–37, 143).

<sup>45</sup> See O. E. Osovskii, 'Iz sovetskikh rabot bol'shuiu tsennost' imeet kniga O. Freidenberg': Bakhhtinskie marginalii na stranitsakh *Poetiki siuzheta i zhanra*', *Bakhhtinskii sbornik*, 4, 2000, pp. 128–34, and Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics*, pp. 134–37.

<sup>46</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, '[O Flobere]', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 130–37 (p. 135).



back to “comparative mythology” as a branch of “comparative study of religions” and, on the other, ‘An opposing — “profane” — evaluation of “origins” as culture’s lowest stage, evolving along a rising straight line until it reaches the contemporary type of thinking’, an evaluation associated with thinkers such as Frazer, but most clearly articulated by the French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. The object of Bakhtin’s critique is not, she continues, the founding opposition of sacred and profane associated with Lévy-Bruhl’s teacher, Durkheim; rather, his comments are directed principally against the tendency in Soviet scholarship, among both supporters (such as Marr) and opponents (such as Kautsky) of Lévy-Bruhl, to over-simplify his theories ‘against a Marxist background’, and can be seen to resonate, though not necessarily coincide, with the critical positions advanced by a number of other thinkers, notably Lucien Febvre, Aleksei Losev, Arnold Toynbee and Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>47</sup> But the precise nuances of Bakhtin’s unelaborated polemic are less important for our purposes than the fact that he should introduce this anthropological terminology as part of a discussion of an ‘axiological model of becoming’ that is, as we have seen, indissociable from his thinking on ‘great time’.

An especially succinct categorization of time in terms of the sacred and the profane is that offered by the anthropologist and phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade: ‘On the one hand there are the intervals of a sacred time, the time of festivals (by far the greater part of which are periodical); and on the other there is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts without religious meaning have their setting.’ According to Eliade, ‘Religious man periodically finds his way into mythical and sacred time, re-enters the *time of origin*, the time that “floweth not” because it does not participate in profane temporal duration, because it is composed of an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable’; ‘It is the *eternal present* of the mythical event that makes possible the profane duration of historical events.’<sup>48</sup> At first sight this opposition might appear to map in straightforward manner on to Bakhtin’s distinction between the ‘small time’ of individual historical epochs and the ‘great time’ that overcomes small time. Postulation of significant common ground between the two thinkers might seem to be further justified by Eliade’s juxtaposition of two of Bakhtin’s points of reference, one hypothesized, the other firmly attested:

<sup>47</sup> See L. A. Gogotishvili, ‘[Commentary on “[O Flobere]”]’, in Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5, pp. 492–507 (pp. 504, 505). For a more nuanced account of the relationship between the work of Lévy-Bruhl and Marr and his followers (including Freidenberg), one that takes into account Bakhtin’s own far from entirely negative assessment of Marr, see Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics*, pp. 109–111.

<sup>48</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, San Diego, CA, New York and London, 1957 (hereafter, *The Sacred and the Profane*), pp. 68, 88, 89.

In the Calabrian abbot [Joachim of Fiore]’s vision, each of [the three] epochs reveals, in history, a new dimension of the divinity and, by this fact, allows humanity to perfect itself progressively until finally, in the last phase — inspired by the Holy Ghost — it arrives at absolute spiritual freedom. [. . .] From the seventeenth century on, linearism and the progressivistic conception of history assert themselves more and more, inaugurating faith in an infinite progress, a faith already proclaimed by Leibniz, predominant in the century of ‘enlightenment’, and popularized in the nineteenth century by the triumph of the ideas of the evolutionists. We must wait until our own century to see the beginnings of certain new reactions against this historical linearism and a certain revival of interest in the theory of cycles; so it is [. . .] that in philosophy the myth of the eternal return is revived by Nietzsche [. . .].<sup>49</sup>

In the text on Flaubert, as we have just seen, Bakhtin mentions the ‘Nietzschean idea of eternal return’. That this mention is both preceded and followed by reference to theory of relativity (and to the relativity of great and small) is significant, and echoes his treatment of Nietzsche in ‘[On Questions of Self-Consciousness]’: ‘This great memory is not memory of the past (in the abstract temporal sense); time is relative in it. That which returns eternally and is at the same time irrevocable. Here time is not a line, but a complex form of a rotating body. The moment of return is captured by Nietzsche, but interpreted by him abstractly and mechanistically.’<sup>50</sup> Both these references to Nietzsche suggest that for Bakhtin the concept of eternal return is something that needs to be taken account of in his theorization of time, but as a further problem rather than as a solution to the cluster of problems already addressed.<sup>51</sup> If for Eliade a notion of eternal return is entirely

<sup>49</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York, 1965 (hereafter, *Eternal Return*), pp. 145–46.

<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin, ‘[K voprosam samosoznaniia i samoosnki . . .]’, p. 78.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Bakhtin’s idea of “eternal return” most probably does not coincide with Nietzsche’s: in this sense Nietzsche was probably valued by [Bakhtin] simply for his historically timely accentuation of the problem’: Gogotishvili, ‘Commentary on “[O Flobere]”’, p. 504. This is not to say that there may not be Nietzschean overtones to Bakhtin’s treatment of time; as so often, it is essential to be sensitive to the mediation of key ideas. For example, in referring to ‘great time’ as ‘a later term’ used by Bakhtin to denote and explain the greatness of writers such as Dante, Dostoevskii and Shakespeare, Bocharov and Gogotishvili note the similarity between Bakhtin’s move and the Symbolist poet, critic and classical scholar Viacheslav Ivanov’s association of Dostoevskii with ‘great, pandemic art’ (‘bol’shoe, vsenarodnoe iskusstvo’), ‘great [bol’shoe], Homeric or Dantean, art’: see Bocharov and Gogotishvili, ‘[Commentary on “1961. Zametki”]’, p. 649. The significance of Ivanov’s reading of Dostoevskii’s ‘novel-tragedy’ for the approach taken by Bakhtin in *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevskii’s Art*, 1929) and in the revised version of this study, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevskii’s Poetics*, 1963) is well known. For a lucid account that gives due weight to the role played by Bakhtin’s close associate Lev Pumpianskii in mediating and directing the influence of Ivanov (and, through him, of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*), see Bocharov, ‘[Commentary on *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*]’, pp. 437–42; see also O. E. Osovskii, ‘F. Rable, karnaval i karnaval’naia kul’tura v rabotakh M. M. Bakhtina 1930–1950-kh gg.’, *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, 1, 2002, 38,

compatible with, indeed a necessary consequence of, the continuing accessibility in profane historical time of *illud tempus*, the 'great time' of origins, for Bakhtin it must be seen in terms of contemporary scientific theories that problematize the relationship between the linear and the cyclical.<sup>52</sup> Eliade's model of 'great time' is also, moreover, a resolutely non- or anti-Hegelian one. Thus 'eternal return reveals an ontology uncontaminated by time and becoming',<sup>53</sup> whereas

Hegel takes over the Judaeo-Christian ideology and applies it to universal history in its totality: the universal spirit continually manifests itself in historical events and manifests itself only in historical events. [. . .] The road is thus opened to the various forms of twentieth-century historicistic philosophies. [. . .] Yet we must add that historicism arises as a decomposition product of Christianity; it accords decisive importance to the historical event (which is an idea whose origin is Christian) but to the *historical event as such*, that is, by denying it any possibility of revealing a transhistorical, soteriological intent.<sup>54</sup>

It must be emphasized that the purpose of this extended juxtaposition of Bakhtin and Eliade is not to suggest the existence of any direct link between the two thinkers. Rather, the contrast between their solutions to problems similarly posed, because in large measure arising from engagement with a significant body of shared traditions, affiliations and sources,<sup>55</sup> is helpful as a way of highlighting the complex and contradictory nature of Bakhtin's thinking about time in general, and 'great time' in particular. Bakhtin's model of 'great time', in contrast to Eliade's more harmonious system, is fraught (or, in his terms, pregnant) with the tension between a Hegelian historicism and a simultaneous will to discover an order of time in which there would remain room for

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pp. 59–74 (p. 61). For a general account of Ivanov's aesthetic theory, see Victor Terras, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov's Aesthetic Thought: Context and Antecedents', in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson Jr. (eds), *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, New Haven, CT, 1986, pp. 326–45 (on Ivanov's opposition of 'great' and 'small' and its antecedents, see pp. 334–37).

<sup>52</sup> Relativity theory is, of course, together with Kantian thought, a crucial reference point for Bakhtin's definition of the chronotope. For an incisive account of Bakhtin and relativity theory, and of previous treatments of the question, see Erik Dop, 'A Dialogic Epistemology: Bakhtin on Truth and Meaning', *Dialogism*, 2000, 4, pp. 7–33. On the Kantian dimensions of the chronotope, see Bernhard F. Scholz, 'Bakhtin's Concept of the "Chronotope": The Kantian Connection', in David Shepherd (ed.), *The Contexts of Bakhtin: Philosophy, Authorship, Aesthetics*, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 141–72.

<sup>53</sup> Eliade, *Eternal Return*, p. 89.

<sup>54</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 112.

<sup>55</sup> Apart from Hegel and Nietzsche, figures to whom both Bakhtin and Eliade are indebted, in different ways and to different degrees, include Bergson, Cassirer and Lévy-Bruhl: see Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, Albany, NY, 1996.

a 'transhistorical, soteriological intent'.<sup>56</sup> In this sense the very concept of 'great time', first formulated in the 1940s but deployed predominantly from the 1960s onwards, might be seen as exemplifying its own (Hegelian) premises by holding and unfolding within itself the (great) memory of the successive stages of Bakhtin's intellectual development, and by simultaneously gesturing towards and deferring an ultimate resolution of contradiction.

<sup>56</sup> This tension is closely related to the tension identified by Galin Tihanov in his incisive analysis of the contradictions (traceable to his neo-Kantian and Hegelian affiliations) in Bakhtin's position on the novel and on the body in the 1930s and 1940s between a drive to historicization and an attachment to the perennial and unalterable: see Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, pp. 161, 290; see also Galin Tihanov, 'The Body as a Cultural Value: Brief Notes on the History of the Idea and the Idea of History in Bakhtin's Writings', *Dialogism*, 2001, 5–6, pp. 111–21.