Bakhtin (1895-1975)

*Discourse in the Novel (1934-35), Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics (1929), Rabelais and His World (1941)* For Bakhtin it is within literary forms like the novel that one finds the site of resistance to authority.

*Heteroglossia*: the novel displays a multiplicity of social voices.

***Dialogism***: no worldview is given superiority over others, plurality of voices, styles and points of view, many meanings.

***Monologism*** - having one single voice, or representing one single ideological stance or perspective. All the characters' voices are subordinated to the voice of the author.

***Polyphony*** – characteristic of the dialogical text, which does not depend on the centrality of a single authoritative voice.

***Carnival/carnivalesque***: the carnival reflects the 'lived life' of medieval and early modern peoples. In carnival, official authority and high culture were made fun of from below by elements of satire, parody, irony, mimicry, bodily humour, and grotesque display. In the carnival, social hierarchies of everyday life—their solemnities and pieties and etiquettes, as well as all ready-made truths—are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies: fools become wise, kings become beggars; opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell). I.e. the world is turned-upside-down, truths are endlessly contested - mingling of “high culture” with the profane. -> The carnival serves to keep society open, to liberate it from custom and authoritative ideologies.

.

from: *Discourse in the Novel*

1. How does Bakhtin define heteroglossia?
2. What is dialogisation?
3. Explain: “Language... is never unitary” (674)
4. What are the 5 kinds of stratifications that literary language possesses? (675-6)
5. What do the different languages of the heteroglossia represent? In what sense they engage with a dialogue with each other in the novel? (676)
6. Explain: there are no neutral forms, there is no word or form that would belong to no one.
7. Explain: language lies on the borderline between self and other. (677/2)
8. How does one get to occupy a position in language? How does one find one’s own language? (677/3)
9. In what different language systems does an illiterate peasant live? What is the novelty of this argument? (677-8)
10. What is the peculiarity of the novelist, according to Bakhtin? (678)
11. Can you comment on this famous, opening passage by Jane Austen, using Bakhtin’s ideas? (679-80-81):

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.  
However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.”

1. Can you draw a parallel between the narratological term “free indirect speech” and the following comment by Bakhtin: “Heteroglossia, once incorporated in the novel, ... is another’s speech in another’s language ... Such speech constitutes a special kind of double voiced discourse” (681). Cf: “Mr. Collins was eloquent in her praise. The subject elevated him to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect he protested that he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank — such affability and condescension as he had himself experienced from Lady Catherine.”
2. pp. 683-4: What are the characteristics of the “authoritative word/discourse”? What is the reason why its role in the novel is insignificant?
3. What is internally persuasive discourse? How does it relate to questions 7. and 8.?

from *Rabelais and his World*:

1. Check Rabelais on the internet. Who was he?
2. How do official feasts relate to authoritative discourse? (686)
3. What are the characteristics of official feasts? (686)
4. What are the characteristics of the carnival? (686-7)
5. What are the characteristics of what B. calls “grotesque realism”? (687-8)
6. What are the different senses of the “lower level”, of “materiality”? (688)
7. What is the difference between the language of the Church and institutions on the one hand, and that of the marketplace on the other? What is the wider importance of the marketplace for Bakhtin?
8. What are the characteristics of praise and abuse in the carnival, and how are they present in official feasts? (689-90)
9. How does the prologue of *Garantua* turn the world upside down? What is the function of laughter? (691/1)
10. What is the importance of excrement?