CHAPTER ONE

BAKHTINIAN CATEGORIES—DIALOGUE, GENRE-MEMORY, CHRONOTOPE AND CARNIVAL

Bakhtin, Dialogue & Mark

First-level dialogue

At a fundamental level, all language and thought is dialogical: each word or thought presupposes an answer. Dialogisation occurs when a word, discourse, language or culture becomes relativised, and de-privileged. Authoritative or absolute discourse does not permit dialogisation. The question of whether the Gospel represents authoritative discourse, or whether it permits dialogisation, is central to this discussion: that is, whether Markan characterisation evidences dialogisation throughout the Gospel.

Central to the concept of dialogue is the understanding that each person, although having irreducible moral status, cannot be considered to have a consciousness in isolation. Thus, thought and utterance can only occur between people, with each individual’s consciousness being intersubjective. As Bakhtin puts it, “The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context.” In considering characterisation, therefore, it is necessary to conceive of characters as essentially interindividual, with each ‘character zone’

1 Each thought or utterance also involves a political and socio-cultural context, however, and therefore pure Bakhtinian categories are a contradiction in terms, as evidenced by the many ways these categories have been applied, each time reflecting the socio-political or cultural bias of the person invoking them! Bakhtin (DN, 300) comments that “[t]he social and historical voices populating language…which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized…into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch.” By extension, there will inevitably be a bias reflected where Bakhtin’s categories are applied to biblical texts, although such bias will also vary depending on the person applying them.

2 DN, 284.

3 McCracken (“Character,” 29-42) either coins his own term ‘interindividual,’ or has misread Bakhtin’s term.
functioning as a bearer of a 'language' comprised of a set of sound and ideological variations. Indeed, Bakhtin locates the motivation for characterisation in the representation of language. Thus, he comments that

character zones... [are] formed from the fragments of character speech... from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations). Such a character zone is the field of action for a character's voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author's voice.5

In the course of developing a methodology for applying Bakhtinian categories, I have found it necessary to define different levels of dialogue. First-level dialogue is that which occurs at this most basic level between two characters, and which is the most common understanding of the term 'dialogue.' This, then, is the first level of a three-level schema proposed here. It also corresponds with the first sense in which Bakhtin uses dialogue; namely that every utterance is dialogic by definition. Such dialogue requires the concept of character-zones, since to a certain extent an 'individual' character can never exist: each character-zone involves speech fragments which, however stratified, cannot exist independently of other character-zones, and presupposes dialogic relationship.

It is this level of dialogue that occurs at the boundary between two interindividual characters. With each interindividual character there must always exist the possibility of change as a result of dialogic inter-

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5 DN, 317.
6 "Consequently the utterance depends upon the participants' real material participation in one and the same section of being, and gives ideological expression and subsequent ideological development to this material communality." (DLDP, 11, italics original).
7 Characters are, therefore, essentially "zones of influence which infiltrate... other zones. A character is both a point of convergence and a point of emanation for social voices in the text." Wall, "Characters," 47. The concept of stratification of speech will be further considered below.
8 The concept of a boundary between interindividual characters is difficult: it could be argued that there could be no true 'boundary' by definition. However, if dialogue occurs between two 'character-zones', there can be considered to be a threshold encounter, and thus some sort of 'boundary'. Bakhtin comments "...[E]ach of the two persons would be a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made—out of all the possible existing languages available to it at that moment—of a discourse to transcribe its intention in this specific exchange." (DI, XX)