**Eichenbaum, Boris (1886-1959)**

Boris Mikhailovich Eichenbaum (Борис Михайлович Эйхенбаум) was a leading figure in the Russian formalist school of literary scholars, critics and theorists. An early member of OPOYAZ (Общество изучения Поэтического Языка, Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and a prominent member of the school, Eichenbaum propounded its central claims during its period of highest visibility during the early-to-mid 1920s, and also defended the school against attack from revolutionary thinkers (like Leon Trotsky) who rejected formalism for its supposed lack of social-historical engagement. Along with his eminent colleague Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), who carried Russian formalist precepts to his later involvement with the structuralists of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Eichenbaum argued for a conception of the literary work that focused on intrinsic features of the text such as verse-forms, poetic devices, narrative structures, tropes and structural attributes. Strictly speaking, therefore, this approach discouraged analysis of ‘extraneous’ factors such as history, politics or authorial biography. However Eichenbaum moved towards appeasing the movement’s state-sponsored critics – and thus staving off its eventual enforced dispersal – by seeking to reconcile those formalist principles with a sociological poetics sensitive to shifting cultural contexts. In this respect his work shows tentative signs of convergence with that of the contemporary group around Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), whose programme pushed much further toward a theoretically worked-out dialectical synthesis of these seemingly disparate aims.

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**List of works**

Eichenbaum, B. (1963) ‘The Structure of Gogol’s “The Overcoat”’, trans. B. Paul and M. Nesbitt, *Russian Review*, 22 (4): 377-99.

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**References and further reading**

(2001) ‘Boris Eichenbaum’, in V. B. Leitch (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, New York and London: W.W. Norton.

Lemon, L. T. and Reis, M. J. (eds.) (1965) *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.