

## Duvakin's Oral History and Bakhtin in His Own Voice

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**Slav N. Gratchev and Tatevik Gyulamiryan,**  
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**Abstract:** In their article "Duvakin's Oral History and Bakhtin in His Own Voice" Slav N. Gratchev and Tatevik Gyulamiryan examine Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of literary theory based on interviews recorded by Victor Duvakin in 1973. The collection is now held in the library of Moscow State University. As it so often happened in the Soviet Union, these unique interviews only became known many years later and Gratchev's and Gyulamiryan's analysis of the interviews sheds light on Bakhtin's thought not available when reading his published work.

## **Slav N. GRATCHEV and Tatevik GYULAMIRYAN**

### **Duvakin's Oral History and Bakhtin in His Own Voice**

The purpose of the present study is to discuss Mikhail Bakhtin in his own voice and to analyze his understanding of the poetic world and notions coined by him. We also provide an overview of a unique project: the creation of an oral history of the time when the written word could not be trusted undertaken by Soviet scholar Victor Duvakin (1909–1982). On 15 March 2013, *Radio Liberty* broadcast a small piece of a unique recording that traces back to 1973, the apogee of the Soviet era, when one conscientious philologist, Victor Duvakin, spent several weeks with the ailing 78-year-old Bakhtin and recorded him. The full eighteen hours of interviews with Mikhail Bakhtin were conducted and recorded in February–March of 1973 in Moscow at Bakhtin's home. The entire collection is now held in the library of Moscow State University. As it so often happened in the Soviet Union, these unique interviews only became known many years later in 1995 at the Bakhtin Centennial Conference in Moscow. Later, a fairly large audience, including Western scholars such as Deborah J. Haynes heard some of those interviews for the first time ever.

The part of Bakhtin's interviews we examine is short — only twenty-two minutes — but it is laden with the philosopher's unique and personal attitudes toward poetry and the poets whom he and Duvakin chose to discuss. We can imagine Bakhtin sitting comfortably in his armchair, holding a cup of a strong black tea (a detail that is inseparable from his image), and smoking a cigarette. His interviewer was not a journalist seeking to hit some breaking news; rather, he was a professional philologist and a former professor of Moscow State University who had been dismissed from his position for being sympathetic and supportive to one of his former students, the young writer Andrei Sinyavsky. Duvakin's dismissal from the university, while painful, gave him the long-desired freedom to accomplish something that no one in the Soviet Union had ever done before: the creation of a recorded oral history library of reminiscences from leading figures in the arts and sciences of the first half of the twentieth century. He undertook a project whose historical and cultural importance we should not underestimate: no later than in the twenty-first century, as indicated by Duvakin, these documents would have an incomparable importance for literary critics specializing in the Soviet era, as well as for historians (see, e.g., Balmont-Bruni, Gal'perina-Osmerkina, Gershenson-Chegodavaeva).

Duvakin, whose collection of interviews became a cornerstone of the future Department of Oral History now located in the library of Moscow State University, was born in Moscow in 1909 to the well-known physician Dimitry Duvakin. In 1926 he entered Moscow University specializing in philology. It was the time of the post-revolutionary chaos when students and professors were sitting in the classrooms with coats on because the temperature could easily drop to freezing temperatures, but the sense of camaraderie was stronger than the cold and kept them all together. The quality of the students' education was dependent not upon how the systematic or sequential the schedule was, but on the professors whose classes they managed to attend. Duvakin — because he belonged to the intelligentsia — was immediately added to the list of suspects and twice during his studies (1929 and 1930) was suspended from university in accordance with the "plan of withdrawing from universities foreign elements" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by the authors) ("работе по удалению из вузов чуждых элементов") [Kamardenkov 47]). The official reason for his suspension was Duvakin's participation in the Formalists' circle (see Luchishkin 129), and, consequently, his "class foreignness" ("классовая чуждость") to the common ideological movement of Soviet education [Luchishkin 133]). No one knows how it happened, but eventually Duvakin was allowed to finish university and in 1930 he received his diploma.

The turning point in Duvakin's biography was the offer from the State Literary Museum to organize an exhibition dedicated to recently deceased poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. The poet happened to be akin to Duvakin's heart and literary interests and all his life from that point on became connected with Mayakovsky. Interestingly enough, forty years later, Duvakin came to interview Bakhtin precisely because he saw Mayakovsky personally in the early twentieth century and he would be able to bring some personal insights. The next ten years until 1941, Duvakin worked for the Museum with materials primarily related to Mayakovsky. In 1938 Duvakin visited Stalingrad (Saint Petersburg), where he conducted a series of live interviews with people who had known Mayakovsky personally. That was the

moment when Duvakin came up with an idea of creating an oral history library that would capture and preserve for future generations what the written word was not able to preserve any more: "In the concept of collecting materials I include also the recording of live conversations with people who should write their memoirs, but do not" ("В понятие сбора материала я включаю также и запись живой беседы с людьми, которых надо заставить писать мемуары, но которые их не пишут") [Duvakin qtd. in Timofeev-Resovski 173]). Little by little, the idea of the oral history library seized Duvakin's thoughts, but the reality was not conducive to his plans: Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, the director of the Literary Museum, was dismissed from his position. Bonch-Bruевич was one of the leaders of the Socialist Academy of Social Sciences, the personal secretary of Lenin, and the author of the canonical Soviet book about the leader of the Bolshevik party. Bonch-Bruевич, together with Tolstoy, organized the emigration of Dukhobors to Canada, and spent a year with them there. During that time, he was able to record much of their orally transmitted tradition, in particular the Dukhobors' hymns. Thus Bonch-Bruевич supported Duvakin's undertaking fully.

Under new leadership, the situation in the Museum deteriorated rapidly and Duvakin was forced to leave his position. In search of new employment, he finally obtained the position of lecturer at Moscow State University, where he gave courses on Mayakovsky, the poetry of the early twentieth century, and Russian literature of the pre-revolutionary period. The most popular course was his seminar on Russian literature of the beginning of the twentieth century and one of his most devoted students was Andrei Sinyavsky. Then came the war with Germany. During the war Duvakin continued his lectures at the University (classes continued even during the three-month-long counter-attack at Moscow), but he was not able to continue to conduct and record the live interviews. The idea of the oral history library, however, never died. After the war, Duvakin had relatively few quiet years when he was able to concentrate on his research of Mayakovsky, successfully defend his candidate dissertation (akin to the German *Habilitation* or the French *Doctorat d'Etat*), and publish a few articles. He was finally promoted to the position of assistant professor of the Department of Soviet Literature.

On 8 September 1965 Sinyavsky, the favorite student and good friend of Duvakin, was arrested by the KGB for publishing abroad a few of his satirical novels under the pen name of a Jewish gangster, Abram Tertz. The infamous Sinyavsky trial, together with a harsh propaganda campaign in the Soviet media, was perceived as a sign of the demise of Khrushchev's Thaw. For Duvakin, who had no idea about the writing activity of his student, the trial came as a complete surprise. As one of Sinyavsky's former professors, he was "invited" to testify against him. The unexpected thing was that Duvakin did not testify against his student, but tried to convince the trial that Sinyavsky deserved to be forgiven. The rebellious professor was punished immediately: "Duvakin occupies a position of an active defender of Sinyavsky; he did not understand the political nature of his anti-Soviet politics. We believe that this position is incompatible with Duvakin's position of professor and tutor of students. We urge you to raise the question about the prudence of Duvakin's presence at the department of Soviet literature" ("Дувакин занимает позицию активного защитника Синявского, не понял политической антисоветской сущности его политической деятельности. Считаем эту позицию несовместимой с его положением профессора и воспитателя студентов. Просим рассмотреть вопрос о нецелесообразности его прибывания на кафедре советской литературы") (Ginzburg 173). Duvakin was dismissed from his position, but was allowed to work for the university, although not as a professor, if the provost would find a position suitable for him.

Duvakin's dismissal produced a protest at the university: students and faculty wrote letters in his support asking the University's president to keep the prominent scholar and specialist of Mayakovsky at the university. The president could not annul the decision of Duvakin's dismissal on grounds of his political immaturity, so to speak, but found another position for him. No one knows what Duvakin and the president talked about for half an hour, but when they finished, Duvakin headed straight to the Department of Scientific Information to accept a modest position as a departmental assistant (Ivanov 202). But, as it so often happens, bad things bring some good ones along: Duvakin now not only had time to continue working on his oral history project, but he obtained a technical ability to do so. He proposed his research project as "Primary Documentation of Mayakovsky's Biography" ("Первичная документация биографии Маяковского") [Duvakin 17]) and it was approved, but what was needed was the technology. Duvakin wrote another letter to the president with an explanation: "The value that such primary documents will have in 10-20-30 years is hard to overstate. If the process of

phono-recording of Mayakovsky's contemporaries goes well, it will be an experience of a fundamental significance. Its prospects are endless: this is a new thing, and it is a very necessary thing from the point of view of studying the history of our Soviet culture in the future" ("Ценность, которую такие первичные документы будут иметь через 10-20-30 лет, трудно преувеличить. Если работа по фонозаписи воспоминаний современников Маяковского пойдет успешно, то это будет опыт, имеющий принципиальное значение. Перспективы здесь поистине безграничны. Это вовсе новое дело очень нужное с точки зрения интересов изучения истории нашей советской культуры в будущем") [Duvakin 18]).

The president not only approved the idea, but also provided technical support: in a few weeks Duvakin received the compact recorder and thus the project came to life: Duvakin made a list of persons whom he intended to visit and interview. Among these people were Dmitry Shostakovich, Victor Shklovsky, and Roman Yakobson. Bakhtin was not on the list yet because in 1967, when Duvakin started his endeavor, Bakhtin was still in Saransk (a little town 360 miles from Moscow where he taught Russian literature) and only in 1969 was Bakhtin able to come to Moscow where he stayed until his death in 1975. Then there were fifteen years of continuous, fanatical labor: making innumerable phone calls, recording the interviews, and cataloguing everything. Of course, the fact that Mayakovsky was originally the core of the whole enterprise affected the entire structure of the project: many interviewees were either associated with Mayakovsky or had been brought to Duvakin's attention by people who knew the poet. Interest in Mayakovsky certainly shaped the library, but the list of the potential interviewees was growing and changing and one day Duvakin made a phone call to Bakhtin. On 17 February 1973, Bakhtin met for the first time with Duvakin and they spent eighteen hours diligently recording.

Duvakin's unusual project was rooted in the political situation in the Soviet Union: the oppression and terror that began immediately after the revolution of 1917 caused new generations of intellectuals to stop writing altogether or to write and publish only what was allowed. Gradually, confidence in the written word was undermined and Soviet society, as noted by modernist poet Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), was returning to the pre-Gutenberg system of communication, that is, verbal dialogue. Today, these oral history documents of the Soviet era could easily become one of the major parts of the historic memory of a society that, under communist oppression, had to erase its own reminiscences of its rich cultural past.

For Bakhtin scholars the Duvakin records are remarkable. First, there is not a single published work of Bakhtin dedicated specifically to poetry or any particular poet and second, Bakhtin's talk is uncensored, so to speak: he was feeling absolutely comfortable talking to a professional who had asked him for his personal, but professional opinion, an opinion that then would be available to posterity. Bakhtin did not accept the term "decadence" and for him, it was no more than a term that some insignificant poets used to substitute for their lack of poetic originality or to attract attention. Alexander Dobrolubov, for instance, always wore black leather gloves even in the middle of the summer and did not remove them even at the table. Why so? It is a pose, asserted Bakhtin. Thus, Bakhtin negated the notion of decadence and the denial is significant. For decades, dozens of Soviet literary scholars were studying what they defined as a period of decadence and they assigned this label to a number of the most prominent Russian poets.

Fyodor Sollogub, as Bakhtin describes him during the interview, was a reputable man who would not write just to shock his audience. He was a teacher, a school inspector, a serious man who, at the same time, loved to be in good company. His poetry, continues Bakhtin, was absolutely pure and beautiful despite of the fact that it always had a premonition of the end. This is natural for poetry, remarks Bakhtin, for there is no joyous poetry — there is always the element of death in it. It has nothing to do with decadence as it is just a natural element of any good poetry that accepts and worships life. The description of Alexander Blok also presents a singular interest by Bakhtin who loved this poet. Blok recited his poetry eloquently and, without a doubt, he was an utterly unusual man who was, in Bakhtin's words, "made out of different dough" (this is a literal translation of a common Russian idiom that is often used to describe someone who is different from others or unusual in a good way). According to Bakhtin, Blok seemed to be rising above all and even above himself while reciting poems and the effect of his poetry was always astonishing. He dressed oddly, however: he always wore a strange looking shirt like those worn by revolutionaries during the French Revolution.

Perhaps it was symbolic. Also, Blok was not just any "decadent," insisted Bakhtin: his poetry was always extremely ironic. Consider Blok's last poem "The Twelve," which describes Jesus Christ wearing a rose garland on the head and leading a squad of revolutionary soldiers. For decades, the poem was used by Soviet literary scholars to argue that "even Jesus Christ supported the revolution." In reality, as Bakhtin mentions in the interview, the symbol of Christ is ironic and it is used to defeat the notion of the "glory" of the bloody revolution that created chaos and famine in the city that Blok loved so much, Saint Petersburg.

Soon the news came, continues Bakhtin, that Blok was dying of hunger in the "magnificent Saint Petersburg." Bakhtin was in Vitebsk at the time, a city in Belarus (at the time of Bakhtin it was already a Soviet republic) founded in 947, even before Moscow. Bakhtin spent almost six years there, from 1918 to 1924 (see Clark and Holquist for a detailed description of his stay). Bakhtin's description of Vitebsk is interesting: "It was a city of Jews, and there was everything there ... We prepared the evening on behalf of Blok. I was reciting his poetry. His 'and the world is beautiful as always' was especially good. We collected lots of money, got everything ready, but we were already late: we got the news that Blok had died" (unless indicated otherwise, all translation are by the authors) ("Это был еврейский город, и там все было ... Мы сделали вечер в пользу Блока; я стихи его читал; особенно хорошо было его 'а мир прекрасен, как всегда;' собрали много денег, все приготовили, но не успели отправить: пришло известие что Блок умер [Bakhtin <<http://www.svoboda.org/audio/audio/391290.html>>]).

The next poet who Bakhtin talked about was Mayakovsky. In 1930, at the beginning of the Red Terror, Mayakovsky allegedly committed suicide, but it has long been believed that he was the victim of a conspiracy of the KGB and that he was almost certainly assassinated. Bakhtin never took him seriously and talked about him with some disdain. The "bawler," as Bakhtin called him, loved to dress and always dressed nicely like a dandy. His problem, opined Bakhtin, was that a dandy is never conscious of how he is dressed, while Mayakovsky always was. It is certain, concluded Bakhtin ironically, that Mayakovsky never was a real dandy. Mayakovsky made a bad impression on Bakhtin when the latter saw him in a publishing office. Mayakovaky came in, asked for the latest issue of a journal, and fixed his eyes on the pages where his latest poem was printed. He did not want to read anything else in the journal: he just wanted to see his verse published and this alone certainly gave him immeasurable pleasure. There were other times, continued Bakhtin, there were the evenings of poetry when Mayakovsky recited his poetry and he looked different on the stage: tall and confident, but modest and reserved with his gestures. He definitely made a good impression on the stage, concluded Bakhtin.

The next literary figure that Bakhtin discusses during this particular recording is Velimir Khlebnikov. Khlebnikov is regarded as a central figure of the Russian futurist movement, but his work and his literary influence have stretched far beyond this movement. According to Bakhtin, Khlebnikov cannot be described in simple terms, for he was a complicated man. Being a poet in the highest sense of the word, Khlebnikov never distanced himself from reality; instead, he was very much aware of actuality. He had a broad vision and he always saw the big picture in every aspect. He was like the cosmos, like the universe, continued Bakhtin, and his cosmic thinking was perhaps the most distinct feature of his literary personality, a personality that none of the other contemporary poets had.

Bakhtin's interview about the above-mentioned poets, Blok, Sollogub, Mayakovsky, and Khlebnikov, presents a variety of concepts previously introduced by Bakhtin himself in his published works, particularly in *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Concepts such as carnival and carnivalesque recur both in the interview and in his published work and it is interesting to note that during the interview Bakhtin humanizes the word carnival, which was merely literary and conceptual in his earlier works. In the first chapter of the book, Bakhtin identifies Rabelaisian writing as "grotesque," stating that Rabelais and his influence on later writers present an imagery that is "filled with an almost Rabelaisian grotesque life" (*Rabelais* 61). The grotesque for Bakhtin seems to be equally comparable with concepts which are humorous and laughable. Later on, Bakhtin presents the Rabelaisian laughter, sarcasm, and grotesque imagery as brilliant representations of medieval folklore and popular culture, calling the whole concept carnivalesque. He believed that laughter was used to degrade people and make fun of the lower and underrepresented social classes: "the place of laughter in literature belongs only to the low genres, showing the life of private individuals and the inferior

social levels. Laughter is a light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons" (*Rabelais* 67).

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin uses the literary term carnival to describe ridiculed or burlesque resonances of popular culture in literature (107; *Rabelais* xxi). In *Rabelais* there are various examples and illustrations of the carnivalesque from *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, where it is clear that "carnivalization" occurs when two opposites meet forming a polyphonic unity. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin uses the musical term "polyphony" to describe the notion of the unification of several individual voices in literature. In polyphonic novels, characters break through the monologic plane of the novel and create a plurality of autonomous voices, independent from the authorial discourse. Bakhtin argued that the first examples of the polyphonic novel were introduced by Shakespeare, Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen, and others culminating in Dostoevsky's work, thereby making him the first polyphonic novel writer (34). As Bakhtin states: "Carnival itself ... is not, of course, a literary phenomenon. It is syncretic pageantry of ritualistic sort" (*Problems* 122). The word carnival is believed to be a folkloric component of culture and therefore carnivalesque characters are those who are the immediate offspring and representatives of the popular culture of a given society.

In his interview Bakhtin also talks about Maxim Gorky, the creator of socialist realism in Soviet literature. In 1921 Gorky, unable to tolerate the Bolsheviks' terror, left the Soviet Union, but when in 1931 upon Stalin's personal invitation Gorky returned. However, in 1936 Gorky died suddenly and there is speculation that he was killed by agents of the NKVD director Genrikh Yagoda. Gorky, who was not representative of the poetry composed during the decadent period, projects an important part of Bakhtin's understanding of carnival. Bakhtin remarks that Gorky's life was like a carnival: he never had his own will because he could not find his own inner voice. As a consequence, he would take one decision, then change his mind, and he would accept changes, lies, and deceptions. Gorky was a rogue and a bluffer, continues Bakhtin, and therefore he was easy on the negative effects that life had to offer him. Gorky's habits gave reverence to the beginning of his carnivalesque life, or, as previously stated by Bakhtin: his "carnivalistic life." Bakhtin observes that "Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent 'life turned inside out,' 'the reverse side of the world' ('monde à l'envers')" (*Problems* 122). Gorky, says Bakhtin, lived from carnival to carnival, and hence his conduct was a replica of life itself. He was a man of life as chaotic as it can be. What the writer tended to do was to disrupt the normal flow of life, but his apathetic worldview let him live an illusionary life, therefore making him a carnivalesque individual.

Bakhtin's definition of carnivalesque is different when he refers to Gorky as a man of carnival. When Bakhtin referred to a "carnivalesque person" who lived a "carnivalistic life," he meant to describe the chaos in Gorky's mind. In his description of Gorky, he did not imply the meaning of carnival that generates laughter, although in his illustrative examples of carnival found in *Rabelais and His World* there is laughter and humor. In the interview, Bakhtin uses the term carnival to refer to something chaotic and grotesque, in this case, Gorky's carnivalistic life which had no law, prohibitions, or restrictions. The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions, according to Bakhtin, "determine the structure and order of ordinary," which is not carnivalesque. Only "free and familiar contact among people" can create a carnival (*Problems* 122-23). There are ample varieties in his use of the terms carnival and carnivalesque, given that the definitions of these terms introduced by Bakhtin may vary according to the contexts in which they are used. The definitions are not limited to the literary representation of the grotesque laughter and a chaotic way of leading one's life.

The concepts of the carnival and carnivalesque gain a new meaning when Bakhtin describes Khlebnikov, also as a carnivalesque person. Bakhtin sees Khlebnikov as a man of carnival, but this meaning of the word does not correspond with Gorky's description. Unlike Gorky, who was a cheater, a chaotic and rogue person, as well as deceitful, Khlebnikov, according to Bakhtin, represented carnival by the mere fact that he did not see the "reality of existing conditions" in life. His life was based on symbols, which were depicted well enough in his poetry. Khlebnikov's poems communicated his visions composed in his abstract and cosmic mind. This poet, claims Bakhtin, experienced the universe because his ideology is universal. His carnivalesque personality, therefore, is composed of his

abstract and unreal worldviews, which are unpopular in Russian culture as they are symbolic and distorted.

Thus far, Bakhtin has given three distinct meanings to the terms carnival and carnivalesque, which are the literary grotesque depiction of deeds which cause laughter, human chaotic behavior that has a negative connotation, and the human abstraction of mind that engenders mess and perplexity. It is interesting to see that nothing is written in stone in the works of the Russian philosopher. He is loyal to his idea of context present in every socio-linguistic situation. This allows the word to gain several meanings, which Bakhtin refers to as heteroglossia, a term he introduced in *Dialogic Imagination*. By this term Bakhtin strives to reflect the various possibilities and linguistic dimensions that a word can express once it is exposed to certain contexts. As he claims, there should not be anything absolute in the humanities. Absolute ideas and definitions give rise to a theoretical interpretation of concepts causing theoreticism, a term used by Bakhtin to describe the theories of theorists whose ideas are limited and who do not show any interest in accepting possible alternatives (see *Towards a Philosophy*). Therefore, we see that Bakhtin uses the word "carnival" to refer to laughter, feast, chaos, and grotesque imagery in literature to refer to the chaotic and deceitful way of living of humans, as well as the abstract meaning and the tangled thoughts of people. The uses of the terms carnival or carnivalesque in literature, therefore, are meant to denote the Rabelaisian world of chaos, the grotesque, the masquerade, and the mixture of opposites. However, in his interview, Bakhtin reveals other linguistic dimensions of his understanding of his concept, which, as we saw in his description of Khlebnikov, are the unknown, the futuristic and cosmic visions which are not fully accepted or understood by the given culture. Gorky's carnival, on the other hand, is nothing but "life upside down."

As mentioned above, Bakhtin argued that there is no joyous poetry: individuals read poetry with intonation and understand it according to their psychological state of mind, which came to be understood as cognitive poetics. Bakhtin calls this notion "element." Without element, and without form, poetry is silly and makes no sense. It is interesting that in the early 1970s, when cognitive approaches to literature were only coming to light and when Soviet scholarship was not well exposed to Western literature on cognitive studies, Bakhtin mentions several important cognitive aspects which were yet to be described by Western scholars. Bakhtin talks about the element and form of poetry, which represents the author-reader relationship, because the author creates the poetic form and the message and the reader creates the element deriving from already existing poetic entities. This has been referred to as the reader's response and as cognitive poetics in cognitive approaches to literature. The latter is a reader's skill in interpreting the text deriving from several cognitive-psychological abilities, two most important of which are attention and foregrounding. Poetry is lyrical, and, as Bakhtin mentions in *Dialogic Imagination*, the word "poetic" should only refer to genres of imaginative literature (10). It is clear that author's imagination is linked closely to the reader's interpretation. However, the reader is the one who adds the element to poetry, which means that the author leaves one asset for the reader to fill in to make the poetry complete. What good poets should do, according to Bakhtin, is to respect the end and establish memory in poetry.

The genre of poetry contains various cognitive aspects, one of which is memory. Bakhtin mentions that poetry respects the end, looks toward the ending, and is closely related to memory. What the philosopher means is that poetry, unlike reality, has utmost consciousness of finality. Poetry is life, which is short, symbolic, lyrical, and full of memories. Bakhtin claims that if there is life, there is memory. Therefore, if poetry exists, there also exists a poetic memory. According to Bakhtin, Blok was one of the most eminent poets in Russian literature who was able to depict these aspects (memory, finality) in his work. Memory in Blok's poetry, however, does not only relate to reminiscing about the past. In Blok there is a lot of visual memory, where the poet transfers his visual knowledge and memory to reader's imagination. The reader, by reading poetry that has memory attentively, is able to depict the scenery and visualize the state of mind of the writer at the moment of the production of the poem.

We do not believe that the attempt to record Bakhtin was purely accidental. Because of the Iron Curtain between the Soviet Union and the rest of the Western world, the works of Bakhtin were practically inaccessible in the West up until the late 1970s, and even his name was generally unknown by literary scholars. In spite of this, the information somehow was able to circulate. Younger

generations of Soviet scholars or at least some of them longed to know what was going on behind the curtain. Some of them who regularly listened to Radio Svoboda, which was broadcasting Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, were possibly familiar with the fact that Bakhtin had already been discovered by the West. In fact, at the time when the interviews were conducted, the modest university lecturer was rapidly becoming one of the key literary figures in Western scholarship. In a large part, we owe the discovery of Bakhtin to Julia Kristeva and her groundbreaking essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," published in *Séméiôtiké* in 1969 where Kristeva not only presented and developed Bakhtin's central ideas about dialogue and its role in the novel, but also introduced Bakhtin's work to Western scholarship.

All of a sudden, this retired old *chudak* (чудак) — a Russian term that means a strange, funny man, almost an idiot, who is fully immersed in his own quasi-fantastic world of dreams, ideas, and theories — became a world-famous literary thinker, as Bakhtin always preferred to call himself, and one of the most influential literary theorists and philosophers. Perhaps Duvakin's decision to interview Bakhtin had something to do with the keen interest in Bakhtin in the West, perhaps not and he was acting strictly out of his personal admiration of an "old master." What we can state for sure is that in 1973 Kristeva's essay was not accessible to Soviet scholars and even Bakhtin himself had no idea that his works had already penetrated and were being discussed in the West. In any case, without personal knowledge of Kristeva's essay, but certainly aware that Bakhtin's ideas had already reached the West, Duvakin conducted his interviews with Bakhtin and thanks to his enthusiasm, today we can hear the real voice of Bakhtin as if he were talking to us. Less than two years after the interview Bakhtin died, but his great time had already begun.

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